

Working with Early Years Inspection Service Providers

From 1 September 2010 the inspection and registration visits of Early Years providers will be transferred to Tribal Group Plc and Prospects Services Ltd. These changes will enable Ofsted to focus on the quality of provision in the early years sector. We have not changed the way we inspect so providers should not notice any difference in the way inspections and registrations are carried out.

Ofsted has a history of successfully working with a number of companies in the private sector to provide high-quality inspections for schools.

Inspections and registration visits will continue to be carried out by inspectors who will transfer from Ofsted. Our inspectors have built up their expertise and knowledge through many years of inspecting early years provision. Any new inspectors will also be highly experienced and well qualified for this work.

Early years inspection and regulation are important parts of Ofsted's work. By outsourcing inspections, we can focus on making improvements to create better services for children. These changes will bring greater value for money, giving Ofsted the ability to work more flexibly while maintaining high standards of inspection.

The outsourcing of inspections will create opportunities for outstanding early years practitioners to share good practice as well as training to become inspectors themselves, by working closely with experienced inspectors.

Ofsted will remain the main point of contact for general enquiries about registration, inspection, compliance, enforcement, complaints, fees and all other enquiries relating to early years provision.

All providers who are registered with Ofsted have been made aware of this change. Some providers have contacted the Ofsted helpline to ask questions about the arrangements from September. The following briefing answers the questions we have been asked.

Please could you bring this briefing to the attention of any of your staff who work with the early years sector within the local authority. If they require any further information, they should contact: jean.humphrys@ofsted.gov.uk.

Inspections

Ofsted will work closely with Tribal and Prospects to carry out early years inspection services. Tribal and Prospects will work on behalf of Ofsted and will carry out their work in Ofsted's name.

We will continue to decide who needs to be inspected and when the inspection will take place, and Prospects and Tribal will arrange for inspectors to carry out the inspections. The inspector's report will be sent to providers to check that it is factually accurate before it is submitted to Ofsted to be published on the website.

There may be times when provision is judged to be inadequate and, depending on the nature and seriousness of the concerns, Ofsted may decide to send a senior Ofsted inspector (either an HMI or a regulatory inspector) to monitor the provision until it has improved. In most other cases, Tribal or Prospects will send an inspector to check that improvements have been made.

Providers are encouraged to feedback their views on the quality of the inspection that Tribal or Prospects provides, so we can continue to improve the quality of inspections. This can be done online and this information will remain anonymous.

Registration

Those who wish to apply to be on the Early Years or Childcare registers will continue to find the information they need on the Ofsted website at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Applicants should also seek advice, guidance and support from their local authority before completing the application form.

Once the application has been received by us and the checks carried out, those who apply to be on the Early Years Register will be contacted by Tribal or Prospects to arrange a pre-registration visit.

The visit will be carried out by a fully qualified inspector, who will check the premises and interview the applicant. The inspector will not confirm registration at that stage, but will submit a report to Ofsted where all available information will be considered. Ofsted will then decide whether or not to grant registration and will send out a letter to the applicant giving our decision.

We will send all applicants a website address so that they can give us feedback on how well the registration process was conducted. We ask everyone to take this opportunity to let us know their experiences, so we can continue to improve our service.

Variations and changes to registration

Providers can continue to make any requests for change to their registration by writing to Ofsted's National Business Unit:

Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA
0300 123 1231
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

You may also pass information to inspectors during their inspection visits. Inspectors will pass on the information to our registration team, just as they did before September 2010. We will send out a letter or legal notice confirming the outcome of the request.

If you have any questions, please telephone Ofsted using the general enquiries number.

Suitable person interview

Where there is a change in manager, or a need to carry out a suitable person interview separate from the registration process, applicants should continue to contact Ofsted using the general enquiries number. We will ask Tribal or Prospects to arrange for an inspector to visit to carry out the interview.

Once the interview is complete the inspector will send information to us to put with other information already available. We will decide on suitability and will inform the provider of our decision.

Complaints about inspections

The vast majority of inspections are completed very well, but there may be occasions when providers want to make a complaint about the quality of their inspection. Providers should send complaints to us in the usual way and we will send your complaint to either Tribal or Prospects to investigate and respond directly. The investigation will be carried out by managers who have not been involved in the inspection.

If providers feel that the complaint has not been dealt with as well as it should have been, you can ask Ofsted to investigate how well it has been carried out. Ofsted will write to you giving the outcome of the investigation. If you are still dissatisfied, your complaint can be sent to an independent adjudicator. All of this information is available on Ofsted's website at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Complaints about providers

There will be no changes to the way complaints are made about providers. If you wish to make a complaint about a provider, please write to the National Business Unit. If you need any advice about how to do this, please ring us on the general number.

How will Ofsted work, from September onwards?

Will I need to have another inspection now that Prospects and Tribal are conducting inspections for Ofsted?

No, you will only be inspected once in the current inspection cycle, that is between September 2008 and August 2012, unless your provision is inadequate and a follow up visit is required.

Will I still pay my fees to Ofsted?

Yes, you will continue to pay fees to Ofsted in the normal way.

Will my inspection be delayed because of the handover to Tribal and Prospects?

No. Ofsted will continue to decide when your inspection should take place and all inspections will be completed by the end of the cycle.

What does the 'transition period' mean?

The transition period is a time for Ofsted to work with Prospects and Tribal to make sure the inspection work is effectively transferred. It gives time for Prospects and Tribal to build their systems, prepare their offices and to carry out training. During that time inspections will continue as normal.

Will Ofsted still be involved in inspecting and training?

Ofsted will continue to be involved in inspections. Ofsted will follow up all compliance issues and will monitor settings that are judged to be inadequate. We will create training materials and will train the trainers that Prospects and Tribal employ.

What would happen if a provider has concerns about an inspection or if they feel their report is inaccurate?

Providers will be sent a copy of the report to check before publication. They will be given contact details so that they can send their comments to Prospects or Tribal. If the report has been published or if they have concerns with the inspection they should contact Ofsted using the phone number they have been given.

How will Ofsted ensure inspections are consistent?

Ofsted has key performance indicators that set out exactly what Prospects and Tribal should do. Ofsted will monitor this work closely and will meet with the inspection service providers frequently to ensure that work meets our specifications. We will also continue to provide guidance for inspections and handbooks for inspectors to follow. These handbooks will be published on the website so providers can see what their inspection will be like. We will also look closely at the feedback we get from providers after every inspection. This feedback gives providers an opportunity to tell us about their experience of inspection. We hope that providers will return their forms so we can get a national picture of the quality of inspections, to help us to improve inspections.

How will new directives reach childminders?

Ofsted will make sure that we communicate information about changes in Ofsted or inspection quickly. Information about early years that is not related to inspections would normally come from government via the local authority.