

Childcare Sector Experiences of Care Inspectorate Inspections

National Day Nurseries Association, Early Years Scotland, Care and Learning Alliance and Scottish Childminding Association
Report of Survey Findings
February 2024

This survey was carried out by NDNA, EYS, CALA and SCMA to gather members' experiences of inspections. The responses covered 1496 different respondents including 175 nurseries, 25 school aged childcare settings, 1286* childminders, 21 playgroups and four family centres.

**the questions asked of childminders were split over two surveys conducted at different times and only the higher figure from one survey is quoted to avoid any double-counting of respondents (1263 were from SCMA the others from EYS and CALA).*

Findings in this report have been gathered into four areas: inspections, professional respect, and 2 additional childminding findings.

Inspections

- Overall 43% of providers had not been inspected in the past 3 years. Nearly a quarter (24.3%) had been inspected in the past 12 months.
- There was a difference between non-domestic settings and childminders. Childminders responding were more likely to have been inspected more than three years ago: 45%. By comparison, only 30% of other respondents said their last inspection had been that long ago.
- For inspections in the past 12 months 45% of non-domestic settings had had an inspection in this time frame while only 20% of childminders had.

- Inspection gradings:

1 - Unsatisfactory	0.14%
2 - Weak	0.86%
3 - Adequate	6.42%
4 - Good	34.82%
5 - Very Good	52.77%
6 - Excellent	5.14%

- Interesting to note that only 5.1% achieved "excellent" and 52.8% "very good" (57.9% in total) but 68.2% said the report contained no recommendations.
- Childminders reported that there has been a decrease in 3s and 6s with those moving to 4 and 5s. Of particular note, within the same sample size responding to both questions, only 19 reported getting a 6 in their most recent inspection in comparison to 32 in their previous inspection. A reduction of 13 (40%).
- 22.1% of respondents who had received recommendations said they either did not understand or did not agree with them.
- 77.8% found it positive or very positive vs 12% who said it was mostly or entirely negative. However, for non-domestic settings this shifted to 65.3% with 17.4% describing the experience as mostly or entirely negative.
- 94% said the inspector introduced themselves in a friendly manner and 81% said they clearly explained the inspection process and 84% said the inspector respected the operating hours of the setting.
- 85% said the inspector spoke to staff and 88% said they spoke to children during the inspection but engagement with parents was more mixed – only 48.6% said this happened. Greater variation of experience was experienced within childminding – 87% spoke to children, but only 39.7% of childminders reported that inspectors spoke to parents in their setting and for childminders who work with Assistants only 63% reported that inspectors spoke to them during inspection.
- Respondents reported that the inspection process is very stressful with two thirds (66%) saying it was stressful or very stressful. 'Very stressful' was the most common response with 45.1% of respondents saying this.

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- There was a big difference between the amount of time spent in a childminder setting (88.5% said the inspector spent half a day at the setting) compared with non-domestic settings, where only 18% said the inspector was there for half a day. 31.5% of non-domestic settings said a day was spent at the setting, 22.8% said one and a half days and 23.7% said it was two days.
- Comparing the inspection on the day with the report that was produced, 1 in 5 (20.3%) said that some verbal comments made on the day were not reflected in the final report.

Professional respect:

- Most felt respected by the inspector – 75%, but 6% said they did not and 16% felt partially respected.
- Nearly one in five (19.53%) said they did not feel the inspector showed a good prior knowledge of their setting before arrival.
- Only 40% of respondents felt they were given the opportunity to show their service ‘at its best’.
- While 80.4% felt some level of confidence in asking questions of the inspector, respondents reported that their reasons for not being confident included a feeling of conflict, intimidation, worry about impact on grades, aggressive and unprofessional reactions to potential challenge by the inspector.
- Reasons for feeling confident included having many years of experience, qualifications, belief in the quality of service and staff, good relationships with the inspector, and good communication and professional discussion with the inspector. However, respondents did also say that although they felt confident often, they didn’t challenge because they were worried about repercussions in future inspections.
- We found that 60% of respondents had received a different grade from their previous inspection and only half (52.7%) of those agreed with this change.
- Childminders, as predominantly sole practitioners, were less likely to challenge an inspection outcome (10.6% compared with 24.7% of non-domestic providers.)
- 56% of those who did not challenge their grading report said it was due to concerns about it adversely affecting their future inspections, 54% said they did not believe their concerns would be taken seriously and 51% said they worried it would adversely affect their relationship with their inspector. 43.9% said their most recent inspection was carried out by an inspector who had previously visited their setting.
- For those who did challenge their reports the feedback there was positive feedback with around half (49%) saying their challenge or questions at the draft stage were fully or partially reflected in the published report. However, 28% said they were not reflected at all in the final report.
- Only 82% said they were aware of the care inspectorates’ own complaints process.

Additional Childminding Findings

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SCMA also asked some additional more childminding-specific questions in their first inspection survey linked to particular concerns reported to them by members. These findings included –

- **Consistency of inspection:** only 42% of childminders believed that their inspections by the CI had been 'consistent' or 'very consistent'; of those who believed their inspections had been 'inconsistent' or 'very inconsistent', 95.5% believed this had been due to inconsistencies in approach between inspectors; and 61.2% of childminders also believed that there is inconsistency of CI inspection between childminders.
- **Understanding of childminding:** SCMA also sought to test some basic principles with members regarding the CI inspection system and its relevance to, focus on and understanding of childminding – only 38% of childminders believed the current CI inspection system has a 'strong' or 'very strong' relevance to childminding; the same number (38%) believed that it has a 'strong' or 'very strong' focus on childminding; and only 34.2% (or 1 in 3) childminders believed that it has a 'strong' or 'very strong' understanding of childminding.