# School-age Childcare – Quality Framework

A self-evaluation and quality development toolkit for school-age childcare providers.

2026 Edition - Produced by Cambridgeshire County Council Early Years, Childcare, and School Readiness Service (CambsEYC)

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## Introduction

Cambridgeshire Early Years, Childcare, and School Readiness Service (CambsEYC) has devised the School-age Childcare Quality Framework to support raising our expectations around quality provision in Cambridgeshire.

All children, including those living in Cambridgeshire, deserve the best start in life. With a high proportion of high-quality provision and a diverse and largely prosperous population, Cambridgeshire's early years and childcare sector are leading contributors to improving and supporting children's life outcomes. CambsEYC are committed to Cambridgeshire's 'Best Start in Life' strategy and recognise this as a key part of working in a more integrated way across organisations and using other services to support the best outcomes for children.

## How to use the Quality Framework

This document will support you in an ongoing evidence-based self-evaluation. It will give you guidance on how to ensure a high-quality environment for care and education is provided for all children and their families whilst improving professional practice for all staff.

The Quality Framework reflects the early years foundation stage (EYFS) statutory framework for group and school-based providers* and Early years inspection toolkit** evaluation areas, coupled with CambsEYC's aspirations for high quality childcare provision. It is recommended that you also reflect on higher standards within the inspection toolkit, to ensure you are aspirational for your setting and the children you care for.

*Size: 711KB File format: pdf
**Size: 551KB File format: pdf

If you require support or would like further guidance, contact your early years and childcare advisor.
For further information on Exemplary standards, please refer to the Early years inspection toolkit.

## Guidance for using the quality framework

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| Step 1 | • Decide whether you wish to look at your setting as a whole or which standards to focus on first.<br>• Read each statement in 'Expected standard.' Discuss with your team where you judge your setting to be and give it a Red, Amber, Green (RAG) rating to show. R = Red. Not yet in place. A = Amber. Partly in place or needs attention. G = Green. Standard met.<br>• Discuss what evidence you have to support your judgements. Consider the views of the children and families.<br>• Briefly record key points or sources of evidence in bullet points in the 'notes' box. |
| Step 2 | • Review the initial draft with your leadership and management team to consider the quantity and quality of the evidence. Is there enough to suggest that the 'expected standard' has been met? |
| Step 3 | • Create an action plan by prioritising standards that need development. Be realistic about how many your team can address at any one time.<br>• Identify tasks, personnel, resources, and timescales needed. |
| Step 4 | • Ensure the action plan is shared with your team and leadership support.<br>• Begin to implement the action plan.<br>• Review the action plan each term to assess the progress that has been made. |
| Step 5 | • Return to the Quality Framework and discuss the standards that have been addressed.<br>• Record any new evidence in a new colour.<br>• Update the RAG ratings.<br>• Discuss the new evidence and judgements with your team.<br>• Identify new actions for the action plan. |

## Example sources of evidence

Where would you look for evidence to demonstrate the completion of the Quality Framework?

This list is an example and there is no requirement to have all these sources of evidence, or physical/written copies of the ones you do have. Take time to reflect on the tools and strategies you have in place as a setting.

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| • Room/tracking observations.<br>• Parent questionnaires and incidental feedback.<br>• Notes regarding visit from Local Authority Advisers.<br>• Attendance at external and internal meetings and training.<br>• Notes from self-study, peer support or coaching and mentoring opportunities.<br>• Setting displays.<br>• Child voice.<br>• Data and cohort analysis.<br>• Whole setting self-evaluation – based on this document.<br>• Holiday activities and food (HAF) Framework of Standards. | • Policies and procedures<br>• Liaison with outside agencies – schools and social care.<br>• Feedback from team members – team meetings.<br>• SEND documentation, for example, The Graduated Approach cycle, Cambridgeshire Developmental Journal.<br>• Actions from designated roles – Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo), Equality Named Coordinator (ENCo), Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL).<br>• Internal setting improvement documents.<br>• Recommendation(s) from previous Ofsted inspection reports.<br>• Supervisions processes and outcomes.<br>• Actions and progression from team meeting. |

## Expected standard: Inclusion

Consider if you are working higher than expected and how you know this – refer to the Early years inspection toolkit for Strong and Exemplary.

| Expected standard: Inclusion | RAG | | | Reflection prompts | Notes |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Autumn | Spring | Summer | | |
| Leaders identify children's needs quickly and accurately, including any emerging or changing needs. This includes the needs of disadvantaged children, those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), those who are known, or previously known, to children's social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or well-being.<br><br>Leaders have high expectations for these children. Typically, the support they provide reduces barriers to the children's learning and/or well-being.<br><br>Leaders ask for and implement advice from specialists and external partners, when needed.<br><br>Leaders take a graduated approach, which means that children's SEND needs are | | | | • How do you ensure that emerging or changing needs are identified promptly and accurately? How do play cues and play returns inform your understanding of changing needs?<br>• Are there any barriers preventing you from responding to children's emerging or changing needs? Do any adult-led routines, space limitations, or risk-averse practices unintentionally restrict children's ability to express themselves through play, making needs harder to identify?<br>• What systems help you track and respond to the needs of disadvantaged children and those with SEND? How do play observations contribute to your assessments? Do you use play narratives or play cycle mapping to support tracking?<br>• How do you communicate and maintain high expectations for all children? How do you show children that their play is valued, respected, and worthy of time and space, | |

| Expected standard: Inclusion | RAG | | | Reflection prompts | Notes |
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| | Autumn | Spring | Summer | | |
| generally met well. Practitioners receive suitable training and support to implement this approach.<br><br>Leaders have a secure understanding of these children's needs and progress. Which has a positive impact on reducing barriers to learning and/or well-being that these children face.<br><br>When required, the identified SENCo has the knowledge, understanding and skills to make a positive difference for children with SEND.<br><br>Leaders ensure that, when appropriate, local partnership strategies have a positive impact on the children in the setting. | | | | regardless of background or ability?<br>• What evidence shows that support strategies are reducing barriers effectively? Do children show increased confidence, autonomy, or deeper engagement in their play as barriers reduce? What play behaviours signal progress?<br>• How do you review and adapt support to ensure continued impact? Do you reflect on whether adult involvement is supporting, over-scaffolding, or disrupting play? How do children's play choices influence your adaptations?<br>• How do you celebrate progress and achievement for disadvantaged children and those with SEND? Do you recognise and celebrate progress shown through play, such as risk-taking, resilience, negotiation, or sustained involvement?<br>• How do you decide when to seek advice from specialists or external partners and how effectively is it implemented? Do you consult specialists when play behaviours indicate underlying | |

| Expected standard: Inclusion | RAG | | | Reflection prompts | Notes |
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| | Autumn | Spring | Summer | | |
| | | | | needs or when the play cycle is regularly interrupted?<br>• What processes ensure advice leads to measurable improvements for children?<br>Are play-based strategies included in action plans, and do you monitor whether children experience more successful, uninterrupted play cycles as a result?<br>• What training have practitioners had to enable them to feel confident in implementing this and how do you evaluate the impact on children's progress?<br>Have staff received training on playwork principles, play cues, and risk-benefit assessment? How does this training influence children's play quality and participation?<br>• How do you gather and analyse evidence about children's needs and progress?<br>Do you use play observations, play diaries, or environment audits, for example, loose parts engagement to inform your analysis?<br>• How do you evaluate the SENCo's and ENCO's impact on children's progress and well-being?<br>Do they support staff in interpreting play behaviours, planning inclusive play environments, or reducing | |

| Expected standard: Inclusion | RAG | | | Reflection prompts | Notes |
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| | Autumn | Spring | Summer | | |
| | | | | barriers within play-based provision?<br>• What professional development opportunities are available for the SENCo and ENCo?<br>Do they access training related to playwork, inclusive play environments, or play-based assessment?<br>• How do the SENCo and ENCo support practitioners in meeting children's needs?<br>Do they model how to read play cues, support play cycles, or adapt the play environment for accessibility?<br>• Do the SENCo and ENCo have sufficient time and resources to fulfil their role effectively?<br>Do they have capacity to observe children in play to gain holistic, authentic insights into their needs?<br>• How do you engage with local partnership strategies to benefit children?<br>Do partnerships help enrich play provision, for example, through community play projects, inclusion networks, or shared outdoor spaces?<br>• What evidence shows that these partnerships are having a positive impact?<br>Do children show increased | |

| Expected standard: Inclusion | RAG | | | Reflection prompts | Notes |
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| | Autumn | Spring | Summer | | |
| | | | | engagement, confidence, or creativity in their play following partnership contributions?<br>• Are there any missed opportunities to strengthen local partnerships? Could you collaborate more with local play organisations such as other HAF or wraparound providers, community groups, or SEND support teams to widen play opportunities?<br>• How do you ensure partnership work aligns with your setting's priorities and children's needs? | |

## Expected standard: Playwork Principles

Consider if you are working higher than expected and how you know this – refer to the Early years inspection toolkit for Strong and Exemplary.

| Expected standard: Playwork Principles | RAG | | | Reflection prompts | Notes |
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| | Autumn | Spring | Summer | | |
| Leaders have a well-developed understanding of the quality of the play environment and ensure it fully supports children's freely chosen, self-directed play. They use reflective practice to identify strengths and areas for development, taking clear and purposeful action to enhance children's play experiences in line with the Playwork Principles.<br><br>Playworkers design a flexible, responsive play environment that enables children to explore, experiment and develop knowledge, skills and confidence through their own play processes.<br><br>The emphasis is on providing rich possibilities rather than predetermined outcomes, consistent with both playwork theory and Ofsted's focus on well-planned educational experiences. | | | | • How do you currently understand the strengths and weaknesses of your play environment?<br>• What do you notice in children's play that helps you understand whether the space supports self-directed play?<br>• In what ways do you contribute to a culture of reflection and continual improvement?<br>• What recent changes have you made because of reflection, and how do you know they made a positive difference to play?<br>• How do you ensure your decisions align with the Playwork Principles?<br>• How flexible is the space for children to shape, rearrange and reinterpret?<br>• How well do the resources support exploration, experimentation and imaginative play?<br>• Do you ever unintentionally steer children toward a particular outcome?<br>• How do you decide when to change or enrich the environment and when to leave it alone? | |

| Expected standard: Playwork Principles | RAG | | | Reflection prompts | Notes |
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| | Autumn | Spring | Summer | | |
| The setting ensures every child regardless of need, background, disadvantage, SEND can participate fully in play.<br><br>Barriers to participation are proactively identified and removed. Children attending part time or across multiple settings still receive equal access to rich, ambitious play opportunities.<br><br>Playworkers observe children sensitively to understand their interests, play cues and developmental needs. These observations guide adjustments to the environment, resources and adult positioning. Adults avoid interrupting children's play unnecessarily but intervene with skill when support or safeguarding requires it.<br><br>Practitioners enrich the environment with conversations and playful interactions that support children to communicate, imagine and share ideas. | | | | • What cues tell you the environment is genuinely responsive to children's ideas?<br>• How do you ensure that every child can participate fully in play on their own terms?<br>• Which children might be participating less and why?<br>• How do you adapt the environment to meet a wide range of play needs?<br>• Do you fully understand the unique play needs of children with SEND or those facing disadvantage?<br>• What barriers, environmental, social, emotional, sensory, might be limiting children's play within your provision?<br>• How do you know when a child is being excluded unintentionally?<br>• How do you ensure children attending part-time or multiple provisions still experience rich play possibilities?<br>• What adjustments have you made recently to improve access and how do you know they worked?<br>• How do you observe children's play without interrupting it?<br>• How do practitioners decide when an intervention is necessary for safety, inclusion or emotional support? | |

| Expected standard: Playwork Principles | RAG | | | Reflection prompts | Notes |
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| | Autumn | Spring | Summer | | |
| Children choose how and when to engage with materials and imaginative prompts, allowing language to emerge authentically through play.<br><br>Children have continual access to open ended materials, indoor and outdoor spaces and physical challenges that support coordination, balance, strength and confidence. Practitioners understand the playwork perspective of risk as developmental, enabling children to test limits safely.<br><br>The play environment reflects diverse identities, cultures and perspectives. Children encounter similarities and differences through materials and peer interactions. Playworkers encourage respect, curiosity and self-expression, supporting children to develop a strong sense of identity and belonging.<br><br>Playworkers create an environment where children's rights including the right to | | | | • How do you create opportunities for natural, playful communication without directing it?<br>• How do you respond to children's ideas, stories and imaginative play?<br>• Do children have access to varied prompts, props, books, loose parts, materials, that inspire play cues, communication and creativity?<br>• How do you ensure children can choose how and when to engage in conversation?<br>• Does your environment encourage movement, challenge and physical exploration?<br>• How comfortable are practitioners with children taking physical risks in their play for developmental benefit?<br>• How do you balance safety with preserving the integrity of the play process?<br>• What physical opportunities have children been drawn to recently and what does that tell you?<br>• How well does the environment represent the identities, cultures and experiences of the children?<br>• How do you ensure all children see themselves reflected meaningfully in the space? | |

| Expected standard: Playwork Principles | RAG | | | Reflection prompts | Notes |
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| | Autumn | Spring | Summer | | |
| play are fully protected. Risk management is robust and consistently applied, with staff confidently identifying risks, responding appropriately, and ensuring children feel safe while still able to engage in rich, self-directed, and adventurous play. | | | | • How do you help children explore similarities and differences through play without adult led instruction?<br>• What role modelling do you provide that supports respect, curiosity and belonging?<br>• How do you ensure children's right to play is upheld daily and understood by all practitioners?<br>• How confident are practitioners in identifying and responding to risks without unnecessarily restricting play?<br>• How do practitioners maintain safety while still enabling adventurous, challenging play?<br>• How do practitioners ensure every decision made is rooted in children's rights, needs and wellbeing? | |

## Expected standard: Behaviour, attitudes and establishing routine

Consider if you are working higher than expected and how you know this – refer to the Early years inspection toolkit for Strong and Exemplary.

| Expected standard: Behaviour, attitudes and establishing routine | RAG | | | Reflection prompts | Notes |
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| | Autumn | Spring | Summer | | |
| Leaders and staff members create a warm, supportive atmosphere where children understand what respectful, cooperative behaviour looks like in a play setting. Expectations are shared clearly with children and families and upheld fairly and consistently. When unkind words, exclusion or discriminatory behaviour occur, playworkers address them promptly and sensitively to restore safety and trust in the group.<br><br>Leaders communicate with families about the importance of regular attendance and timely arrival so children can settle comfortably into the routine of the session and fully enjoy the play opportunities available.<br><br>Staff members role model positive, respectful | | | | • How do you communicate your shared expectations for respectful, kind and cooperative behaviour to children and families in a way that fits a play-based setting?<br>• How consistently do you uphold these expectations across different play situations, spaces and times of day?<br>• How do you ensure expectations do not unnecessarily restrict children's autonomy, choice or self-directed play?<br>• How do you balance expectations for behaviour with the Playwork Principle that children should be free to determine and direct their own play?<br>• In what ways do adults observe first — before intervening — so that responses are sensitive, minimal and respectful of the play process?<br>• When unkind, exclusionary or discriminatory behaviours occur, how effectively and sensitively do you respond in the moment? | |

| Expected standard: Behaviour, attitudes and establishing routine | RAG | | | Reflection prompts | Notes |
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| | Autumn | Spring | Summer | | |
| interactions in everything they do. Through their own behaviour, they help children understand how to treat others with kindness, empathy and care during play and daily routines.<br><br>Playworkers support children to develop focus, flexible thinking and problem-solving skills naturally through play experiences. They help children tune into what matters in the moment, manage distractions, make plans, adapt when things change, and persevere with challenges in ways that feel playful, meaningful and age appropriate.<br><br>Playworkers understand each child's unique circumstances and respond thoughtfully to their individual needs, including those who are disadvantaged, have SEND, or experience additional challenges.<br><br>Adaptations and reasonable adjustments ensure all children can engage fully in | | | | • Do your interventions restore safety and trust without disrupting the integrity of children's play more than necessary?<br>• How do you distinguish between behaviour that requires adult intervention and behaviour that is part of children's natural negotiation, risk-taking or problem-solving in play?<br>• How do you ensure your presence, tone and positioning support the play cycle rather than block or interrupt it unnecessarily?<br>• How do you support children to return to their play cues after conflict or disruption?<br>• What approaches do you use to support families who may find attendance or punctuality difficult?<br>• How do we notice patterns in attendance and follow up gently but supportively when concerns arise?<br>• In what ways do you consciously role model respectful, caring- and inclusive behaviour in daily interactions with children?<br>• How do your interactions help children understand how to treat one another during play?<br>• How do you demonstrate and uphold inclusive values such as fairness, respect, empathy and belonging? | |

| Expected standard: Behaviour, attitudes and establishing routine | RAG | | | Reflection prompts | Notes |
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| | Autumn | Spring | Summer | | |
| play while still maintaining developmentally appropriate expectations for respectful behaviour. Playworkers work closely with families and other agencies when needed to support children's wellbeing and inclusion.<br><br>Children take part in games and activities together, learning to negotiate, share, take turns and support one another. They generally play well with others and enjoy being part of a community where collaboration is encouraged.<br><br>Playworkers notice and praise positive behaviour such as kindness, creativity, effort, problem solving and inclusion helping children recognise and build on their strengths.<br><br>Children form warm, trusting relationships with playworkers. These secure relationships help children feel confident, valued and able to share their worries, ideas or feelings in ways that are appropriate for their age and stage. | | | | • How do you help children develop focus, flexible thinking, turn-taking and problem-solving through natural play situations?<br>• How do you use everyday routines and play moments to scaffold children's resilience, emotional regulation and ability to adapt when things change?<br>• What strategies do you use to help children persevere when play becomes challenging?<br>• How do staff support children to engage with challenge and uncertainty in play without removing beneficial risk?<br>• How do members of staff identify and respond to the individual play needs of children, including those with SEND or facing disadvantage?<br>• When and how do you make reasonable adjustments so every child can participate fully in play without lowering expectations of respectful behaviour?<br>• How do staff ensure adjustments enhance autonomy and access to play rather than create dependency or reduce children's ownership of their play?<br>• How do you recognise when the environment, rather than the child, needs adjusting to enable fuller participation? | |

| Expected standard: Behaviour, attitudes and establishing routine | RAG | | | Reflection prompts | Notes |
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| | Autumn | Spring | Summer | | |
| | | | | • How do you collaborate with families and external agencies to support children's wellbeing, inclusion and access to play?<br>• How do you ensure equity, not just equality, when responding to different children's needs?<br>• How do you encourage collaboration, teamwork and shared play experiences among children?<br>• How do you support children to negotiate, compromise and resolve conflicts during play without taking over?<br>• When designing play opportunities, loose parts, physical areas, group games, how do you ensure they promote cooperation and shared decision making?<br>• How do you observe and understand children's social development through their play behaviours and interactions?<br>• How do members of staff use praise to acknowledge positive, pro-social behaviour in a genuine and meaningful way?<br>• Are members of staff's praise specific, timely and linked to what the child has done or tried?<br>• How do members of staff balance praise with other playwork appropriate strategies, such as encouragement, modelling and offering choices? | |

| Expected standard: Behaviour, attitudes and establishing routine | RAG | | | Reflection prompts | Notes |
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| | Autumn | Spring | Summer | | |
| | | | | • How do children respond to praise, and does it build motivation, confidence and connection?<br>• How do members of staff build warm, trusting and respectful relationships with children, so they feel safe, valued and able to express themselves?<br>• What do you do to create an emotionally safe environment where children feel confident to share worries or concerns?<br>• How do members of staff respond to children's worries in an age appropriate, sensitive and reassuring way?<br>• How do strong, secure relationships between members of staff and children support emotional wellbeing, resilience and readiness to engage in play. | |

## Expected standard: Children's welfare and wellbeing

Consider if you are working higher than expected and how you know this – refer to the Early years inspection toolkit for Strong and Exemplary.

| Expected standard: Children's welfare and wellbeing | RAG | | | Reflection prompts | Notes |
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| | Autumn | Spring | Summer | | |
| Leaders establish policies and practices that support children's welfare, mental health and well-being. These are generally understood by staff and parents and implemented well across the setting.<br><br>Leaders create a safe, welcoming space where children typically enjoy play, learning and social activities and have daily access to outdoor learning.<br><br>Hygiene practices ensure that the personal needs of babies and children of all ages are met appropriately.<br><br>Practitioners teach children to become increasingly independent in managing their personal needs. Practitioners teach children about making healthy choices about food, rest, exercise and screen time. | | | | • How do you ensure policies and practices are consistently understood and applied by all staff and parents?<br>• What evidence shows that these policies positively impact children's welfare and well-being?<br>• How do you review and update policies to reflect current best playwork practice and guidance?<br>• How do you ensure children's voices influence policy in a way that respects their autonomy and right to self-direct their play?<br>• How do you ensure children's contributions are genuinely child-led rather than adult-directed, respecting their right to shape the environment and culture of the setting?<br>• How do you gather children's views through play-based, informal and non-intrusive methods rather than formal questioning alone?<br>• How do you know that children feel safe and welcome in the setting? | |

| Expected standard: Children's welfare and wellbeing | RAG | | | Reflection prompts | Notes |
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| | Autumn | Spring | Summer | | |
| Leaders and practitioners provide a healthy diet. Practitioners make sure that mealtimes are opportunities to promote children's good manners and social skills.<br><br>Practitioners support children to develop their physical and emotional health. They provide children with the age- and stage-appropriate knowledge that they need to stay safe and healthy.<br><br>Children, especially disadvantaged children, those with SEND, those who are known, or previously known, to children's social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or well-being, develop secure attachments and a sense of belonging through warm and positive relationships with key persons, which promote their well-being effectively. | | | | • Do you observe play cues, return cues and children's willingness to initiate play freely?<br>• What strategies ensure outdoor play is meaningful and accessible every day?<br>• How do you ensure outdoor environments offer appropriate challenge, uncertainty and opportunities for risk-taking that support development?<br>• How do you ensure the outdoor environment enables self-directed play, rather than becoming adult-led activity time?<br>• How do you gather feedback from children and families about the environment?<br>• Are there any barriers preventing children from fully engaging in play and social activities?<br>• How do you monitor and maintain high standards of hygiene across the setting?<br>• How do you ensure hygiene practices meet the needs of all age groups effectively?<br>• What training do staff receive to maintain best practice in hygiene?<br>• How do you involve parents in supporting hygiene routines at home and in the setting? | |

| Expected standard: Children's welfare and wellbeing | RAG | | | Reflection prompts | Notes |
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| | Autumn | Spring | Summer | | |
| | | | | • How do you support children to develop independence in managing personal needs?<br>• How do adults balance supporting independence with allowing children to attempt tasks in their own time and play-driven way?<br>• What approaches help children understand and make healthy lifestyle choices?<br>• How do you adapt teaching about health for different ages and stages?<br>• How do you involve families in reinforcing healthy habits at home?<br>• How do you ensure that the food provided meets nutritional standards and children's needs?<br>• How do you use mealtimes to promote social skills and positive interactions?<br>• How do you accommodate dietary requirements and cultural preferences?<br>• How do you involve children in learning about healthy eating during mealtimes?<br>• How do you assess whether children are developing physical and emotional health effectively?<br>• How do you measure the impact of your health and safety teaching? | |

| Expected standard: Children's welfare and wellbeing | RAG | | | Reflection prompts | Notes |
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| | Autumn | Spring | Summer | | |
| | | | | • How do you involve families in promoting physical and emotional well-being?<br>• How do you ensure children have opportunities for freely chosen physical play, rather than only structured physical activity?<br>• How do you ensure that every child forms a secure attachment with their key person?<br>• What strategies help you to build strong relationships with children who face additional barriers?<br>• How do you monitor and evaluate the impact of these relationships on children's well-being?<br>• How do adults use attunement and co-regulation to stabilise children emotionally while still allowing play to unfold on the child's own terms? | |

## Expected standard: Leadership and governance

Consider if you are working higher than expected and how you know this – refer to the Early years inspection toolkit for Strong and Exemplary.

| Expected standard: Leadership and governance | RAG | | | Reflection prompts | Notes |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Autumn | Spring | Summer | | |
| Leaders understand the setting's context, strengths and areas for development. They are ambitious for children, taking appropriate action to drive improvement and/or maintain high standards of education and care. When improvements are needed, leaders' actions are timely and effective.<br><br>The nominated individual ensures leaders have a clear vision, strategy, and well-managed resources, while supporting and challenging them appropriately and considering well-being and workload.<br><br>Leaders provide regular, relevant and appropriate professional learning and expertise opportunities and constructive feedback for all practitioners, which equips them to carry out their roles successfully. | | | | • How do you identify your setting's strengths and areas for development?<br>• How do observations of children's freely chosen play highlight what your environment does well and where barriers still exist?<br>• Do play cues, play cycles, and staff responses reveal patterns in practice that help identify strengths and gaps?<br>• How do you ensure timely and effective action for improvement?<br>• Do you reflect on how quickly adaptations to the play environment or adult role impact children's play experiences?<br>• How do you ensure changes support, not interrupt, play cycles?<br>• How do you communicate your vision and strategy to staff?<br>• How do you ensure your vision includes a shared understanding of the Playwork Principles?<br>• Do staff understand the importance of giving children autonomy, space, and permission to play freely?<br>• How do you balance support and challenge while considering | |

| Expected standard: Leadership and governance | RAG | | | Reflection prompts | Notes |
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| | Autumn | Spring | Summer | | |
| Leaders act, so staff feel valued, and workload is manageable, avoiding unnecessary burdens.<br><br>Leaders engage with parents and professionals thoughtfully and positively in a way that supports children's education and care. This includes at times of transition, to enable children to settle quickly when they start at the setting and move on seamlessly to other settings or school, when appropriate. | | | | workload?<br>How do you encourage staff to be reflective about when to step back and when to step in during play, without adding unnecessary administrative tasks or restricting their time to observe children authentically?<br>• How do you ensure professional learning meets staff needs?<br>• Does CPD include opportunities to develop skills in reading play cues, risk-benefit assessment, and enabling play?<br>• Do staff feel confident applying Playwork thinking in your setting's context?<br>• How do you provide feedback that supports improvement?<br>• Do you use examples from play observations to highlight effective practice or areas for development, for example, how staff interactions supported or unintentionally interrupted a play cycle?<br>• How do you show staff they are valued?<br>• Do you recognise and celebrate staff who skilfully enable children's play, manage dynamic risk, and create rich play environments?<br>• Are their insights into children's play experiences acknowledged as important? | |

| Expected standard: Leadership and governance | RAG | | | Reflection prompts | Notes |
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| | Autumn | Spring | Summer | | |
| | | | | • What steps do you take to prevent unnecessary workload?<br>• Do your systems allow staff enough time to observe play, reflect, and respond without being burdened by excessive paperwork or overly adult-led expectations?<br>• How do you build positive relationships with parents and professionals?<br>• Do you share the value of play with parents, helping them understand how play supports development, resilience, communication, and well-being? How do you use play narratives to strengthen professional conversations?<br>• How do you ensure smooth transitions for children?<br>• Do you consider how play can support transitions, through familiar resources, predictable play routines, or opportunities for children to express emotions through their play? How do you observe and respond to play cues that indicate anxiety or readiness? | |

# Local and national resources to support early years and childcare

| Aspect | Useful resources |
|---|---|
| **Inclusion** | SEND Support: Resources<br>Cambridgeshire Development Journal 2024. Size: 1,064KB File format: pdf<br>OAP Audit Tool_Final. Size: 966KB File format: pdf<br>EY SEND Toolkit<br>What is Inclusive Practice?<br>Supporting Inclusive Practice |
| **Playwork** | The Playwork Principles - Play Wales<br>Play Wales<br>Play England<br>Play Scotland |
| **Behaviour, attitudes and establishing routine** | Supporting Positive Interactions<br>Talking Together in Cambridgeshire - Practitioner resources<br>Early Years Transitions Toolkit 2026 |
| **Children's welfare and wellbeing** | Help for early years providers : Health and wellbeing<br>Physical Development in the EYFS<br>Forest School<br>Cambridgeshire HAF & Wraparound Providers - Knowledge Hub<br>Cambridgeshire Early Years and Childcare: Designated Safeguarding Lead for Early Years & Childcare (PVI) - Knowledge Hub |

## Appendix 1: safeguarding and welfare requirements – a checklist

This has been designed to support HAF Providers to become more knowledgeable and confident in applying the required safeguarding practices. There is a range of legislation that providers must work within, this includes the Children Act 1989 and EYFS statutory framework 2025, the Data Protection Act and the UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Working together to safeguard children 2026*, The HAF Programme Provider Agreement and HAF programme Framework of Standards. Legislation relating to health and safety basics for your business, including fire safety: guidance for those with legal duties, and food hygiene and safety must also be adhered to.

*Size: 2MB File format: pdf

This follows best practice. The EYFS statutory framework 2025 safeguarding and welfare requirements are therefore referenced as standard for all HAF providers throughout. If advice or support is required to assist with the SET, contact: HAF@cambridgeshire.gov.uk.

| | | In place? | Date | Actions |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Child protection** | Does your setting have a policy and procedures in place to safeguard children in line with the guidance of the Safeguarding Partnership Board \| Cambridgeshire and Peterborough which includes:<br>• Actions to be taken when there is a safeguarding concern about a child.<br>• Actions to be taken in the event of an allegation made against an adult who works or volunteers with children.<br>• The use of technology including mobile phones, cameras and another electronic device with imaging and sharing capabilities.<br>• Details of how safeguarding training is delivered and how practitioners are supported to put this into practice.<br>• Details of other channels for Whistleblowing, for example NSPCC. | | | |
| | Does your setting have a Designated Safeguarding Lead who continues to keep themselves up to date with local risks and information and refreshes their training every two years?<br>Keeping children safe in education 2025. Size: 1,474 KB File format: pdf | | | |
| | Have all your staff been trained in understanding your safeguarding policy and procedures? | | | |

| | | In place? | Date | Actions |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Have all staff attended Basic Child Protection training to identify, understand, and respond appropriately to signs of abuse and neglect? This must be updated every two years, but providers may decide whether staff need to undertake annual refresher training.<br>Annex C of EYFS statutory framework for group and school-based providers* lists what safeguarding training must cover. *Size: 711KB File format: pdf | | | |
| | Have all your staff read and have regard to:<br>• Child abuse concerns: guide for practitioners.<br>• Working together to safeguard children.<br>• Prevent duty guidance: England and Wales (2023).<br>• Keeping children safe in education.<br>• Safeguarding children and protecting professionals in early years settings: online safety considerations.<br>• EYFS statutory framework for group and school-based providers.<br>• HAF programme Framework of Standards. | | | |
| **Suitable people** | Have enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service checks (DBS) been obtained for all staff, unsupervised volunteers, and supervised volunteers who provide personal care? Additional criminal record check/s should also be made for anyone who has lived or worked abroad. | | | |
| | Has information about staff qualifications, identify checks, vetting processes and references been recorded? Including criminal records check reference numbers, the date a check was obtained and details of who obtained it. | | | |
| **Staff qualifications, training, support, and skills** | Have you checked staff's qualifications meet the full and relevant sections of the EYFS? (Staff: Child ratio - 3.42 – 3.57) You can check an early years qualification online: Get ready to start the qualification check<br><br>Do all staff receive induction training to ensure they understand their roles and responsibilities. Induction training must include:<br>• Information about emergency evacuation procedures.<br>• Safeguarding.<br>• Child protection.<br>• Health and safety. | | | |
| | Are all staff supported to undertake appropriate training and professional development opportunities? | | | |

| | | In place? | Date | Actions |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Once safeguarding training is attended, do you ensure practitioners are supported to put this into practice? | | | |
| | Is effective supervision of staff in place to provide support, coaching and training for all EYFS practitioners who have contact with children and families? | | | |
| | Do you have at least one person who has a current paediatric first aid certificate, always renewed every three years, on the premises and available when children are present? | | | |
| | Do all staff have sufficient understanding and use of English to ensure the well-being of the children? | | | |
| **Key person** | For children in reception class or younger, have they been assigned a key person and do parents and/or carers understand the role? | | | |
| **Staff: child ratios** | Have parents and/or carers been informed about how staff are deployed to ensure children are adequately supervised? | | | |
| | Are children usually within sight and hearing of staff and always within sight or hearing? | | | |
| | Whilst eating, are children within sight and hearing of a staff member with a valid Paediatric First Aid (PFA) qualification? | | | |
| | Where possible, do staff sit facing children whilst they eat so they can make sure children are eating in a way to prevent choking, food sharing and be aware of any unexpected allergic reactions? | | | |
| | Are staff clear, at each mealtime and snack time, about who is responsible for checking that the food being provided meets all the requirements for each child? | | | |
| | Have you ensured that you have the correct ratios of staff to children according to the statutory guidance? | | | |
| **Managing behaviour** | Is behaviour understood in an appropriate way? | | | |
| | Are records kept of any occasion where physical intervention is used, and parents and/or carers informed on the same day, or as soon as reasonably practicable? | | | |
| **Health** | Do you promote the good health, including oral health, of children attending the setting? For older young people, does this include health issues current for their age/stage of development such sexual health, vaping, alcohol or drugs and so forth. | | | |
| | Do you have agreed procedures for responding to children who are ill or infectious, which has been discussed with parents and/or carers? See guidance on infection control in schools' poster. Size: 54.5KB File format: pdf | | | |

| | | In place? | Date | Actions |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Do you have a policy and procedures for administering medicines which includes systems for obtaining information about a child's needs for medicines, and for keeping this information up to date? | | | |
| | Do staff need any training for the administration of medicine, which requires medical or technical knowledge, for specific children? | | | |
| | Are meals, snacks, and drinks healthy, balanced, and nutritious? | | | |
| | Has information been gathered for each child about any special dietary requirements, preferences, food allergies and any special health requirements, prior to starting? | | | |
| | At all times is fresh drinking water available and accessible to children? | | | |
| | At all times is a first aid box accessible with appropriate content for use with children? | | | |
| | Do you keep a written record of accidents or injuries and first aid treatment and have a system that ensures you inform parents and/or carers on the same day? | | | |
| **Special educational needs** | Does your setting have regard for the SEND code of practice: 0 to 25 years? | | | |
| | Have you identified a member of staff in the setting to function as SENCO?<br>Have they attended relevant training for the role? Booking and reservations for Early Years Childcare and School Readiness Service, HAF programme:<br>• Inclusion for managers in wrap around and holiday provision.<br>• Inclusion for staff in wrap around and holiday provision. | | | |
| **ENCo** | Have you identified a member of staff in the setting to function as ENCo?<br>Have they attended relevant training for the role? Booking and reservations for Early Years Childcare and School Readiness Service, School-age Childcare:<br>• Equalities Named Co-ordinator (ENCo) for HAF and Out of School Clubs. | | | |
| **Safety and suitability of premises, environment, and equipment** | Are the premises, including overall floor space and outdoor spaces fit for purpose and suitable for the age of the children? | | | |
| | Do you comply with requirements of health and safety legislation, including fire safety and hygiene requirements? | | | |
| | Do you have an emergency evacuation and invacuation procedure which is practiced with staff and children regularly? | | | |
| | Do you have appropriate fire detection and control equipment?<br>Are fire exits clearly identifiable with fire doors free of obstruction and easily opened from the inside? | | | |

| | | In place? | Date | Actions |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Do you meet indoor space requirements – paragraph 3.58 in the statutory framework? | | | |
| | Do you provide access to an outdoor play area, or ensure outdoor activities are planned and taken daily? | | | |
| | Are there an adequate number of toilets and hand basins available? | | | |
| | Is children's privacy considered and balanced with safeguarding and support needs when supporting changing and toileting? | | | |
| | Is there an area where staff may talk to parents and/or carers confidentially? | | | |
| | Do you have an agreed procedure for checking the identity of visitors? | | | |
| | Do risk assessments identify aspects of the environment that need to be checked on a regular basis? | | | |
| **Information and records** | Are you aware of your responsibilities under the GDPR, Data Protection Act 2018 and Freedom of Information Act 2000? | | | |
| | Are confidential records about staff and children held securely? | | | |
| | Does the DSL regularly update child protection files? Refer to Page 172 of Keeping children safe in education 2025. Size: 1,474KB File format: pdf | | | |
| | Do you document the following information about every child?<br>• Full name. date of birth.<br>• Name and address of every parent and/or carer, including parental responsibility.<br>• Which parents and/or carers the child normally lives with.<br>• Emergency contact details. | | | |
| | Do you make the following information available to parents and/or carers?<br>• The range and type of activities, daily routines.<br>• How SEND children are supported.<br>• Food and drinks provided.<br>• Relevant policies and procedures. Staffing arrangement, including key persons. | | | |
| | Are there a written procedure for concerns and complaints? | | | |
| | Do you have a Whistleblowing policy and have all staff read and understood this? | | | |
| | Is your attendance policy shared with parents and/or carers, and does it include expectations for reporting child absences and actions taken? | | | |
| | Are child absences followed up in a timely manner?<br>If a child is absent for a prolonged period, do you ensure your school:<br>• Contacts the child's parents and/or carers? | | | |

| | | In place? | Date | Actions |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | • Consider patterns, trends, and personal circumstances, for example home life, child's, parent/carer's vulnerability, to consider if it is a prolonged absence?<br>• Refer the child to social care and/or police welfare check if there are concerns? | | | |

## Appendix 2: writing the action plan

An action plan is a vital tool which enables settings to plan the improvement and development of their early years and childcare provisions. It is important that your action plan is a working document. Here is some guidance for completing each section of the action plan:

| | |
|---|---|
| **Standards to address** | Once you have RAG rated the criteria in the 'expected standard', choose some key standards to address and list these on the action plan. You can use the wording directly from the 'expected standard' descriptors. |
| **Tasks** | When identifying the tasks, make sure that they are practical, realistic and affordable. Write them in a way that is clearly understood by all involved. It is useful to consider the sequence in which tasks will be actioned and record them on the plan in that way, for example, audit current resources, research and cost new resources, purchase resources, introduce new resources to the classroom monitor use of the resources. When writing tasks, start with a verb, for example, 'observe', 'monitor', 'review', 'audit', and so forth. You may need to amend tasks or add new ones throughout the year. Consider adding these in a different colour to demonstrate a continuous approach to improvement. |
| **Timescales** | Be realistic about timescales and be as specific as possible. A timescale of 'ongoing' will mean that an action may never be started. Agree a completion date for tasks to keep momentum going. |
| **Lead** | Make sure that everyone identified in the action plan is clear about the tasks they need to complete. It may be possible to identify a lead person for each area that is being addressed through the action plan. They can ensure that actions are being implemented effectively. |
| **Resources, training and support** | When looking at resource, training or support implications, be as precise as possible. Resources may include equipment needed or staff time required. When undertaking quality improvements, it is likely there will also be some cost implications, so add these where you can. |
| **Progress and Impact** | When judging whether improvement has worked always consider the impact on the children and talk to them about the changes. Also consider how it has affected all aspects of the provision, f or example, the staff, environment, parents, and so forth. Set regular review dates for your action plan, at least every term. Once an action has been fully implemented, consider how the quality improvement will be maintained. Sometimes, for a variety of reasons, planned actions either do not happen or do not have the expected impact. Important lessons can be learned from these experiences, and they should be used positively. |
| **RAG** | Each term, RAG rate each task so that it is clear to see progress and the remaining tasks that require input. |

## Appendix 3: action plan template

| School-age childcare action plan | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Written by** | | **Date** | | **Dates to be reviewed** | |
| **Reflective prompts** | | | | | |
| **Standards to address** | | | | | |

| Tasks | Timescale | Lead | Resources/training/support | Progress and impact | RAG |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | |
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