

## Evaluation and monitoring your provision – How are you doing?



## Introduction

The ability to monitor and evaluate your own practice and provision is essential as an early years practitioner. Identifying your strengths, your weaknesses and areas that you could improve on will help to ensure that your practice is evolving and improving in order to meet the ever changing needs of the childcare market and the children in your care. Being good at self-evaluation and reflection is a skill. Like all skills, it may come more easily to some people than others, and so some of us may need a little help in bringing it all together and making sense of what we find.

If you feel that your practice is outstanding and always has been, then you may not see the point in reflection or changing the way you work. However, when you recognise the amount of changes that the early years sector has had over the last few years or so then you may wonder if you have moved on in the same way.

When Ofsted inspect early years and childcare provision, they will usually ask the provider what they feel are their areas of strength and areas for improvement. In fact, the ability to reflect and act upon your reflections is mentioned in the record of inspection judgements in Ofsted's inspection report format:

*“The capacity of the provision to maintain continuous improvement”*

*“The effectiveness of the setting's self-evaluation, including the steps taken to promote improvement”*

This demonstrates the importance that Ofsted places on a providers ability to evaluate their own practice. This toolkit will support you in reflecting on and evaluating your practice effectively and efficiently.

## Links with other documentation

### The Early Years Foundation Stage

The value of evaluation and monitoring is threaded throughout the Early Years Foundation Stage documents. The EYFS document itself contains references to the Themes, Principles and Practice, each one of which highlights the need to nurture the Unique Child, build Positive Relationships and provide Enabling Environments through which children can explore and investigate. Page 6 (onwards) contains detailed information around both ‘what adults could do’ and ‘what adults could provide’, and it is through these sections that the need to frequently evaluate and reflect upon practice is highlighted.

These sections suggest what is seen to be effective practice within the principle, challenges and dilemmas that you will need to give consideration to, and questions that will encourage you to reflect on your own current practice. As such, evaluation and monitoring does not fit snugly into just one or two areas of practice within the EYFS – instead it needs to cover everything that you do.

### Ofsted self-evaluation form

As the name suggests, the SEF is all about self-evaluation. Each section requires you to reflect on your provision and includes the opportunity for you to include the views of those who use your setting.

## What is evaluation?

Evaluation is a structured way of thinking about what happens in your provision, why it happens and what effect it has on everyone using the provision.

- It involves parents/children making judgements through observations and involvement with the setting about the value and quality of the provision
- It involves staff voicing their opinions about what works well, what doesn't work well and any ideas they may have
- It looks at the progress made in relation to the provisions' original aims and objectives
- It identifies problems that can help inform future planning/marketing, future change and improvement
- It provides information to help maintain and sustain the success of the business such as:
  - Providing value for money
  - Maintaining cost effectiveness
  - Planning on future marketing strategies
- It provides information to help maintain and improve the quality of care and provision, therefore meeting the needs of children and parents

Being able to recognise things that you do well, and identify areas that may need improvement is a skill that builds with time and practice. As you become more practiced at self-evaluation you will no longer just ask yourself "What do we do?". You will begin to probe deeper and ask yourself "Why do we do that?", "What impact does it have?" and "What evidence do we have of that?".

Questionnaires for parents, children and staff are an effective method of collating information to use for evaluating provision. Keep the number of questions limited and briefly explain the reasons for the questionnaire. Think about how often you want to evaluate your provision e.g. after the first half-term and then on an annual basis.

For questionnaires think about including questions that:

- Are relatively short and focused
- Are simple, clear and understandable
- Are linked to what is actually happening in your setting
- Closed questions with tick-box answers, making sure there is an appropriate range of answers to choose from
- Open ended questions for more detailed answers
- Consider the use of language and literacy levels, including knowledge of English

A suggestion box or book could also be strategically placed within the setting. Sometimes offering incentives such as a prize draw or gift vouchers may encourage more people to participate.

How will you ensure that you get the views from the children attending your setting?

- Surveys using pictures
- Encouraging children to use cameras to show the setting from their perspective
- Observing children throughout their day and using their choices and behaviours to inform your evaluation
- Asking children questions that are relevant and meaningful to them
- You could note down their answers to questions on post-it notes or stickers, and add these to a wall so that parents and staff were able to read them

Other ways of evaluating your practice can include:

- Peer observations
- Staff meetings
- Informal conversations with your stakeholders
- Staff appraisal and supervision
- Exit interviews for staff and/or parents – you may find staff are more willing to raise concerns if they are moving on.

Remember: Self-evaluation is not just about finding areas of practice that you'd like to develop, it's also about recognising and celebrating what you already do well!

### **Reflecting and moving forward**

Once your evidence has been collated and analysed think about:

- What have you learnt from the evaluation?
- Will you do things differently in the future? If yes, what changes will you make?
- Remember to feedback to participants and inform them of any developments and changes you are going to make as a result
- If you are part of a staff team, then any changes should ideally be made together, this ensures that everyone is aware of and can take ownership of the changes

***Turning your evaluation into actions and improved practice shows your ability to maintain continuous improvement***

### What is monitoring?

Monitoring is an ongoing process, which looks at what is happening in your setting. It is the collection of data and should be ongoing and consistent.

### Why monitor?

Recurring trends or patterns can be highlighted by monitoring the day-to-day procedures such as:

- Accident and incident records
- Activities
- Attendance registers
- Behaviour
- Children's developmental records
- Complaints records
- Income and expenditure records
- Observations, assessment and planning
- Registration forms to monitor validity of emergency contacts, ethnic background/country of origin and children with SEN/Special Needs etc
- Staff recruitment and retention

This will identify if any action needs to be taken to remedy a situation. Effective monitoring should be regular and consistent, which may be helped if the monitoring is always completed by the same person as they will gain confidence in what to look for. However, it is worthwhile to have a 'new pair of eyes' to help occasionally as well as they may spot new areas for consideration.

### Reporting back and sharing information

In group settings, staff can be delegated the responsibility to overview monitoring certain areas/activities. Think about what you are going to do with the information gathered.

- Who will you tell and why?
- How will you tell them?
- What will you tell them?

Working together with your parents, and with a staff team where applicable demonstrates a commitment to continuous quality improvement. It can help to strengthen relationships and make everyone feel valued and respected.

## Recording Developments and Achievements

You do not have to record your achievements in quality improvement, however it is strongly recommended for a number of reasons:

- To communicate to parents the developments that you identify and any steps you are taking to improve practice
- Strong evidence of self-evaluation, and steps to promote improvement for Ofsted inspections
- Impact evaluation for your SEF
- Evidence for anyone supporting your provision of continued quality improvement
- Perhaps most importantly, a reminder for yourselves of how hard you have worked to improve the provision, as well as being good evidence to back up any development plans that you have been working on. It will prove to be a clear record of your commitment to continued quality improvement

## Suggestions for recording your achievements

The simplest way to record your achievements is probably to use a scrapbook. If used effectively, this can become a record of a learning journey; not just for your provision but also for individual staff.

Whatever you use, you should include a description of your practice at various stages and the steps that you are taking to change this. It would be most effective as a working document, one that is added to on an ongoing basis and not just at the beginning and end of changing practices.

Examples of evidence that you could include:

- Statements from your SEF that demonstrate what you want to improve, and then describe your new practice
- Extracts from parent/staff/child questionnaires
- Photographs, for example of an area, notice board, activity or time of day
- Evaluation or reflections of your previous practice
- Scribed comments or pictures from children
- Comments from parents or visitors
- A copy of related documentation, for example a risk assessment, policy, activity plan
- An anonymised child observation
- An extract from a staff meeting in which the necessary development and steps to take were identified
- Updated policies, procedures, forms etc

Involving everyone who uses your provision in your reflections obviously ensures that you take into account everyone's point of view. But the benefits don't stop there - it gives you an opportunity to show how dedicated you are to delivering a high quality service to all users and also ensures that everyone has some ownership of the developments and improvements you make to the provision. This means that colleagues and parents will gain an understanding of why you have made changes to your provision and what the benefits are to them.

*Making improvements is much easier when everyone is on board –  
just consider how much an army of ants can move when working together compared  
to a solitary ant working alone!*