

A safe and phased return to EIF inspection for early years

29 March 2020

Today, the Secretary of State [announced](#) plans for Ofsted during the summer and autumn terms. Ofsted has also [announced](#) further detail about these plans, including that we will resume full graded EIF inspections in early years as of 3 May 2021. We will continue with our vital registration and regulatory work and continue to carry out urgent inspections where there are significant concerns about a provider. You can find further information on our [COVID-19 rolling update](#).

All inspections will be completed on site. We have completed field work to ensure that the inspection methodology can be completed safely and securely in line with the published inspection framework.

We have built on what we learnt from carrying out interim visits and research calls, and the fieldwork allows us to see what minor amends, if any, we need to make to the inspection handbook - given the COVID context - and to inform our inspector training. The republished handbook will be available after the Easter break.

We know that returning to full graded inspections is the right thing to do for early years providers. We have listened to those who have told us that they want a graded judgement, and we understand that some inspections are now overdue. Providers have told us that resuming routine inspections under the EIF is preferable as soon as it is safe to do so.

We know that providers prefer to receive a graded overall effectiveness (OE) judgement following inspection and that providers use the OE judgements that we provide to give reassurance to parents, stimulate their business and support access to funding from local authorities.

We have included some FAQs below to provide further clarity on our safe and phased return to EIF inspections

Q: What format will the inspections take?

All inspections will be carried out on site. However, it may be pragmatic to do some elements of the inspection through video calls. This will be agreed with the provider at the start of the inspection. It will usually only be used to involve parents/carers and those with leadership responsibility who are unable to attend the setting.

Q: How will we ensure everyone remains safe on inspection?

We will prioritise the safety and welfare of everyone involved in inspections, including children, carers, staff and inspectors - we will follow the most up-to-date guidance from Public Health England. In the notification call before an inspection, providers and inspectors will agree safety measures to ensure the inspection is

COVID-19 secure and how inspectors can work effectively within the protective measures in place.

Inspectors will also take a lateral flow test before arriving at the setting and PVI's and Childminders now have access to these tests too. Where possible, any interactions with practitioners, leaders and parents will be in a socially distanced manner. This could include, but is not limited to, standing 2 metres apart in a large room and conversations/meetings taking place outside or by telephone. What precautions are needed will vary from provider to provider and activity to activity, but inspectors will always ensure that they are acting safely and within the clear guidance given.

Q: What if a provider has active cases of COVID-19 or staff / children self-isolating?

Where a provider has active cases of COVID-19 in their setting, they can request a deferral of their inspection at the point of notification. We will consider all requests in line with our published [deferral policy](#).

Q: What if I am a childminder and have family members shielding in another part of my home?

On 18 March the government [announced](#) that shielding advice to the clinically extremely vulnerable will cease from 1 April 2021 and those on the shielded patient list can begin to follow the national restrictions alongside the rest of the population.

We understand that people on the shielded patients list are still advised to take extra precautions to keep themselves safe and we will prioritise the safety and welfare of everyone involved in inspections. In the notification call before an inspection, providers and inspectors will agree safety measures to ensure the inspection is COVID-19 secure and how inspectors can work effectively within the protective measures in place.

Q: When will I have my EIF inspection?

Last autumn we [confirmed](#) that we will move to a six year inspection window. This means each provider has their own inspection window, which is determined by their last inspection judgement. As we prepare for a return to full EIF inspection we will take a proportionate and risk-based approach to who we inspect first.

We will prioritise providers who: were judged less than good at their last inspection (including those who received an interim visit in the autumn term); providers recently registered that have not been inspected and whose first inspection is overdue, and those that were not been inspected in the last inspection cycle due to the pause in routine inspection.

We continue to work on this; we are unable to answer specific questions about the timing of an inspection for individual providers. We will continue to carry out any urgent inspection where we have significant concerns about a provider.