

An introduction to “A Journey to Outstanding”

Stockton-on-Tees Quality Improvement Programme

Evidence from long-term studies in the US and UK shows that in the early years the quality of early learning and childcare is second only to parenting in determining children's outcomes – both short and long term. It is particularly important for those from disadvantaged backgrounds, who may get less support at home, and can help to narrow gaps in achievement.

The Stockton-on-Tees vision of high quality is to have highly-skilled practitioners delivering play based learning adapted to the development needs of each individual child. It is our belief that the early years and childcare sector needs to be able to attract and keep the best people, and create a culture of self-improvement if it is to provide truly world class provision.

In order to achieve this vision, it is important that there is a strong framework for early learning and childcare, which:

- attracts the most talented people to work with children and lead practice
- retains and develops the workforce, building on their existing skills and experience with a focus on career progression and leadership
- establishes a culture of development and self-improvement, where practitioners value learning, share good practice with others and develop strong relationships with parents.

Ofsted expects every provider to work towards making their provision outstanding. Those who already do this will know that to provide outstanding provision means continuing to reflect on what works well and what is not working as well as you would hope. The very best providers do this all of the time. They use their evaluations to strengthen and build on the most effective practice and to remedy any weaknesses they find in areas that are not as good. The very best providers also seek out good practice across the sector and beyond. They search for ways they may not have thought of to improve what they offer. If this is what you do, you are already very well prepared for inspection and are likely to be offering high quality provision.

In order to prepare for inspection Ofsted strongly recommends that providers complete the self-evaluation form. This is designed to help early years providers to review and improve their provision, so that it is of the highest standard and offers the best experience for young children. Importantly, it is a useful tool for you and any assistants or staff to evaluate the impact of what you do on children's welfare, learning and development.

“A Journey to Outstanding”

The Government expects that local authorities will have in place an evidence based method to monitor, evaluate and improve the quality of childcare settings, in other words, a Quality Improvement Programme. This Programme enables the local authority to have a clear understanding of the quality of the provision in their area. It builds upon Ofsted inspection ratings and allows Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council to involve settings they perceive to be ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ in delivery of a variety of initiatives including the Free Nursery Entitlement and the 2 year old pilot. Similarly where the Council has concerns around a setting the programme will ensure that the correct support and challenge is provided to encourage improvement.

In addition, it is important that the Programme supports providers in completing their self-evaluation form for Ofsted, thereby helping to improve their inspection ratings. The Programme could also be used as a useful aid to ensuring that they are well placed to promote the quality of their setting when meeting with Inspectors.

In order to achieve this Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council, in partnership with local providers, has produced this endorsed Quality Improvement Programme.

The aim of the “A Journey to Outstanding” process is to:

- be provider focussed
- involve providers in the on-going development process in order to promote ownership
- support all providers to implement strategies for continuous improvement
- clearly take into account the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)
- promote reflective practice
- provide settings with support and challenge
- provide a method of monitoring quality in settings
- use the Ofsted SEF to contribute to the inspection process
- bring together strategies for monitoring and evaluation in order to prevent duplication
- inform the childcare sufficiency agenda
- enable the local authority to plan, resource and support requirements
- support and provide a structure for an annual conversation between the provider and the relevant local authority officer.

This toolkit has been produced to offer challenge questions to support settings in reflective practice, SEF preparation and completion. The toolkit also provides an agreed process, including descriptors for self evaluation, for an annual conversation with the local authority.

The annual conversation between the provider and an appropriate local authority officer will underpin the quality improvement process, inform the support needs of the setting over the coming year and agree an action plan, the framework for which is included within the toolkit.