How To Be Outstanding: The Ofsted Inspection Guide
## Table of Contents

What's inside the book.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intro: A head start with Ofsted</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributors</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Preparing for Ofsted</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Leadership &amp; Management</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Staff Development</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Self-Evaluation</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Parents as Partners</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Teaching, Learning &amp; Assessment</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Development, Behaviour &amp; Welfare</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Outcomes for Children</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Safeguarding</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Paperwork</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Strategies</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Final Tips</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction - A head start with Ofsted

Whether this is your first experience with Ofsted or you’re an Ofsted veteran, ‘the call’ can strike fear into any manager’s heart.

But it needn’t be that way. Ofsted should be a chance for you to shine and show the very best your setting has to offer. Properly prepare yourself and you should feel nothing but excitement when the call does finally come.

But with so much to think about, how do you know what to focus on in order to achieve outstanding? How can you really be sure that you’re focusing on the right thing to make your setting outstanding day in and day out?

Well, the people who’ve been there and done it might not be a bad starting point.

That’s why we’ve spoken to five of the very best managers, owners, and leaders in the country, all of whom have achieved outstanding at their own nurseries. We’ve also got contributions from leading early years expert Dr Sue Allingham.

As ever, please get in touch and let us know what you think! And if you like what you read, we’d love for you to pass the guide on to your friends, colleagues and anyone in early years who might want a helping hand at their next Ofsted inspection.
Contributors - The experts you'll hear from

The Setting: Cotswold Montessori School
Principal: Ailsa Monk
Outstanding in: 2018

Ofsted say: “Staff provide an exceptional learning environment where children benefit from the vast range of high-quality, stimulating resources. Children have an excellent sense of belonging.”

Cotswold Montessori School is located in specially converted farm buildings in the beautiful North Cotswolds. They aim to create a safe and caring home environment for children filled with opportunities to engage and learn.

The Setting: Little Acorns Montessori
Manager/Director: Michelle Tuddenham
Outstanding in: 2018

Ofsted Say: “Staff have exceptional relationships with children and their families. New children settle quickly, show high levels of confidence and eagerly explore the stimulating play areas.”

Little Acorns Montessori has been providing care for children in Windsor for well over two decades. They aim to provide structured learning in a fun, relaxed and caring environment every day.
The Settings: Hollies Day Nurseries
Partner: Becky Pike
Nursery Group Leader: Lizzy Barlow
Outstanding in: 2017

Ofsted Say: “Children are curious and excited, and they are exceptionally well motivated in their learning. They quickly develop the skills they need for the next stage of their learning and for their eventual move on to school.”

Hollies Day Nurseries consist of four settings in Nottingham, and they hold two outstandings and a good, with one setting yet to be inspected. Hollies are progressive and forward-thinking, making sure that each child has a unique journey towards becoming a life-long learner.

The Setting: Priesthills Nursery
Childcare Manager: Catherine Walker
Outstanding in: 2015

Ofsted Say: “Staff have an excellent knowledge and understanding of childcare and development allowing children to flourish in all aspects of their learning and development, preparing them extremely well for the move to school.”

Priesthills Nursery in Leicestershire has been a setting with a genuine family feel for more than three decades. The children enjoy a stimulating and challenging environment, allowing them to explore, imagine and create every day.

Dr Sue Allingham
Email: sue@eyoutofthebox.com
Twitter: @DrSue22

Dr Sue Allingham has both an MA and a Doctorate in Early Childhood Education from the University of Sheffield. She is the author of Transitions in the Early Years and writes regularly for Early Years Educator (EYE) magazine where she is Consultant Editor. Sue is also an independent consultant and trainer who works with a wide range of settings.
1. Preparing for Ofsted

It’s not about having a special Ofsted day plan. Instead, it’s making sure that you and your staff are confident and capable enough to let the good work you do shine through.

Selling yourself

The call is the first point for you to really sell yourself. To say “Yes, come on, we’re ready for you, we’re looking forward to it, can’t wait to show you around.” Be positive. Be competent. Ordered. Ask questions. Sell yourself, because that’s effectively what you’re doing.

Your time to shine

The inspector said, this is your time to shine. Because it is your time to shine. Do what you’re good at and don’t put anything in that you’ve never done before. It’s not a day for trying something new.

Telling the staff

I waited until the end of the day to tell the staff so that they could just go home and relax as much as possible. There’s nothing that we needed to do or change that day specifically for Ofsted’s visit.
Don’t panic

Firstly it’s about not panicking. Unless it is a complaint driven inspection, you will have been working towards this inspection for some time. Be confident and believe in the work you’ve done.

Michelle Tuddenham

Keep it simple

It’s much better to just do what you do every day. If you run your nursery properly then you don’t need to change anything. Obviously you should check your policies and procedures are up to date, but you should be doing the day-to-day stuff anyway. If you change it for an inspection then it’s going to go wrong.

Organisation

I think the key to getting outstanding was getting more organised. In particular we noticed that staff were getting really nervous because they felt like they didn’t know the right things to say or do. I think that might have held us back in the past because they were worried about doing the wrong thing.

Catherine Walker

Get some sleep

It is important that you don’t try to stay up all night to change the way things are done or write new documents. This will be very obvious during the inspection as the practice won’t be embedded. Just do what you always do, and try to act normally. It is too late to change anything now.

Dr Sue Allingham
Tip - The post-call strategy

The team at Hollies Day Nursery have a strategy for when you get that phone call, which is to PANIC! No it’s not! The strategies they use really can make the difference between good and outstanding.

- After the phone call - inform everybody straight away
- Make sure that every member of staff who is in that day is confident and experienced
- Get the nursery clean and ready
- Make sure everyone feels confident about their room
- Don’t put something in you haven’t done before
- Hold a quick meeting the night before to tell all the staff how amazing they are
- Get other practitioners to share their experience from past inspections
**Finding the answer**

If you get put on the spot, just say “You know what, my mind’s gone blank, can you give me a minute?” That’s all you need to do - you don’t need to have every answer every time.

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**The right language**

We use a competency framework that runs in levels to assess our staff. It’s more about passion and talent than qualifications. Kind of like a learning journey. Within that we use the kind of language that Ofsted wants you to know so that it’s a part of the staff’s whole process with us.

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**Mock Ofsted**

The mock Ofsted inspection was really useful to get staff comfortable with answering questions. In the real thing, they commented on how consistent and accomplished the staff answers were. The main difference was that everyone was so much more confident once they’d been through that mock process.

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**Best practice**

If you do have special activities, and you think that’s best practice and what Ofsted want to see, then why don’t you do that every day?
2. Leadership & Management

It can be tough at the top. But to be the very best you need to be an outstanding leader and a great manager. So, how do outstanding leaders run their nurseries?

**Committing to your setting**
If your leadership isn’t there then you won’t get outstanding. Unless you’re into everything at your nursery 100% then you’re wasting your time. You’ve got to have commitment to it.

Becky Pike

**Talk to Outstanding settings**
If you’re a setting and you’re not outstanding, phone a setting who is. People are so happy to share their information. They’re not in it to make money or just to be the best. What matters is the children. So if you have a setting down the road who is outstanding, go and ask to see how they do things.

Lizzy Barlow

**Do the dirty work**
I wouldn’t expect anyone to do anything that I wouldn’t do. The team know that, which is why they know that when I ask for things it comes from the right place.

Catherine Walker
Tip - An outstanding staff meeting

This is the first three things the team at Cotswold Montessori discuss at every meeting to ensure that all staff are on top of the latest safeguarding issues and risks. It means they are prepared for Ofsted to come at any time.

- We always start with safeguarding. Are there any issues that we need to address?

- Next up, are there any early help concerns? That’s a level down from safeguarding and it’s about spotting early warning signs. For example it could be parents who are struggling.

- Finally, risk assessments. Is there anything that we need to change or anything new that isn’t working?
Leading vs managing
Understand the difference between being a leader and being a manager – these are vital and complementary skills but they are not the same thing. Leaders must be able to identify the strengths of their team and areas for development and approach them both proactively.

Being in the room
If you’re in the room, you’ve got no choice but to be engaged, because the children will climb on you. And if you can show that you can be silly and play and have a laugh, the staff can be silly and play too.

Are you approachable?
Being open and being approachable is the most important thing as a leader so that you can have that open communication with your staff team. You need to be able to have the difficult conversations but you won’t get the confidence to do that if you don’t spend time educating yourself so that your team trust your judgement.

Out of office
Our nursery leaders aren’t office based. They have an amount of time to do their office work and a laptop so they can answer emails in the room, but all of the main admin is dealt with by the administration team. Fees, contracts, new starters, funding - none of it’s dealt with by the leaders.
Tip - The Tenth Man

At any staff meeting, if everybody agrees on something, then it’s somebody’s designated job to disagree. They need to find an argument against it, play devil’s advocate.

Funnily enough, that argument can often win out, because being able to take a completely different view of something can often come up with the best answers. We call that the tenth man. I think it came from a film! It’s just a great way of questioning stuff.

Becky Pike & Lizzy Barlow
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3. Staff Development

While Ofsted cover this under Leadership and Management, everyone we spoke to thought that staff training and development was the number one thing to invest in at any setting. Let’s see what they have to say...

The team comes first

The main thing that makes any setting outstanding is the staff team. You need to make sure that you invest time and money in training them to be the best that they can be. You are only as good as they are.

Catherine Walker

Worth the investment?

We’re passionate about staff training and it’s all focused on what the children’s needs are. It costs a lot of money to train staff, but the investment has been second to none. If we hadn’t done it then we wouldn’t be where we are now.

Becky Pike

Performance management

I give every member of staff a sheet with maybe 50 statements on, and get them to rate themselves on a scale of 1-5. This means they’re not scared about performance management, because they already know what we’re going to discuss, and if they’re honest with themselves, they also know what I’m going to say and they can prepare for it.

Ailsa Monk
Talking the talk
Proper training means the staff can talk the theory as well as explain what’s happening in the room. It’s not just about one single child, but about what they’ve learnt about how all children learn.

Simple questions
Inspectors ask simple questions in complicated ways. So if you can prep your staff with the language of Ofsted by using the handbook as part of your training, it just puts them at ease and lets them be themselves.

Open your door
Ofsted really liked that all staff said we had an open door policy because it gives them easy access to the management any time they wanted to discuss something.

Do they really know it?
If the team do training outside of our internal training they need to be able to evidence what they’ve learnt and present that training back to the rest of the staff. Just because they’ve got a certificate doesn’t mean they know what they’re talking about.
Everyone can improve

We get evaluated on what we might not do well and we have to take that onboard too. Your staff have to able to approach you to say that they need your support.

Fixing mistakes

The fact that the staff feel comfortable telling us if they’ve made a mistake means that we can correct the problems and let the right people know before they become bigger problems. It’s really important that they feel comfortable to just ask or say.

Balancing the rooms

You need to balance the skill sets in the room. If you’ve got somebody who is really lively then you can balance them with someone who is more nurturing. If it doesn’t work, then you can always change it.

Strengths vs weaknesses

You’ve got to identify people’s strengths but don’t necessarily try to develop their weaknesses. There is no point - because you’re just giving them a job that they don’t want to do. Let them use their passion to share with others who want to improve.
Admitting you’re wrong

To have a situation where staff don’t cover up anything, you have to have a framework in which it’s safe to say when you’ve gone wrong.

Ailsa Monk

Is this you?

If you like telling people off, this isn’t the business to be in. If something goes wrong it should feel as upsetting to you as it does to them.

Becky Pike
4. **Self-Evaluation**

Even now that Ofsted have scrapped the SEF, it’s still important that you are evaluating and improving your setting all the time. At least, that’s what the experts say...

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**Always changing**

The current thinking in childcare is continually changing and so is the legislation and rules. So to continue to provide outstanding care for the children you have to be continually assessing yourself.

*— Catherine Walker*

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**Organic self-evaluation**

Our self-evaluation is very organic. If something stops being exciting because the children lose interest, then we address it next time we have an evaluation. We don’t just keep bashing away at the same thing because people say that you should.

*— Becky Pike*

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**Constant self-evaluation**

We’re continually self-evaluating, and we’ve always got specific improvement projects that we’re working on. Looking closely at where we are good and where we are outstanding and choosing the areas to improve upon was a huge contributor to us getting the grade in the end.

*— Catherine Walker*
Tip - Involving the parents

We let parents join in on the training with our staff if they want to, meaning they take on exactly the same early years training that our staff do. Then we do a survey each time afterwards to find out how the course went.

Now we keep the flyers from those events, and get them to take questionnaires to show how we’re developing the practice and looking at ways to improve. That’s the kind of evidence Ofsted liked to see.

Becky Pike & Lizzy Barlow
**Keeping it fresh**

I find a working document is better as a self-evaluation because then it's not going to go out of date the minute you've finished it.

Ailsa Monk

**Who to include?**

We include our children, our parents, our families, our environment, and local factors in our evaluation. You need to go outside the doors of your setting and see how the local factors change what you do.

Becky Pike

**Looking inwards**

The simplest way we improve is to look at each other and how we do things. It involves taking staff off ratio for half an hour every now and again and get them to observe someone else. Then that helps to inform our reflective practice.

Michelle Tuddenham

**SEF no more?**

Post-SEF, you still need to demonstrate that you understand how effective your setting is and that you have clear actions to move it forward. This needs to include evidence of exactly how these actions are being implemented, and any impact so far.

Dr Sue Allingham
Tip - The self-evaluation scrapbook board

We have a scrapbook board up in the offices of both nurseries. So staff can add things continually. Any time we change anything or have an evaluation, they just pin it up. A post-it note or a photograph maybe. That means we have solid staff involvement in the self-evaluation process.

Catherine Walker
5. Parents as Partners

Your parent partnerships are crucial in helping to build a full picture of every child. So how do you make sure they're outstanding in the eyes of Ofsted?

Understanding the child

The better the relationship with the parent, the more you understand and know the child and the more comfortable they are. So partnerships with parents are really important to make sure the children learn and develop.

Daily diaries

Try to involve parents as much as possible in everything you do. Famly has really helped with that, tracking sleep times and meal times, all the daily diary stuff. What they really want to know is all the amazing stuff we've done in the day and now they don't need to ask about the daily stuff because they can find out on Famly.

Bad relationships

If you need to have difficult conversations with a parent who you have a bad relationship with, it's 10 times harder. But with a good relationship and open communication things are a little easier. It also makes it easier for the parent to come to you when they've got concerns and then things get flagged up earlier.
Parent questionnaires
We also do parent questionnaires based on the Ofsted primary school ones. We compile them for evaluation and we also have evidence to show Ofsted.

Your biggest fan
If a parent loves you, then get them in and ask them why! Or get them to send an email or have a meeting about why they believe you’re outstanding.

Telling them about the inspection
As soon as I knew that we were going to have an Ofsted inspection I messaged all the parents to let them know. I told them that the inspector might want to speak to them and that they should be completely honest and say whatever they think. We got a huge number of comments back and I even showed that to the inspector. It was incredible what they put and the inspector really liked that.

Regular communication
We’re always chatting with parents as they come in and out in the morning and we invite them in for regular parent evenings. We have things like craft afternoons and mother’s day breakfasts. We have newsletters. But mainly it’s about just having open communication and letting them know that they can call or come in.
Parent-teacher meetings
Different parents want different things. So when we send out the reports we ask them if they'd like a parent-teacher meeting. This means it’s efficient, because we only spend our time on the parents who really need it.

Lizzy Barlow

Behaviour management
Having a hugely trusting and confident relationship with parents allows you to have that difficult conversation. You mustn’t say to them that their child has had a good day if they haven’t. The language we use is “WE haven’t had a good day.” Because then it’s about the practitioner taking on those emotions and trying to change it.

Catherine Walker

Documenting communication
Famly has improved our partnerships even further, because our parents love the fact that they can just message straight to the rooms. What’s more, it’s all documented so you can show Ofsted on the day.

Ailsa Monk

An open door
They can always come in and talk to us. That’s very important for Ofsted, because parents are leaving their children with us and they need to know that they are secure and safe when they’re here.

Michelle Tuddenham
6. Teaching, Learning & Assessment

Are your assessments up to scratch? Do you really know each child and where they’re at developmentally? This is what Ofsted want to find out.

Learning from the kids

Lizzy Barlow

Multiple inspectors have said to me now that they shouldn’t need to talk to a manager or staff member to see if a setting is outstanding. They say that they can learn everything they need to know from the children.

Know the children

Catherine Walker

You need to make sure that staff know their key children really well and that they have the time to build those relationships with both the children and the parents.

Individual learning plans

Ailsa Monk

What really swung it for us was how well we know our children. Every child has an individual learning plan and twice a year we take the time to make assessments on how the children are doing and produce a CoEL report on them. We use our own practitioner knowledge for that which helps us to understand our children really well.
**In-the-moment planning**

Changing to in-the-moment planning has been really positive for the children. They are so much more engaged and they settle a lot more quickly because of the continuous provision. It means they know where things are when they arrive in the morning.

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**Next steps**

Staff need to think for themselves when it comes to next steps. Because if you’re just given an automatic next step, that might not be the right one for that child. And the inspector said she agreed with that.

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**Time in the classroom**

At the beginning of each big term I spend a whole day in each class with the teachers to track the children’s development. I also observe how the classroom runs, how the teachers are teaching, how the routines are and so on. That is my monitoring system to make sure no child is left behind and that we always have things to improve on.

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**EYFS not the focus?**

They used to go through all of your journals and tracking with a fine tooth comb but I don’t think the EYFS is the focus anymore. It’s more important that you’re looking at where each child is and use that to push them further on.
Tip - Correcting your mistakes

A member of staff was doing an activity with playdough when a child wanted to come in and put water in the playdough and she stopped him. That is not outstanding practice. But within 30 seconds she realised she’d made a mistake and so in front of the inspector she went to her line manager and said “I’ve made a mistake and I need to change it”.

Together they brought the child back in, brought the water with them and they developed the activity into something completely different. In her report, the inspector noted specifically that this was outstanding practice. She said it doesn’t matter that she made a mistake, she acknowledged it, she did something about it, and she engaged the child with the child initiated choice. That was the outstanding practice.

Becky Pike & Lizzy Barlow
7. Development, Behaviour & Welfare

This section is all about making sure you have self-confident, happy, eager learners in your setting, and how to make sure they’re ready for the next step in their education.

The children lead

We let the children lead their own learning and give the children the options and choices to follow their own fascinations. Finding out what really interests them and asking them questions and building on that. You have to encourage them to push themselves further.

Challenging the children

Ofsted are looking for the staff to challenge the children to make predictions, think about what they’re doing and solve problems.

Child interests

We didn’t get asked anything about the EYFS last time. It’s more about the children’s interests and what inspires them and how you keep them engaged. As long as you can show that they are making progress in line with the EYFS, it’s more about how you’re helping them towards that progress and keeping them engaged.
Tip - The zone of proximal development

If they’re happy and concentrated, children will be in what we call the zone of proximal development. It means that they are engaged in activities that are neither too easy nor too difficult.

In this zone you will see children who are calm, peaceful and engaged in their activities. If it’s too easy they will get bored and start misbehaving and if it is too difficult they will lose interest and their self-esteem.

It’s a broad band between too easy and too difficult but if you can keep the children in this band then you will have a settled, calm, environment where the children are engaged, happy, interested, and concentrated.

Ailsa Monk
The boys
It’s especially important for Ofsted now that we challenge the boys. There’s a big push with literacy and boys at the moment, so you really have to be able to show that the boys are switched on with it.

Lizzy Barlow

A flexible schedule
If you’re doing something and the children are really engaged, don’t stop for ‘lunch time’. If you start telling them to stop then they’re going to misbehave. Lunch can wait. We don’t tend to have strict routines and you need to have that because that’s when the most amazing moments happen.

School relationships
We now send a letter every year to the local schools asking what we can do to help our children get to know their school before they start. It means that the majority of our children have already been to their school before they get there and they tell us that as a result our children are a lot more settled when they do start.

Ready for big school
School readiness isn’t whether they can write their name or count to 20. Can they do things independently? Can they get their coats on? Can they get themselves ready for PE? We practice those things and it means the children are more ready, curious and excited to learn when they do get there.

Catherine Walker

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Catherine Walker
Tip - Outstanding practice example

The inspector told the practitioner that she’d like to do the observation and at the time the children were happily playing outside. The activity that the staff member had planned was inside but the children were engrossed in their learning and challenging themselves. The practitioner turned around to the inspector and said “I don’t feel comfortable pulling this child away from an activity that they are engrossed in and learning from in order to do a different activity. Can you observe me now?”. 

The child was just drawing with chalk on the floor. It was a really simple activity but because she’d said she didn’t want to disturb the child learning, the inspector said that was amazing and told us it was outstanding. A simple activity was enough.

Becky Pike & Lizzy Barlow
Laevers involvement and wellbeing

We use relatively recent research by Laevers. He looks at levels of involvement - how concentrated, how hard the children are working. Are they interested? Are they engaged? And also at their levels of wellbeing - are they happy, are they settled, calm, peaceful. Those are the two things that I look at the most rather than the cold hard timeline of the EYFS.

Open-ended questions

We use open-ended questions all the time and our staff always give the children the time to come up with an answer. You need to step back and leave them to think about it for a bit and then you can step in and give them a few clues if they haven’t got it. But they will get there if you give them the time and confidence.

The whole picture

You need to know what’s going on in the rest of your children’s lives, not just in these four walls with you. Because everything that goes on outside affects what happens inside the setting with you.
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8. Outcomes For Children

Are your children progressing at the right level? And do you know how to show this to Ofsted? Luckily, we know a few people who do...

**Changes to the environment**

If there's changes to your environment, be aware about how you’ve dealt with that. For example, if you have an influx of children who all have english as an additional language, they’ll want to know what you’ve done about it and how it’s changed your environment. The same with SEND, and EYPP - how are you using that funding to help support that child’s growth?

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**EYO**

A normally developing child will reach the EYO targets in a timeline that is reasonable for them. Yes we need to keep an eye on that, but it’s not the most important thing for us.

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**Trends**

We even look at the trends in primary and secondary schools and consider how that will filter down to early years. We think, is there anything that we’re doing now that could help with the children’s outcomes later on?
We often ask the children what they want and recently one of the children wanted a digging area. So we made a digging pit. Some soil and two sleepers later and the child said to me “I liked coming to school before, and now I love it.”

It’s not difficult, and it doesn’t cost a lot of money. Ofsted don’t care about matching and pretty and all that, they just want to see the children engaged and happy.

Michelle Tuddenham
Online tracking

Online child development tracking can play a positive role in Ofsted inspections. But making sure that your observations are secure and of high quality is vital because systems will ‘judge’ children based on this input. Tracking will not be secure if the data is not accurate.

Communication and language

We have qualified all of our staff in Elklan, which is all about language and communication. It helps children gain really good communication and language skills. I do a cohort of that and ever since we’ve done the course we’re able to see that the children are progressing much better.
Tip - Learning opportunities

When it was snowing recently, the children asked how we make ice. Well, we turned the question back on them and they told us that you make ice in the fridge. At that point we went back and asked if they could think about it in a different way.

We took a few little yoghurt pots, filled them with water, and left them outside overnight. When they came back in the next day they were frozen solid and of course they were fascinated so it was a great start to so many brilliant conversations about temperature. That's what Ofsted would say was a ‘wow’ moment.

Michelle Tuddenham
9. Safeguarding

Here's some ideas to make sure you’ve shown Ofsted that all bases are covered with your safeguarding, giving you the time on your inspection to impress them with the other aspects of your setting.

Keep it simple

We try to keep things as simple as possible so that we can make sure the children are safe but still put the learning first. The learning is what you want to be talking to Ofsted about. Everything is there, ready in a folder, and then we can show them that so that we can move on and spend time talking about the important things.

Prevent

One big thing for us is monitoring absences of children for Prevent. For example, the inspector asked us what we do if they don’t turn up in the morning and the correct answer is that you ring. You find out where they are.

One thing at a time

There is so much to do and you always feel behind with new things coming in. We just make sure that we always take one thing at a time and look at that area properly to improve it or reduce the time we spend on it. Only once we’re properly done with that do we move on.
Safeguarding quiz
Every second staff meeting we have a short safeguarding quiz. If your most junior member of staff can’t answer those questions then I don’t think you can ever be outstanding.

Ready to go
Keep everything close at hand. We have loads of blank templates of medication, accident and incident sheets ready, so everything is just there, ready to fill out.

The training
All of my staff are trained to designated safeguarding lead level. It’s a day out of school for everybody every two years but I think it’s worthwhile because then everybody has the level of knowledge. They don’t rely on anyone else to pass down that knowledge to them.

Preparing your staff
If you’ve had a complaint, or had to refer anything to LADO, make sure that every single member of staff knows and understands the process. They will ask all staff, because they need to know that everyone knows what to do if a similar incident happens again.
10. Paperwork

Understand the paperwork that can help with Ofsted (and what won’t) and you won't be wasting time that could be spent improving your setting elsewhere.

Save time
There's no point collecting paperwork for paperwork's sake. Make short observations, but make sure that every word counts.

Thinking forward
We changed our paperwork a few years ago so that we have a form for when things do go wrong. We call it a ‘thinking forward form’. It’s more about how we can do it better next time. It’s not about how bad it was. It’s what happened, why it happened, and how can we stop it happening again.

Buying your documents?
You can buy policies and procedures off the shelf but you will not understand them because they were somebody else’s documents. So when the inspector asks you why they are like that it’s going to be difficult. The inspectors will realise if you know what you’re talking about or not.
Tip - Quick risk assessments

Our accident forms are all kept in a folder, and then on the front we have a map of the room. Every time there’s an accident we simply mark on that map where the accident happened. Then there’s a little tally on the bottom to mark the kind of equipment that was involved in the accident.

That means that when it comes to reviewing accidents, we don’t have to go through every form. Instead we just look on that map and I can see straight away if there’s hotspots or particular pieces of equipment where lots of accidents occur and it take seconds to do a review of a whole term’s accidents.

Catherine Walker
**Your nursery values**

Our job descriptions start with personal attributes. The managers, the leaders, the cleaners, it all starts with the same attributes. Happy and smiling. Love children. Approachable. Caring. Because most other things can be taught, but those attributes can’t be.

**You’re never ‘done’**

I thought finally after 5 years I had ‘finished’ my paperwork to the high expectations that we set. And then the next day I came and looked at the beginning and I had to start again. It’s never all done. Once you realise it’s never all done then you can relax, because you realise it’s a continuous process and you will have all the answers ready for them.

**The Ofsted folder**

Your folder doesn’t need to have evidence of everything you do. They want to see that on the floor, not in a folder. I think it’s helpful to have one with the core documents in but I wouldn’t necessarily have one that covers everything that you do because they’ll see the evidence in the room.

**Could you start afresh?**

It’s effectively documenting all of your work processes so that you could take your paperwork and move it into a different setting and start operating under your system. Ask yourself that question, could I start afresh now? Because that’s how you work out where your holes are.
Tip - Compiling your policies and procedures

You don't need to start completely from scratch with everything. I wrote everything myself, but that doesn’t mean I haven’t taken inspiration from other places. I might have looked at six safeguarding policies and then pulled that information together so that it’s adapted to this setting.

Ailsa Monk
11. Strategies

Here we’ll detail some of the strategies that our outstanding managers are using both before and during the inspection to make sure they get the outcome they deserve.

**Starting at Good**

To give outstanding there has to be real justification. Generally the inspector goes in with the expectation that it’s good, and then it’s up to you to prove that you’re outstanding. That’s your job.

*Ailsa Monk*

**Confidence is key**

You need to be confident with the inspectors. Sometimes they will question aspects, but so long as you are confident in your reasons why it suits your practice best, they will understand.

*Becky Pike*

**Pet hates**

I phoned up the local authority and asked them to specifically tell me the inspector’s loves and hates. What does she like? What doesn’t she like? So I knew her tendencies, what she ignores, and what she is passionate about before the inspection.

*Lizzy Barlow*
Shadowing the inspector...

We never left her side. That meant that if an activity happened where an outcome wasn’t outstanding, we had a chance to go back to that activity and do it again, or find something else. It also allows you to explain to the inspector why certain activities are in line with your philosophy and why it works for your children, even if it’s not their preference.

...even if they don’t like it

If they’re not happy with you following them, you can tell them that it’s a safeguarding issue. At the end of the day I wouldn’t let anybody walk around my setting unaccompanied no matter who they said they were. It’s about standing your ground.

Is there proof?

Beware anything you read on internet forums unless you can find the documents to back up what has been said. Also remember Ofsted do not create policy, only recommendations. If you are advised to change your practice to meet the recommendations of the ‘Bold Beginnings’ report for example, this is not appropriate and must be questioned.

Keeping up to date

It’s very important to keep up to date with local and national issues by attending LA briefings and reading relevant news in reputable publications. For example, right now there is a current Ofsted trend towards looking at how settings are developing the physical activity of the children.

Dr Sue Allingham

Becky Pike

Lizzy Barlow

Dr Sue Allingham
12. Final Tips

You’re now ready to get started on the changes that are going to make a difference to your setting. Here’s a few closing thoughts from the experts to round everything up.

A starting point

It sounds simple, but your starting point should be to review the criteria for ‘outstanding’ under each of the judgement areas. How does your setting reflect each of these?

Dr Sue Allingham

What really matters

Outstanding doesn’t really matter. What matters is that you’ve put the best effort in so that each child has the best outcomes they can.

Lizzy Barlow

Are you afraid?

If Ofsted puts fear into your heart then you haven’t worked hard enough. If you have worked hard enough then there’s nothing you need to worry about because you have all the evidence there and it’s just that you haven’t shown them yet.

Ailsa Monk
Questions are good

If they're asking a lot of questions it's going well. If they're tough and asking and asking it's going well. That's because they're seeing everything they wants to see and they're looking for the gaps.

Wellbeing and involvement

Track by wellbeing and involvement. It will really show you the children. It will pick up children who you thought were not a problem, or who other people thought were not a problem. It will also pick up children who look like a problem but are fine. It will pick up the truth.

Back yourself

If you can prove what you're doing is right, and it has the best outcomes for your children, then you can challenge anything. Have the confidence to evidence that you can do it. You don't have to change your practice if you’re doing right by the EYFS.

What really counts

So long as the staff know about safeguarding and the background information, then Ofsted know that the basis is there. After that they just want to see the staff inspiring the children to think for themselves and good relationships with the parents. I really think that is all they are looking for.
Tip - keeping up to date

Best practice in childcare is constantly changing, and you need to stay on top of the latest developments to make sure you’re not getting left behind. Here is Catherine Walker’s list of all the ways she makes sure she’s staying in touch:

- Early years groups on Facebook: Early Years Managers 2018 and Keeping Early Years Unique
- Magazines, books and other publications
- Early Years Conferences
- NDNA Meetings