

Daycare Trust response to the Ofsted Strategic Plan 2007-2010

1. Do you agree that Ofsted's strategic plan is a clear document which explains the vision, purposes, values, work and priorities of the new inspectorate in a way that is easy to understand?

Yes. The document is clearly laid out and provides a broad overview of Ofsted's role. The pages covering vision, purposes, values and work are sketchy, however, the further detail provided in the priorities sections helps to clarify the issues. We recommend that the priorities section be numbered so that it is easier to manoeuvre around.

On page 7, under 'our vision', it would be helpful to include parents as recipients of findings from regulatory visits and inspections. At Daycare Trust we know that many parents value Ofsted inspection reports as a useful tool when choosing childcare.

On page 14, under 'Inspection and regulation' it would be useful to add that Ofsted have the power to investigate parents' complaints about the daycare provider.

2. Is there anything that you think should be added to the strategic plan?

3. Do you have any comments on the priorities, in particular the targets set out under each priority?

On page 15 it is stated that Ofsted does not have complete data in all areas against which performance will be measured. Daycare Trust would urge that immediate action is taken to establish baselines and methodology for measuring performance. Without such data it will be difficult for stakeholders, including parents, to be confident that standards are not slipping.

Priority 1: Better outcomes

The first bullet point under 'What we know' should clarify that the childcare places for three and four year olds are free and part-time, otherwise it is misleading and suggests that all three and four year olds could have access to a full-time place.

It would be helpful under 'What we know' and also in the 'possible targets' section to include a point about the number of staff with qualifications. It is known that in the childcare sector, staff qualifications are key to increasing the quality of provision. Daycare Trust research¹ showed that 79 per cent of the childcare workforce were qualified to Level 2 in 2004, and only 38 per cent were qualified to Level 3 or above. The current standard of 50 per cent to be qualified at Level 2 appears to be lowering the bar from the current situation, rather than raising it. DfES have stated that it would not be appropriate to set the qualification requirements much higher now, because they wish to give time to increase the skills and qualifications of the current workforce, and increase qualification requirements at a later date when they know providers will be better able to meet them.² However, we suggest that the approach

¹ Daycare Trust, November 2004, *Building an integrated workforce for a long-term vision of universal early education and care*

² DfES (2006) Response to the EYFS Consultation, October 2006.

of giving providers time to develop does not prohibit setting out now the requirements to be implemented at a later date; this can act as an incentive to improve. Daycare Trust believes that the qualification requirements for childcare workers should be increased. We would like to see a graduate leader in every setting and all staff counting towards ratios to be qualified to Level 3 by 2015, with new staff completing a Level 3 qualification within two years of starting work.

Also under 'possible targets' the last bullet point should include the aim of reducing turnover of childcare staff. Parents tell Daycare Trust that continuity of care for their children is very important. The staff turnover rate (including both staff moving to another childcare provider and people leaving the sector) is 17 per cent for full day care and out of school clubs 21 per cent. Evidence from the Equal Opportunities Commission found that 25 percent of those leaving their job took up new employment outside the childcare or education sector.³ The turnover rate in the private sector is higher (at 25per cent).⁴ In order to increase take up of childcare, we need parents to be happy about the consistent care their children receive. Monitoring and reducing staff turnover (through better qualifications, pay and status of the workforce) would help with this.

Priority 2: Better inspection and regulation

Daycare Trust is concerned that the new regime inspecting school-based childcare provision through schools means that the data available will not be sufficient to monitor take up of childcare places. DfES should ensure that Ofsted has the capacity to monitor the availability of childcare both within and outside of schools. We believe that DfES and Ofsted must build a system for monitoring the number of childcare and early years places into the registration process, otherwise a huge opportunity for monitoring the National Childcare Strategy will be lost. The data also needs to include detail of both the number of settings and the number of childcare places, showing clearly where settings have closed or merely transformed into another type of provision –eg, changing from sessional to full-time provision.

Priority 3: Better communication

To widen access to information for parents it will be necessary to include other forms of dissemination in addition to web information services. Not all parents will have access to the internet, particularly those from disadvantaged communities, but will still need effective information about the quality of childcare.

Priority 4: Better consultation

It is crucial that children, young people and parents are consulted with, informed about and are able to access information from Ofsted. This needs to be specified within this priority. It is necessary to ensure a full diversity of views within any consultation and particular efforts need to be made to include children and parents from black and minority ethnic groups, families with disabled children or those living on a low income.

Priority 6: Better ways of working

As mentioned under priority 1, increasing the qualifications of childcare staff must be a priority if we want to increase the quality of childcare and improve the outcomes for

³ EOC (2004) The Care Workforce, Factsheet 4

⁴ CWDC (October 2006) Occupational Summary Sheet: Nursery Nurses

children. Daycare Trust recommends that challenging standards should be set for qualification levels in the childcare sector to provide the incentive needed for providers to take action.

4. Do you have any suggestions about how you would like to be kept informed about and keep engaged with the work of the new Ofsted?

Daycare Trust is currently on the National Consultative Forum and welcome the opportunity to continue contributing to the work of Ofsted via this route. The NCF has recently broadened its scope in line with the enlarged Ofsted, but must retain some focus on the individual areas of childcare and early years to ensure the Forum is of most use to Ofsted and its key stakeholders.

Keeping in touch via regular e-bulletins might be a useful way for stakeholders to be kept informed.

5. Do you have any further comments you would like to make?

We would like to reiterate the importance of baseline data. Daycare Trust would urge that immediate action is taken to establish baselines and methodology for measuring performance. Without such data it will be difficult for stakeholders, including parents, to be confident that standards are not slipping.

Moreover, we would ask DfES and Ofsted to ensure that sufficient data is available on childcare provision both within and outside of schools. With the move to school-based childcare provision being inspected through the main schools inspection, we are concerned that a key monitoring opportunity may be lost, making things more difficult for parents, Children's Information Services and more general monitoring of the National Childcare Strategy.

Daycare Trust
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