

Briefing note for heads of standalone early learning and childcare settings: HMIE-only inspections

Please share this information with all staff

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What are the main features of the inspection of our early learning and childcare (ELC) settings?

This briefing note has been designed to help you to prepare for the inspection. It describes the type of activities which will take place during our time in your ELC setting. The note provides answers for some of the questions you may have about the inspection. This is a guide and inspection activity may differ as we take account of your context.

Through inspection, His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education in Scotland (HMIE) aims to:

- provide assurance and public accountability
- promote improvement
- inform the development of educational policy and practice.

Your ELC setting will be inspected using the [quality improvement framework for the early learning and childcare sectors \(QIF\)](#).

You will be notified of the inspection in an email from the inspection administrator (IA) who is supporting the inspection. This email will inform you of the date of inspection and details of where to find further information from our website.

The ELC inspection will take place across three days (usually Monday lunchtime to Wednesday lunchtime). The team may consist of HM Inspectors (HMI), associate assessors (AA), and/or assistant inspectors (AI). At the end of their visit, the team will share messages about their findings.

We will take close account of the context and nature of your ELC setting. We will undertake inspection activities only to the extent necessary to provide a robust evaluation. Our inspections and reviews are always proportionate. This means that we only seek the evidence that we need to make a sound judgement.

As with all ELC inspection models, inspectors will carry out playroom observations and engage with a sample of staff, parents¹ and children, and

¹ Throughout this briefing note, the term 'parents' should be taken to include foster carers, residential care staff and carers who are relatives or friends.

stakeholders. The inspection team will not cover all aspects of your ELC setting's work. It is important that your staff are aware of this.

We use the PRAISE model of shared behaviours to guide our approach to inspection, helping us establish and maintain positive relationships with all involved. We intend that all our discussions and engagements with you and your ELC community are opportunities to share thinking, develop ideas and learn from each other. Throughout the inspection, team members will involve you and your staff in professional dialogue, with the aim of supporting improvement.

Your ongoing self-evaluation is important. We will use this as the starting point of our inspection. This helps the inspection team to take account of the context and nature of your setting. As part of the ELC inspections, we are not requesting a self-evaluation summary for ELC to be submitted in advance. For further detail see section 'What should I do in advance of the inspection?'

Your notification email will contain links to an online pre-inspection questionnaire for staff, parents and partners and helpful tips on sharing the questionnaire links with your stakeholders.

The IA will follow up the notification email with a telephone call to you to discuss the administrative arrangements, confirm you have the necessary information and respond to any immediate enquiries. It is important to highlight to the IA during the initial conversation any additional provision in your setting such as a special unit, and/or Gàidhlig provision.

The Managing Inspector (MI) will contact you to arrange an appropriate time to discuss the inspection visit with you.

HMIE will report on two quality indicators (QIs) from the QIF. In your notification email, you will be informed of the combination of the QIs to be used for your inspection. These QIs will be graded using our six-point scale. The possible combination of QIs is:

- Learning, teaching and assessment, and
- Children's progress

or

- Learning, teaching and assessment, and
- Wellbeing, inclusion and equality

We will review and discuss your arrangements for safeguarding.

Gàidhlig sector

When inspecting Gàidhlig Medium Education, we will use the same national QIs and themes as we do for English Medium provision. In ELC settings that have both English Medium and Gàidhlig Medium Education, we will evaluate the quality of the provision jointly using the relevant QIs.

We will continue to use the Advice on Gàidhlig Education, to support evaluation of the distinctive elements of Gàidhlig Medium Education. A Gàidhlig version of HMIE's Advice on Gàidhlig Education is available [here](#).

In advance of the inspection, we appreciate that the ELC setting will make some documentation available to us. Other documentation will be available to us during the inspection. In a provision that has English and Gàidhlig Medium Education, there is no need for separate documentation. However, it is important that Gàidhlig Medium Education is reflected within the documentation.

We will invite the Gàidhlig Medium Education and ELC team to outline their priorities for improving Gàidhlig Medium Education, progress and evidence of impact on learners.

Reporting on findings

We will provide you and the local authority with a confidential draft of the letter for parents and carers. This draft letter will highlight the main strengths and aspects for improvement. It will also outline the evaluations for the relevant QIs. The letter will provide a statement of the confidence that HMI have in your setting's ability to improve the quality of its work. It will also inform parents and carers of any intended further inspection or engagement, if applicable.

In addition, you and the local authority will receive a copy of the draft summary of inspection findings (SIF). We ask that you check these for factual accuracy and return your response to the MI within one working week.

The final letter and SIF will be published on the HMIE website. In settings offering Gàidhlig Medium Education, the letter will be available in both Gàidhlig and English.

What should I do in advance of the inspection?

As part of ELC inspections, we are not requesting a self-evaluation summary to be submitted in advance of inspection. Instead, we will ask for a copy of your current and previous improvement plans and any standards and quality reports that you provide for parents. However, if you have a pre-existing self-evaluation document which you wish to share with us, we will be happy to receive this.

For further advice on what to do in advance of the inspection, please read:

Appendix 1. ELC documents to be provided in advance of the inspection

Appendix 2. Relevant documents which can be provided during the inspection for the ELC setting

Appendix 3. Meetings required during the ELC inspection

Please contact the IA if you need any clarification.

Pre-inspection questionnaires

An important aspect of the inspection is ensuring that your stakeholders have the opportunity to share their views of the ELC setting. To gather the views of ELC parents, staff and partners, we ask that you direct stakeholders to a pre-inspection questionnaire.

We will gather the views of children through our direct engagement with them during the inspection.

Within the email notifying you of the inspection, you will find links to an online survey containing the pre-inspection questionnaires. The IA will make available questionnaires through the medium of Gàidhlig if required. We welcome and encourage responses in Gàidhlig for our questionnaires. The links you will receive are set out below.

In line with our responsibility under the [Equality Act 2010](#), our approach to questionnaires is inclusive. We encourage everyone to take part and, where necessary, they are supported to do so. To help us do that, we would appreciate your support in ensuring that people who may find completing the questionnaire challenging, for example those with protected characteristics, have the same access to the questionnaires as everyone else. We ask that you put in place appropriate arrangements for anyone who may have difficulty accessing or completing the questionnaire. If you are unable to do that, please advise us as early as possible so that we can offer support in making alternative arrangements.

Parents

You should send the link to the pre-inspection questionnaire to all parents. Parents may complete a pre-inspection questionnaire for each of their children attending your setting. The pre-inspection questionnaire asks parents to indicate if they shall be providing one response only or if they are providing one response for each of their children who attend the setting.

As part of the inspection, members of the inspection team will meet with a range of stakeholders. Parents are asked within the pre-inspection questionnaire to indicate whether they would like to meet with a member of the inspection team and, if so, to provide their contact details. The IA will contact parents to invite them to the meeting.

Staff

All staff should receive the link to the pre-inspection questionnaire. We have created pre-inspection questionnaires for the following broad groupings:

- practitioners
- teachers
- support staff.

Partners

We define partners as all individuals or organisations that deliver learning and contribute to the life and work of the ELC setting. This may include other agencies, such as:

- health and education professionals

- community learning and development services
- voluntary and community organisations.

You should send the pre-inspection questionnaire to all those who work in partnership with your setting. This should include partners supporting Gàidhlig Education, as appropriate.

Distributing the links

You should use existing digital channels to inform these stakeholders of the inspection, the information that is available from our website and the appropriate link to the pre-inspection questionnaire. When sharing the links, it is important to include the date which all responses must be completed by. We usually refer to this as the date the survey will close.

You are best placed to know the most effective ways of communicating and engaging with your stakeholders to ensure that as many as possible have the opportunity to provide their views about your ELC setting. We have found that some settings have, in addition to sending the links digitally, provided parents with devices to complete the pre-inspection questionnaires.

We recognise that ELC settings will want to encourage as many of their stakeholders as possible to complete the pre-inspection questionnaire. To support this, the IA can provide you with a regular update on responses rates. Where, for example, the response levels are lower for a particular stakeholder group, you may wish to send another communication which reminds and encourages more responses.

What should I expect on the first afternoon?

The team will usually arrive between noon and 12.30 pm on the first day (usually Monday) of the inspection. Final arrangements will be confirmed by the Managing Inspector (MI) in their pre-inspection discussions with you. On arrival, the inspection team will have a brief team meeting.

Before any inspection activity begins, the MI will arrange the best time to introduce members of the inspection team to staff.

We will have an introductory discussion about your setting's improvement journey based on your existing self-evaluation arrangements, including your standards and quality reports and improvement plans. As previously noted, we are not asking you to submit a self-evaluation paper in advance of the inspection. However, if you have a pre-existing self-evaluation document which you wish to share with us, we will be happy to receive this.

This discussion will take place at a convenient time in the afternoon. This should last approximately one hour. Please invite your quality improvement officer (QIO) or equivalent colleague from your local authority to take part in the introductory discussion. There is no need to prepare a presentation as the focus should be a discussion. The MI will chair this introductory discussion. The MI will invite you to outline your priorities for improvement, the progress you have made and your evidence of impact on children so far.

The MI and possibly some members of the team will join the introductory meeting while other team members may begin inspection activities. This may include visiting learning spaces or undertaking observations and interacting with children and staff. After the introductory discussion we may meet with some staff for a more focused professional dialogue. This is a voluntary meeting. The MI will discuss with you any meetings and specific activities that require to be arranged. These will build on previous discussions. Your support with these arrangements is greatly appreciated.

Please remember that proportionality is a core principle of our inspection approach. This means the inspection team will not need to cover all aspects of your ELC settings' work.

Discussions around planning activities might also include:

- a focus on particular groups of children (for example, children requiring additional support, care-experienced children, those learning Gàidhlig)
- a focus on features of learning and teaching which are having a major impact on children's experiences, achievements and progress
- aspects which link to priorities in the improvement plan
- a discussion/review of relevant documentation relation to safeguarding.

What happens from the second day onwards?

Inspectors will undertake a wide range of activities, building on discussion at the introductory meeting(s). Inspection activities will typically include:

- visits to playrooms
- observing children
- reading relevant documentation
- discussing specific aspects of your setting's work with groups of children, staff and parents.

Members of the inspection team will engage with learning across, in and beyond playrooms, ensuring a well-rounded understanding of the setting.

At the end of each day, the MI will meet with you to reflect on the day's activity and confirm arrangements or plan any further activity for subsequent days, as appropriate.

Sharing our findings

At the end of evidence gathering, the MI and the team will arrange to share their high-level messages at the sharing of findings meeting with you and the local authority. This will outline the strengths and aspects for improvement we have identified during the inspection and discuss possible next steps to support continued improvement. We will also share our findings from our safeguarding activity.

You should also invite your associated quality improvement officer or equivalent colleague from your local authority to this sharing of high-level messages.

Where relevant, the MI will discuss with you and the local authority any proposal for continuing engagement with your setting.

What engagement will staff have with the team?

Inspectors will engage with staff throughout the inspection week.

For senior staff, engagement with inspectors will usually start with the introductory discussions after lunch on Monday. For some staff, this may begin on Monday afternoon with a playroom visit.

Professional dialogue with staff takes place in a range of situations over the inspection, for example, during playroom visits and observations, in focus groups and during voluntary discussion sessions.

At the end of the first or second day, inspectors would like to meet with groups of staff for professional dialogue. The MI will discuss with you the most appropriate format for the professional engagement session(s). Participation in this professional dialogue session is voluntary for staff.

Meetings will be arranged throughout the course of the inspection with selected members of the staff to discuss aspects of your setting's improvement. Please take the opportunity to discuss potential individuals and/or groups with the MI. It is important that all staff feel encouraged to engage in professional dialogue as part of the inspection.

The MI will invite you, or a nominated colleague (promoted member of staff), to accompany an inspector on a shared observation or learning walk, to support professional dialogue about features of learning and teaching. This is entirely voluntary.

What engagement will children have with the team?

Inspectors will engage with children and join them in their play as part of ongoing observations during the inspection.

What engagement will parents and carers have with the team?

Our inspections take the views of parents and carers into account and seek to engage with them in a number of ways.

When parents complete the pre-inspection questionnaire, they are asked to indicate if they would be willing to meet a member of the inspection team. The IA will then contact parents who have said they would be willing to meet the inspection team and confirm those who are able to attend. The IA will then arrange for a member of the team to meet the group at the agreed time(s) during the inspection. This could be in person or virtually.

The focus of this discussion is to understand how parents are involved in their child's learning.

In exceptional circumstances, it may be possible for a member of the team to have a meeting with individual parents and carers. Please discuss this with the MI if required.

What engagement will partners have with the team?

It is important for the inspection team to understand how you work with your partners to deliver learning and contribute to the life and work of the setting. Inspectors may meet with partners relevant to particular QIs to discuss this work. This meeting can either take place in person or virtually at a suitable time during the inspection.

What happens after the inspection

Once the high-level messages have been shared, the inspection team will leave your setting.

Following the visit, we will provide you with a confidential draft of the letter for parents and carers. This draft letter will highlight strengths and aspects for improvement. It will also outline the evaluations for the QIs. The letter will provide a statement of the confidence HMI have in the setting's ability to improve the quality of its work. It will also inform parents and carers of any intended further inspection or engagement, if applicable.

You and the local authority will receive a copy of the draft SIF once it has been through our quality assurance process. We ask that you check the draft SIF for factual accuracy and return your response to the MI within one working week. Once finalised, the letter and SIF will be published on the HMIE website alongside an analysis of the questionnaire returns. We aim to publish the letter and SIF within 10 working weeks from the end of the inspection.

For ELC settings with Gàidhlig Medium Education, we will make the letter available in Gàidhlig. It may also be appropriate to make the letter available

in Gàidhlig in other situations to reflect the interests of learners in Gàidhlig Education.

Appendix 1. ELC documents to be provided in advance of inspection

Please email only the following items to the IA prior to the inspection. Unless specified, **please return them at least six working days before the inspection.**

Item	?
The current and previous annual reports which you issued to parents and carers on the standards and quality of the ELC setting's work.	
The current and previous improvement plans.	
Names of all ELC staff, and details of their responsibilities.	
Complete practitioners' qualifications form with details of staff registration with other professional bodies such as Scottish Social Services Council and General Teaching Council of Scotland where applicable.	
You should complete the child protection and safeguarding self-evaluation form and send this to the inspection administrator.	

Appendix 2. Documents which can be provided during the inspection for the ELC setting

If available, please provide the following information in the HMI base on the first day of the inspection. There is no requirement to share in advance.

Item	?
Number of children on roll, including a note of those who also attend other settings or who attend on a full-time basis and funded two-year-olds where appropriate.	
Sample agendas and minutes of staff meetings.	
Examples of communications with parents and the wider community, e.g. newsletters, parent handbook.	
Information used by the setting to monitor and evaluate children's progress, including the quality of learning and teaching.	
Sample of children's personal plans/ learning journals across the full age range, including any child with ASN.	
Examples of the setting's planning for children's learning.	
If your inspection team includes a specialist HM Inspector for Gàidhlig Education, please provide details of your Gàidhlig provision, including progress, curriculum and immersion, planning priorities for Gàidhlig and how you promote Gàidhlig with parents and their families.	

We may require access to the following confidential documents during the inspection week. These should only be made available at times when the inspection team is in the setting.

Access to records of complaints, accidents/incidents, administration of medicine.	
List of children with additional support needs and brief details of support provided. Details of children with regular/long-term absence.	
List of children who have experienced care.	
List of children who are on or have been on the child protection register.	
Records on child protection concerns	
Access to children's records, including a sample of children's care plans across the full age range, including any child with ASN or any children who have experienced care.	
Access to Co-ordinated Support Plans (CSPs) and Individual Education Plans (IEPs).	

Appendix 3. Meetings required during the ELC inspection

The MI will discuss with you the composition of the inspection team, the days each of the team members will be in attendance and the meetings that will be required during the inspection.

They may send you a template to complete in advance, asking you to add details of the meetings, attendees and allocated rooms. As the team responds to findings during the inspection and work with you to gather evidence, there are likely to be ongoing adjustments.

The meetings that will be needed include²:

Monday

- Introductory meeting with senior leaders
- Possible one-to-one meetings to start discussions with staff responsible for particular aspects of the work of the setting.
- Meeting with the child protection coordinator
- Staff professional dialogue (can be Tuesday).

Tuesday

- Meetings with parent groups (IA will identify parents from pre-inspection survey returns).
- One-to-one meetings with members of the senior team or appropriate staff in relation to QIs being inspected.
- Meetings with partners as appropriate.

Wednesday

- One-to-one meeting with child protection coordinator to sign off the completed safeguarding form.
- Discussion of high-level messages (timing to be agreed with MI).

² Please note that this is provided as a guide only and the MI may wish to make changes to this depending on circumstances.