

**The National Education Trust**

**Early Years Blink**

**Guidance for  
Early Years Associates  
Headteachers, Leaders and Managers**

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# Quality in the Foundation

Years



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## Early Years BLINK

An Early Years BLINK offers leaders and managers in children's centres, nursery schools and early years settings a trained, experienced and knowledgeable perspective on the quality of provision and practice within their setting.

The review will include

- The roles and responsibilities within the early years team
- Guidance on the Self Evaluation Form to ensure it provides an accurate picture of the setting or school
- Reflections on the setting from different perspectives - a visitor, parent, inspector or adviser
- Knowledge of vulnerable groups and targeted interventions.
- The statutory requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage and preparations for implementing the new framework.

The National Education Trust (NET) has extensive experience in inspecting and reviewing schools, nurseries and childcare settings. NET has a team of experienced early years practitioners, headteachers and early years Ofsted trained inspectors who can quickly get to the heart of what makes for effective provision.

During a half-day or one-day BLINK, the NET team will ask key questions and follow key trails. These can be specified prior to the review in discussion with the Leadership Team so that the BLINK is tailored, focused and relevant.

A detailed written report will be provided on completion of the BLINK with details of key issues and recommendations for quality improvement. Further advice and feedback can be provided by the NET team to support the Focused Improvement Plan

If you would like a one day 'health-check' in your setting, or if you have any questions about BLINK, including the cost for individual settings, please telephone 0207 702 0707 or email: [office@nationaleducationtrust.net](mailto:office@nationaleducationtrust.net)

*"I learned so much by listening to your questions and comments to staff"*

*"The staff have all commented how they were left feeling inspired and motivated"*

*"Professional and thoughtful approach"*

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## An Introduction to the Early Years BLINK

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The Early Years BLINK provides an independent external evaluation of setting/centre effectiveness and what it should do to improve, based upon a range of evidence including that from partner organisations, parents and children who use the centre and its services and first-hand observation.

The National Education Trust promotes the importance of a values based ethos and high quality early education which must underpin the work with young children and their families. Early identification and targeted early intervention as an effective way of closing the gap for disadvantaged groups and all reviews will include a focus on meeting the needs of target groups.

The National Education Trust has carried out its own research into the common qualities of outstanding early years provision. The research has been summarised in the publication 'Celebrating Children's Centres' and excerpts are available on the NET website. During the Early Years BLINK the team will promote and encourage these qualities across the setting.

The Early Years BLINK promotes improvement by:

- **setting expectations:** we will use the criteria and descriptors set out in the Ofsted inspection framework and guidance<sup>1</sup> to inform the standards of performance and effectiveness expected of centres.
- **increasing the capacity for improvement** by sensitively identifying areas where further development is needed.
- **recommending priorities for future action** to improve the children's centre/school/setting and offering practical support to develop a focused improvement plan with the whole team.

The Early Years BLINK can contribute to the annual monitoring of centres' performance by local authorities. Reviews can be commissioned by local authorities, voluntary agencies and independent bodies to provide an independent external view of each of its centres/settings with recommendations and a clear plan to improve the quality across the sector.

The National Education Trust is well placed to support the work of voluntary agencies, independent bodies and Local Authorities.

The team of Early Years Associates are able to draw on experience from across the early years sector. The BLINK will be carried out by Ofsted trained staff who are experienced in using the revised grade descriptors and frameworks for early years inspection.

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<sup>1</sup> The judgements and grade descriptors are set out in the *Inspection of children's centres: evaluation schedule and grade descriptors* available at [www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/100005](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/100005).

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## The BLINK Framework

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Using our knowledge of the Early Years Foundation Stage, the core purpose of Children's Centres and our experience, skills and understanding as inspectors and practitioners across the early years sector, we have updated the Blink framework. During the current period of change, we remain focused on

- Pedagogy - how young children learn
- High quality provision and practice across the early childhood education and care sector.
- Effective Leadership and Management

In September 2008, the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework was introduced to ensure that every child under five gets the best start in life by having 'a safe, secure and happy childhood'. Dame Claire Tickell and a team of Early Years Advisers have now carried out a review of the EYFS framework (2011) and the coalition government has set out proposals for a new framework to be implemented from September 2012.

We recognise the importance of working with leaders and managers to promote quality improvement – we will always discuss whether the Senior Management Team has specific areas they want us to focus on during the review. The Blink framework may be used to help determine these areas and provoke avenues or trails for further exploration. Suggestions for improvement and recommendations will be offered and we will work with you to develop an action plan that is both manageable and achievable.

The National Education Trust is firmly committed to promoting and sharing best practice in order to reduce the achievement gap. A Blink provides an opportunity for us to offer models of good practice to leaders and to share our expertise. We are able to signpost you to outstanding early years practice across the UK and can provide links so you can make new contacts, arrange exchange visits and work together. We can also link you to one of our Early Years NETWORKS so that you can access seminars, training events and conferences in your own locality.

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## BLINK : Sample Programme

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### Before the visit:

To ensure that you gain maximum impact from our visit it would be helpful for the NET Associate to have a copy of your self evaluation form prior to the visit.

A phone call discussion so that the day's timetable can be negotiated and specific areas of focus, or issues can be discussed with headteacher or leader.

### Sample timetable for the day:

- 8.15 Meeting with leadership and management team.
- 9.00 Learning Walk 1: with owner/manager. See where children begin their day. Tour the Nursery.
- 9.30 Learning Walk 2:(unaccompanied) activity observations, including both child and adult initiated activities and transition times. Informal conversations with children and staff.
- 11.30 Visit children at lunch time.
- 12.00 Meetings with children and parents – if time and it is appropriate.
- 12.30 Meeting with key staff. Probably about 20 minutes for each session.
- 1.15 Lunch and preliminary write up.
- 2.00 Learning Walk 3: Further observations of practice at the nursery.
- 3.00 Conclude findings.
- 3.30 Share findings, celebrate current good practice and provide future challenges.

### Following the visit:

A written report will be sent within two weeks for the attention of the headteacher or leader. This will include findings from observations and discussions and suggestions for further development.

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## Leadership and Management

### BLINK Elements of Success

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The setting is well led by the leadership team. All members of the senior leadership team have well defined roles and responsibilities, and contribute different skills and abilities – working together as a leadership team. Members of the leadership team strongly promote the vision and values of the setting. Leaders ensure, through robust recruitment systems, induction and training programmes, that all staff share a common purpose. They ensure that continuous improvement is maintained, and can demonstrate that all children make good or rapid progress in all areas of learning. They continually reflect on children’s learning and development across the setting, regularly monitoring and reviewing individual children’s progress. The leadership team has a good working knowledge of the Early Years Foundation Stage and Families in the Foundation Years. They instil a sense of security and well being amongst children and parents. They are able to demonstrate in depth knowledge of the community, the target groups and local needs.

Governance arrangements promote good links and continuous consultation between leaders, staff, parents/carers and other professionals. The views of parents, children and others are used to shape the provision and practice in the setting. Strengths and weaknesses are identified and appropriate actions are devised and recorded that lead to improvement. Leaders encourage all staff to be reflective practitioners and to work together to promote continuous quality improvement.

All staff are able to demonstrate how they identify and meet universal needs within the local community and how they use early intervention to close the gap for individuals and target groups. All staff regularly access courses and professional development to ensure they are well trained and qualified in early education, speech and language and maintain an up to date knowledge of the EYFS framework.

All staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities and those of others within the team. They work together to provide a nurturing inclusive environment where children and their parents can feel safe and secure. All staff focus on helping children to make progress in their learning and development, but there is a good understanding of why children’s welfare must underpin all aspects of the provision. Warm and effective relationships are promoted between parents and the child’s key person. All children

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in the setting are encouraged to learn through play, with a strong emphasis on building positive relationships, encouraging independence and resilience.

Graduates and Early Years professionals are used effectively within the setting to promote quality improvement and reflective practice.

## Learning and Development

### BLINK Elements of Success

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There is evidence that staff are familiar with the EYFS Framework and in particular the four themes (Unique Child, Positive Partnerships, Positive Environments and Learning and Development) are applied to their work with children and families.

The prime areas of learning and development are evident throughout the centre (inside and out) and staff are able to explain what experience, opportunities and interventions have been taken to promote high quality learning and development for all children:

- Communication and language
- Personal, social and emotional development
- Physical development
  - Literacy
  - Mathematics
  - Understanding the World
  - Expressive Arts and Design

All staff are trained in early education and understand the importance of children's active exploration and play. There is a good balance of adult and child initiated activities with flexibility to follow children's interests and spontaneous events. Staff understand how to use interaction and communication to support and extend children's learning. They provide a range of different experiences and opportunities across all seven areas of learning and development and make effective use of a variety of easily accessible, open ended resources.

Children are given opportunities to make connections, to improve their understanding, and to develop new skills or ways of doing things. The rhythms and routines of the setting are sufficiently flexible to allow children to engage in their own research and active exploration. Adults support children in their investigations encouraging sustained shared thinking, negotiation and communication. The learning and development of each child is well documented and staff are able to demonstrate how the learning journey is used to assess and inform next steps in learning.

All staff are deployed well across the setting. They support children's independent learning as well as working effectively with small groups. Staff have a good understanding of when it

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is appropriate and timely to intervene, and use a range of comments and questions to develop children's ability to think critically. Children are encouraged to follow their own interests, ask questions and collaborate in order to extend their learning. The centre/setting makes effective use of assessment tools to identify needs and monitor progress in learning and development. There are good links with Primary Schools and opportunities to share and use information provided locally on the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile.

## Teaching

### BLINK Elements of Success

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The environment supports and extends every child's learning and development. How resources and space are used provides a wide and rich range of experiences. Children confidently explore and learn in secure and safe, yet challenging, **indoor and outdoor spaces**. Planned experiences and activities are varied, challenging and achievable. Staff pay careful attention to how children present their work, and children can 'see' themselves in the work displayed on the walls.

All staff have good knowledge and understanding of how to support children's learning effectively. They have unconditional positive regard for all children and their families and this is evident throughout the centre/setting. Each interaction demonstrates a caring professional model of how to acknowledge respectfully the feelings of children and their families. A key person has special responsibility for working with a small number of children. They have strong relationships with the children and their families. There is a climate of trust and parents feel confident that their children are safe, secure and cared for. This is helping children to be resilient and independent.

Children show a positive attitude to learning. Starting points are known for each child, and progress is carefully monitored in relation to the starting points. Effective use of observations ensures that staff understand the unique profile and abilities of each child. Planning takes into account the current interests and needs of each child. Learning difficulties are identified early and appropriate additional support is made available. Schedules and routines flow, with clear aims and objectives linked to children's progress. Activities are matched to learning and development. Most children, including children who have English as an additional language and/or learning difficulties or disabilities, make good progress towards early learning goals.

All staff understand the interests, strengths and needs of children in their key group. They actively collect and record evidence of progress, and are able to explain how this information is used to determine next steps in learning. They communicate sensitively with parents about each child's progress. Designated members of staff support children with additional needs and are able to access training, advice and support to ensure that interventions are research based, effective and targeted. All staff are familiar with the importance of early attachment on early brain development and actively work with children and families to promote and model positive interaction, attachments and relationships.

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Alongside good health, high quality early education is one of the most important determinants of every child's life chances. While all children stand to benefit from early education research has shown that children who have attended a high quality pre school do better in reading and maths aged six than those who have not, and that this positive impact is still visible at eleven.

'Supporting Families in the Foundation Years' DFE 2011

## BLINK Elements of Success

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Staff with key person responsibilities are well informed, highly committed and sensitive to each child's needs. They effectively implement strategies that ensure individual needs are met and that children develop at their own rate. Staff have a good knowledge of, and show respect for, each child's background, beliefs, culture, preferences and needs. There is no discrimination. There are trusting relationships between key persons, children and families.

Effective strategies are in place to monitor children's physical, cognitive, linguistic, spiritual, social, and emotional development. The ethos of the setting/school allows for children to develop their self confidence and positive self image. Children are positively encouraged to explore new and exciting experiences. The children are happy and show keen curiosity in their learning environment. Children's feelings and views are valued when planning their curriculum. The setting involves children in establishing rules for their environment. Staff encourage positive behaviour illustrating to children the importance of respecting others around them. Staff offer support to children to make friends and to be a good friend.

The setting has robust procedures in place to safeguard children and does not compromise children's safety at any time. Children are learning right from wrong and how to protect themselves from harm. A safe and supportive environment provides opportunities for children to develop their physical and psychological well being. Staff recognise that children's health is an integral part of their emotional, mental social, environmental and spiritual well being. They provide good opportunities for children to relax and sleep according to their individual needs. Good physical activities are organised throughout the day providing opportunities for daily fresh air. Nourishing balanced meals are provided and staff explain why a healthy lifestyle is important.

Building their essential social and emotional capabilities means children are less likely to adopt antisocial or violent behaviour throughout life. It means fewer disruptive toddlers, fewer unmanageable school children, fewer young people engaging in crime and antisocial behaviour. Early intervention can forestall the physical and mental health problems that commonly perpetuate a cycle of dysfunction.

Allen MP G 2011

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## Positive Partnerships

### BLINK Elements of Success

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The school/setting works effectively in partnership with parents and families. Support for children includes listening to families and taking part in a sensitive two way exchange of information. Parents are well informed of their children's progress. The curriculum and organisation are presented clearly and openly to parents and they are actively encouraged to support their children's learning at the setting and at home.

Partnerships are fostered with other settings, other professionals, individuals and groups in the community. These partnerships actively support children's development and progress towards the outcomes of Every Child Matters. Strategies are implemented to ensure that there is continuity for the child's learning, development and welfare.

It is an inclusive, warm and welcoming environment. The curriculum promotes understanding of the local community. Members from the local community play an active part in the life of the school. The school has effective links with local volunteer organisations and has useful contacts with networks and organisations beyond the locality. Links are used to enable children to develop skills and understanding that will contribute to their economic well-being. The setting reflects the diversity of children and families attending. As part of daily routines children naturally learn about diversity in society. Staff recognise how diversity enriches children's learning. Children are taught the importance of accepting and understanding differences in others.

The Senior Leadership Team take active steps to engage partners in the vision and values of the centre/setting. All adults strive to become strong advocats for children, families and the local community.

Every interaction between families and professionals provides an opportunity to identify and begin to meet additional needs. Midwives, health visitors, general practitioners and dentists, children's centres, outreach and family support practitioners, speech and language therapists, teachers and other professionals all have a part to play.

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## Positive Environments

### BLINK Elements of Success

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A safe, secure and welcoming environment is evident throughout the centre/setting. Children move through the setting with confidence and independence. There is evidence that every child is celebrated, valued and accepted. Children's learning is well documented through photographs, children's quotes and children's work and displayed throughout the centre/setting.

Learning opportunities are enriched by stimulating environments and communication friendly spaces. Resources are well organised and easily accessible. All seven areas of learning are reflected in the environment including opportunities for early reading, writing and mathematics. Children are able to move freely and have opportunities to learn inside and outside. The value of learning through play and exploration is well understood.

The layout, organisation and colour schemes take into account the needs of children in the centre/setting. All adults are aware of the adaptations that may be necessary to support children with additional needs in order to create an inclusive learning environment.

Parents are welcomed into the centre/setting and take an active role in shaping and supporting services as volunteers and on the committee/advisory board. Parent notice boards are visible and kept up to date and encourage families to join in special events and activities. Where possible, there is a designated space to discuss confidential issues with families or to offer support.

All staff are aware of the importance of the home learning environment in children's learning and development and take active steps to support parents to improve opportunities at home. There are opportunities to share resources (a toy library/book library) and to share experiences at home and in nursery (home/school diary/learning journey)

Parental involvement in a child's education from an early age has a significant effect on educational achievement, and continues to do so into adolescence and adulthood. The home learning environment is a measure of the extent to which parents take part in learning activities with their children. These include:

- Reading to children
- Playing with letters and numbers
- Teaching nursery rhymes and songs
- Painting and drawing
- Taking children to the library
- Taking children on visits

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The National Education Trust  
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Dear Colleague

Thank you for your interest in Early Years Blinks and welcome to the work of the National Education Trust.

As an organisation, we have a reputation for delivering high quality services to schools, colleges and early years settings. These include running seminars, workshops and training courses as well as more hands on, personal support such as that offered by Blinks.

Blinks provide headteachers and leaders of early years settings with an individualised perspective on their school or setting. Blinks are tailored to meet specific targets or areas of focus, agreed with the leader in the initial pre-Blink discussions.

The Blink is carried out at the request of the setting and usually with the full knowledge of the staff. The objective is to highlight the setting's strengths and agree possible areas for development. We like to leave you with a smile and some achievable challenges, giving you and your staff confirmation of what you do well and pointers for ways forward.

Oral feedback and the written report are for your use, and remain as confidential as you decide. We do not share either with third parties.

Please contact me at [office@nationaleducationtrust.net](mailto:office@nationaleducationtrust.net) if you require further details.

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Yours sincerely

Louise Jackson

Early years NETWORKS

National Project Leader

**The National Education Trust**

## Foundation Years **BLINK** Observation Record

School/Setting/Centre:

Date:

Focus:

Context:

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Feedback:	Summary:
Early Years Associate:	

<b>Foundation Years BLINK Review Report (1)</b>		
School/Setting/Centre:		
Overview:		
Date:	Focus:	
Purpose of the BLINK Review:		
Evidence base for the BLINK Review:		

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Context and background for BLINK Review:

Verbal Feedback:

## Quality in FoundationYears BLINK Review Report (2)



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## Focused Improvement Plan

BLINK Review Report (3)



Summary of Strengths:

Areas for Development:

Action Points:

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Early Years Associate:

## BLINK Code of Conduct

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Early Years Reviewers should:

- evaluate objectively, be impartial and inspect without fear or favour
- evaluate provision in line with frameworks, national standards or requirements
- base all evaluations on clear and robust evidence
- have no connection with the provider which could undermine their objectivity
- report honestly and clearly, ensuring that judgements are fair and reliable
- carry out their work with integrity, treating all those they meet with courtesy, respect and sensitivity
- endeavour to minimise the stress on those involved in the inspection
- act in the best interests and well-being of service users
- maintain purposeful and productive dialogue with those being inspected, and communicate judgements clearly and frankly
- respect the confidentiality of information, particularly about individuals and their work
- respond appropriately to reasonable requests
- take prompt and appropriate action on any safeguarding or health and safety issues.