

Meeting notes from the closed meeting between the North West Ofsted Big Conversation Steering Group and Ofsted. 3rd November 2021.

Present:

Elaine White, Ofsted, Senior Her Majesty's Inspector – Early Years.
Ann Law, Ofsted Senior Officer
Ian Micklewright, Senior Regulatory Professional
Elaine Sagar, Sunflower Nursery Group, Co-chair.
Rachel Buckler, Early Years Hub, Co-chair.
Cary Rankin, CEO, Thrive Childcare and Education (CR1).
Ursula Krystek-Walton, Head of Early Years, Thrive Childcare and Education.
Jo Kinloch, Director, Mulberry Bush Nursery Group.
Nicole Politis, Director, Portico Day Nurseries.
Clare Roberts, CEO, Kids Planet and Kids Allowed Nurseries (CR2).
Clare Beswick, Owner, Superstars Nursery.
Jane Casey, Director, Happy Faces Out of School Club Ltd.

Apologies:

Sarah Neville, Knutsford Childminding.
Claire Robinson, Registered person Spotted Dog and Stripy Horse Nurseries.

Agenda

- Feedback from the last open meeting /event in October
- EYFS Curriculum
- Sector issues
- Ofsted complaints procedure
- Representation of registered nannies
- Next open meeting 12th March 2022
- AOB

Meeting discussions

RB welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced the agenda.

1. RB gave feedback from the last opening meeting.

The virtual meeting went well but we recognised that there could be more time for questions but ran out of time on the day. The balance of

content from Ofsted and keynote speaker Andy Cope was a good and complimented each other.

EW grateful for the opportunity for Ofsted to attend and present. She recognised that there was not as much opportunity for interaction as in our past live events.

JK spoke about the energy and commitment from the sector.

ES asked if it is possible to answer some of the unanswered questions and put them on the website.

EW confirmed that they expected more questions about inspectors and were ready to answer.

RB suggested that we return to these questions and respond online at some point in the future. EW agreed.

2. EYFS Curriculum, Development Matters/Birth to Five/alternative curriculums.

EW answered questions about curriculum at the live event and discussed it in the Ofsted presentation. She stated that there was no preference of curriculum from Ofsted.

NP informed the group that DM was stated by Ofsted as a preferred curriculum at a recent NDNA conference. This has resulted in mixed messages from Ofsted.

CR2 gave example of an inspector bringing out DM at an inspection.

JK discussed both DM and B25.

AL shared that some settings have created their own curriculum for example and that this was acceptable.

AL and EW agreed to reiterate that there was no preferred curriculum to inspectors.

CR2 stated there are single site providers that feel they have to use DM. Also some LA's are leading with DM.

EW and AL confirmed once again that there was no preferred curriculum.

EW stated that she would raise this with the DfE

3. Sector Issues

RB introduces sector issues to Ofsted personnel in the room. There is a view in the sector that there is currently an agenda with Ofsted that focusses on a punitive approach rather than one that raise standards.

RB stated that we feel we have gone backwards not forwards increasing the need to challenge Ofsted on a number of issues.

CR1 spoke about levels of sensitivity in these unprecedented times, She explained that the sector is feeling stressed and that they have returned to the challenging relationship that was there pre Covid.

ES introduced Claire Ainscough's survey and research on sector feelings at the current moment in time. EW confirmed that they would provide information for this to reach the correct department within Ofsted.

JK spoke about the feeling in the sector and clarified the issues without the burden of covid. She stated the sector are feeling unsettled and heading towards difficult times as seen back in 2013 which was when OBC was first established. JK explained it is our place as a group to represent the sector and put this to the regulators.

CR2 noted that she respects that Ofsted have not been immune from Covid challenges themselves, but it is important that we communicate the issues with them.

RB stated it feels like there is a directive to come down harder on the sector.

AL asked the panel to quantify the meaning of the directive.

CR2 spoke about examples of their inspections and the fight that is felt, stating there are different opinions from inspectors and lack of consistency them. If individuals are making decisions, it must be consistent.

AL reassured that this was not the case.

EW responded asking IM to share data of concerns and reports to Ofsted. Ofsted are working on clarity as to what needs to be reported to them and what doesn't.

CR2 stated that parents not entering the settings building will give more room for complaints.

IM shared information about the complaint risk assessment process.

A discussion took place about what drives inspection activity.

EW explained how they would decide whether to bring forward an inspection.

CR1 asked about disgruntled staff making complaints.

IM explained that they would look at whether it was an anonymous complaint or not to determine authenticity of the complaint.

CR2 asked for clarity on what triggers phone calls or full inspection. Ofsted explained that numerous complaints from different sources could trigger a concern.

JK asked for clarity on a brought forward or unannounced inspection. EW replied that it would be assessed on the level of concern and what the inspection would achieve.

EW verified that they were not there to investigate the concern.

CR2 discussed the quantity of reporting and that this is often disproportionate and unfair.

CR2 discussed the effect of an unannounced inspection upon a provider stating that this influences the inspection adding that the arrival of Ofsted caused additional pressures upon staff that in turn impacts upon their wellbeing. She commented that some inspectors are saying it's difficult to get an Outstanding.

EW responded stating that the profile of high numbers of good and outstanding settings in the NW has not changed at all.

EW responded that outstanding or inadequate judgments must be proportionate and explained the expectation of the inspectors. She explained the process and how it would be challenged by process.

EW reiterated that there were no directives from senior leaders that inspectors should be more punitive in our judgements.

NP explained that she had informed before that schools are marking down the starting points of children to show their improvement in reception. This was discussed at a previous NDNA meeting.

EW stated that Ofsted are aware of this practice in schools.

JK stated that this needs to be acknowledged that schools are using these strategies. Local authorities state that they are meeting with providers to ensure we are meeting and achieving the same targets.

JK discussed the inspection programme of inspection being robust and how is this being met?

CR2 stated that the sector consider that Government's focus is bias towards education, and this starts in primary school.

CR2 stated that there is an increased number of settings selling businesses and that people are leaving the sector.

JR stated the sector are feeling very low.

NP shared where the sector was to where it is now. There is a lot of fear in the sector.

CR2 discussed the turnover of staff post covid and the challenges that this has caused in the sector.

CR2 discussed the difference in the Scottish care system and how that results of inspections generate statistics that are being collected for Scottish Government.

CR discussed the effect of inspection judgements on business.

EW discussed complacencies within practice and therefore the inspection is very different from what it may have been pre Covid. 18 months of not inspecting and going back to a different framework can lead to difficulties recognised through inspection. Every inspector should be asking about Covid.

JK reiterated how passionate we are about the quality of childcare.

SN sent information about childminders issues which was shared with Ofsted.

RB stated that the extent of inconsistencies are encompassing everything and becoming very problematic.

CR2 stated that the catch-up recognition is required for staff when significant changes have occurred.

The window of inspection was confirmed as being 6 years from the last inspection.

RB enquired and doubted whether some inspector knowledge is as strong as some of the providers whom they inspect.

EW and AL explained the QA process, the OI's backgrounds and experience including their recruitment & training process.

RB discussed inspector personal skills and inconsistencies.

AL explained new inspectors are monitored for a long period of time and will no longer work for Ofsted if they fail to be consistent and unable to meet the requirements of the job.

4. Complaints –

JK spoke about the complaint's procedure. It appears that when there is a difference of opinion between the setting's representatives and the inspector about what has happened, often the inspector's word is taken as the truth, and it's not possible for it to be challenged. Currently there are no independent persons sitting on the complaints panel as previously.

EW stated there was a consultation about changing the complaints process due to the volume of work. The EY process did not align with the rest of Ofsted's remits it is now in line with other inspections such as schools, social care etc.

EW explained that now stage 1 of a complaint goes to the inspector who did the inspection to consider. If after that process the provider is still unhappy with the response it goes to stage 2 formal process and it is allocated to a manager and not the person whom the complaint is about. The evidence is then considered to determine if there are any weaknesses. Ofsted are not trying to prove or disprove but will take the matter very seriously.

EW reassured the group that Ofsted do overturn judgements sometimes as a result of a complaint.

JK asked when an independent early years representative would return to contribute at stage 3 of Ofsted's complaints procedure. An example was shared with the group.

CR2 / JK discussed the conduct of the inspector on the day and how that if a complaint was in relation to conduct or behaviour and they address this themselves at the first stage the process could be flawed.

Ofsted made clear that they do consider matters of conduct and that these are taken to the inspector's line manager. They explained that this decision was made subject to the public consultation that recently took place. Some members of the steering group are representatives on national consultancy forum for Ofsted and did not know this. This was pointed out to Ofsted.

ES asked where there has been a complaint about an inspector can this inspector return to the setting or can the provider ask for a different inspector.

EW confirmed that if this was the case or a conflict of interest was known the inspector would not return.

EW stated that she hears what the sector are saying and that she clearly wants to approach it with integrity.

JK asked that this be addressed at the next open NWOBC event.

It was agreed that this along with reflections on the impact of Covid and the changes to the EYFS would be a focus at the next event. It was felt by all that there should be emphasis on empowering the sector to manage their inspections.

Discussions took place regarding the lack of sector awareness as to when an inspection could be deferred because of the impact of Covid upon the setting.

5. Representation of registered nannies

RB enquired how Ofsted include nannies in their regulatory activities. Ofsted (IM) explained that nannies can choose to register with Ofsted on the voluntary part and only 10% of that register are inspected every year. IM explained that there are an increasing number of registered nannies currently.

NWOBC to look at having nanny representation on our steering group.

RB discussed the plans for the next open meeting on the 12th of March 2022 at Anfield, Liverpool. Our keynote speakers are Alistair Bryce-Clegg and Shaddai Tembo.

Meeting Closed.

#Ofsted

BIG

Conversation