

Introduction

Strong and effective leadership makes a setting good or outstanding. (Ofsted, 2013)

The quality of leadership in early years settings is a key factor in determining the quality of the educational provision that children receive. Leaders provide stability, direction, guidance and support, especially during times of change. They invest time in motivating people to work as a team and take pride in what they do. They are skilled at estimating the pace of children's learning and recognising that each child is unique. The term does not apply solely to the manager of the setting; everyone is a leader - either to an individual child, a key group, a room or the setting as a whole. For example, childminders are leaders even if they do not employ assistants, as they lead by guiding and inspiring the parents and children who use their service. *Effective Leadership for High Quality Early Years Practice* is therefore relevant and useful for a range of practitioners who wish to know more about the personal and professional qualities involved in leadership and the role of the leader in improving the quality of early years practice.

Good leaders know they cannot please all of the people all of the time, but their success is determined by the way they listen, reflect and involve others in the decisions they make. *Effective Leadership for High Quality Early Years Practice* introduces some of the approaches and theories which underpin leadership in early years

provision, while recognising that theory must be applied to practice, and that the best learning comes from sharing experiences.

Chapter one discusses the effect of leadership on the quality of early years provision and describes the characteristics of effective leadership, which involve personal as well as professional skills.

Chapter two describes some approaches to leadership which are specifically relevant in early years education, and discusses collaborative reflective questioning and key principles of managing change.

Chapter three examines organisational identity and the leader's role in analysing and protecting what is distinctive about the setting. It also describes how reflective practice and effective teamwork provide useful tools in evaluating and improving early years services.

- Professional knowledge and expertise is shared among the team at every opportunity.
- Staff are given time to come together and share what they know about each child, moderate assessments and plan for children's next steps.
- Staff are given time to observe and critique one another's practice.
- High quality, bespoke, in-house training is provided as required.
- Links with high quality settings are established and good practice is shared through regular meetings or shared training sessions.
- Staff visit other settings and opportunities are provided for others to visit their own setting in return.
- Leaders have developed links with other early years professionals and experts to keep up-to-date with new initiatives and teaching strategies.

Leading to improve the quality of teaching

Ofsted make a judgment about the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and the effectiveness of leadership and management in the setting. It could be argued that if the quality of either one is weak then it can only have a negative impact on the other. The leader needs to be very clear about what good teaching looks like in everyday practice and how they *'successfully plan and manage the*

curriculum and learning programmes so that all children get a good start and are well prepared for the next stage in their learning, especially being ready for school' (Ofsted, 2015a).

Much of the inspector's evidence comes from direct observations of practice during the inspection visit. It therefore makes sense for the leader to regularly observe in a similar way, paying particular attention to the characteristics of effective learning that children are displaying, but also aligning those same characteristics to the teaching that is happening, for example, for *creating and thinking critically*:

- prompting children to formulate their own ideas
- helping them to make links by questioning and providing narrative
- stepping back when appropriate so that children choose their own ways to do things

It is not always easy for a practitioner to identify these characteristics for themselves when they are immersed in an activity with the children. The leader's observations should result in constructive feedback that stimulates further discussion with the practitioner and enables a reflective dialogue to take place. This is why the leader's knowledge of best practice and current research is vital, they are ultimately the 'gatekeepers' of the setting's core beliefs and values, but most importantly they are the enablers who help everyone meet statutory requirements with an approach grounded in current evidence based knowledge.