

What to expect from an unannounced service visit

When can an unannounced visit to your service occur?

A 'visit' refers to any instance where the NSW Early Learning Commission inspects your service in a regulatory capacity, including assessment and rating, monitoring and compliance or an investigation.

The NSW Early Learning Commission (the Commission), as the independent regulator for early childhood education and care (ECEC) in NSW, can conduct unannounced visits at any time during a service's operational hours. The Commission has made a commitment to visit more services, more often. This information has been developed to support your service to feel confident when you have a visit from an authorised officer so that you can demonstrate your everyday practice to the best of your ability.

Visits are conducted by an authorised officer (officer) as part of the Commission's routine monitoring to support ongoing service quality and compliance and are conducted based on a number of priorities such as risk, incidents, time since last visit and complaints. Authorised officers are identified under Section 195 of the Children (Education and Care Services) National Law (NSW).

Unannounced visits may also be in response to:

- a notification relating to your service
- a serious incident
- a complaint about your service
- an allegation about an educator or staff member.

Ensuring your service is 'visit ready'

- You can take steps to support your service being 'visit ready' by ensuring:
- information about your service's operational hours are up to date in the **National Quality Assurance IT System** (NQAITS)
- service documentation is easily accessible (tip: prepare relevant documentation in advance if you expect a visit following a notification, incident or complaint)
- all staff, including responsible persons in day-to-day charge, know how to access and share service documentation if asked by an officer
- staff information in the National Early Childhood Worker Register is regularly updated and reviewed to ensure all staff currently working at the service are included
- health and safety risks, supervision and medical practices (such as medical management plans) are proactively monitored and kept up to date
- all staff receive the latest guidance from the Commission's fortnightly emails and regularly refer to resources like the Commission's Quality and Compliance in Practice newsletters
- you are prepared for the possibility of a discussion with an officer and have a quiet space at your service where conversations can take place confidentially if required.

By maintaining compliant and quality practices every day, your service will be well positioned for any visit by an authorised officer from the Commission.

What to expect from an unannounced visit

When an officer arrives, they will:

- introduce themselves and show you their identification
- sign your service visitor record
- explain how the visit will be conducted
- ask for a brief tour of the service
- observe interactions with the children, request to sight documents and discuss your service practices.

Authorised officers are not required to provide their personal details to a service or organisation, and act under the provisions of Section 197 of the National Law which provides powers of entry for assessing and monitoring approved education and care services. All relevant checks, including WWCC clearance for authorised officers are verified by the Commission as a condition of employment. Officers are not required to provide you with their qualifications or checks – only their Commission issued identification.

In line with the Commission's expectations under its Code of Conduct, authorised officers are expected to:

- be professional, approachable, respectful and timely in dealings
- listen and communicate respectfully
- clearly explain the purpose and be clear on what next steps are involved
- model NSW public service values, including integrity, trust and accountability
- lead their discussions and communication in a culturally safe manner, including forming respectful relationships with Aboriginal peoples, communities and services; and acknowledge and respect cultural protocols.

Observations by the officer may include:

- interactions between staff, children and families
- hygiene practices

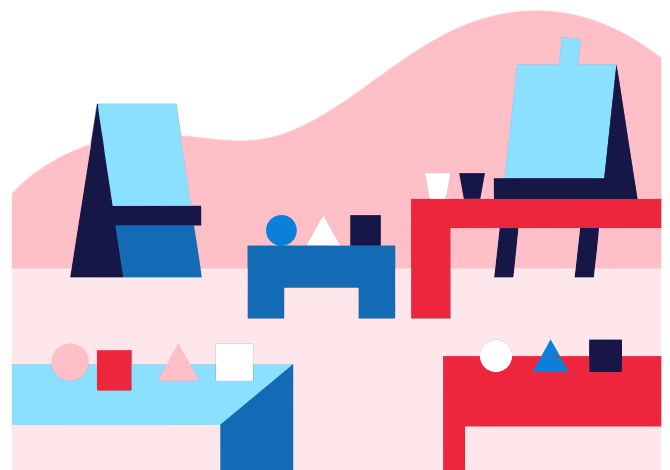
- routine times including meals, sleep and rest periods, and transitions
- how staff implement policies and procedures
- the service's physical environment including play spaces, sleep/rest areas, furniture, resources, first aid kits (including expiry dates of items) and any other areas accessible to children.

Documents an officer may need to sight include:

- educational program and records of planning and assessment cycles
- examples of communication and engagement with families
- records relating to any children with health and medical conditions
- service policies and procedures
- risk assessments
- documents required under regulation 177 of the Education and Care Services National Regulations
- staffing records, including Working with Children Checks (WWCC) and qualifications

Ensure these documents are easily accessible in paper or electronic form to support a smooth process.

An officer may also suggest having a discussion with you away from children. Consider what impact this would have on supervision and maintaining ratios and be transparent with the officer if taking staff off the floor would compromise your compliance. The authorised officer may assist you with identifying solutions to ensure children are kept safe during the visit.



An officer may talk to you about:

- service routines and the educational program
- how your program and the environment is adjusted to meet the differing ages and interests of children
- connections with family and communities
- staffing arrangements
- child safe practices, including your understanding of child protection requirements
- your knowledge and understanding of the service's policies and procedures.

To enable authorised officers to confirm a service's practice and level of compliance, throughout the visit, they may:

- make notes of what they observe, discuss and sight
- walk around the service and speak with educators and staff during the visit
- ask questions to management, staff, children and families to clarify practices
- take photographs, film, make audio recordings or make a sketch of the service premises and documents
- inspect and make copies or take extracts from documents at the premises; and
- take a document or anything at the service premises to support an investigation or case.

If you do not understand a question or a request made by an authorised officer, you can ask for more information or clarification to help you.

What to do if your nominated supervisor is absent

If the nominated supervisor is not present, the officer will defer to the responsible person in day-to-day charge. Before appointing someone as a responsible person, the approved provider or nominated supervisor must take reasonable steps to ensure the person:

- has adequate knowledge and understanding of the provision of education and care to children
- can effectively supervise and manage a service.

Approved providers and nominated supervisors should also ensure responsible persons know the location of relevant service information such as policies, staffing or any other records required by legislation, such as enrolment records, safety checks and risk assessments.

After the visit

Approximately 5-10 business days after the visit, your service will receive an email noting whether any regulatory guidance was provided during the visit.

If non-compliance was identified on the visit, the officer will discuss it with the service provider, nominated supervisor or responsible person on the day and you will receive further communication. You may also receive a follow up visit.

Additional information

Further information on the Commission's approach to visits is available in the Early Learning Commission's Approach to Visits Policy. If you have feedback or concerns about a visit, you are encouraged to contact the Commission who will review your complaint. You may be issued with a post-visit survey which provides another opportunity for you to share your experience and to support the Commission's continuous improvement.

Providers should also ensure their service is aware of and meets their obligations in line with the national and state child safety reforms. Information about what these changes mean for families, providers and services, including how to comply with these obligations, is available on the NSW Early Learning Commission's child safety reforms webpage.



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