

# Conversations with families about safety and quality

At times, parents and carers may have questions about the safety and quality of your service and what that means for the education and care of their child.

This guide aims to support approved providers, educators and other staff explain your service's safety and compliance with the National Law and Regulations, quality rating and the assessment and rating process to families.

## Starting a conversation about safe, quality education and care

A conversation with families about your quality rating and compliance should not be daunting. If a family asks about your quality rating, you can use it as an opportunity to celebrate the things you are doing well. Talk to families and make them part of your quality improvement journey.

This can even help you, for example, with Quality Area 6: Collaborative partnerships with families and communities of the National Quality Standard (NQS).

A service's compliance history should be readily available to families at all times, in line with Regulation 177(3)(b). This is an opportunity for your service to demonstrate its commitment to transparency, continuous improvement and safe practice.



## Common questions

### What are quality ratings?

Families may not understand how quality ratings work or be aware of the NQS. You can help them understand by explaining:

- Quality ratings are not the same as 'minimum standards' – these are set by the National Law and Regulations.
- Quality is measured on a continuum starting with a very high benchmark.
- Ratings are meant to promote continuous improvement – the system is not designed to 'call-out' services who may need to improve in one or 2 areas.
- Ratings are 'point in time' based on the evidence available to the authorised officer during the assessment and rating visit.
- 'Quality' in early childhood education and care (ECEC) services is not static. All services are on a journey of quality improvement whatever their rating.

## Who determines quality and how?

Many people are not aware that services are regulated by the NSW Department of Education, as the regulatory authority (NSW Regulatory Authority) for the ECEC sector in NSW. You can explain:

- The National Quality Framework sets out what 'quality' looks like in ECEC. Within the framework is the NQS, which sets out 7 key areas that contribute to the overall quality of the service.
- The NSW Regulatory Authority assesses quality against the NQS.
- The NSW Regulatory Authority also monitors compliance with the National Law and Regulations – this is different to assessment and rating.
- Authorised officers from the regulatory authority are trained to assess services against the NQS based on evidence collected and visits/discussions with services.
- Authorised officers look for evidence of how services are meeting the standard across those 7 areas. The overall rating is based on how well services are doing in all 7 quality areas.

## How do I explain each different rating?

Below are some tips for how you can explain each rating and what it really means.



### Significant Improvement Required

If your service is rated Significant Improvement Required (SIR) you may want to discuss with families how you are working with the NSW Regulatory Authority to improve your performance against the 7 quality areas.

It's important that families know that, when a service is rated SIR, the regulatory authority is keeping in regular contact with the provider and supporting them to improve, while closely monitoring their progress.



### Working Towards National Quality Standard

Working Towards NQS means that there are one or more quality areas identified for improvement.

It may be helpful to point out which of the 7 quality areas you have been rated Working Towards NQS and explain what you are doing to improve.

You should also point out any areas where your service has been rated Meeting or Exceeding and celebrate those.



### Meeting National Quality Standard

An overall rating of Meeting NQS means that you are meeting the standards in all 7 quality areas.

The NQS sets a high benchmark, an overall rating of Meeting is a great achievement.

You should also point out any areas where you have been rated Exceeding and celebrate those.



### Exceeding National Quality Standard

An overall rating of Exceeding means your service is performing above and beyond the standard.

Take the opportunity to explain all the things you have done to achieve a rating of Exceeding at your service.



### Excellent

If you have achieved a rating of Excellent, well done! You can explain to your families that not only did you get rated Exceeding in all 7 quality areas by the NSW Regulatory Authority, you also participated in a separate assessment by ACECQA, which awarded you the highest rating possible.

## Why have a standard if a service can be rated as not meeting it and still operate?

The NQS does not set a minimum regulatory requirement that services must meet to be operational. Minimum standards are set by the National Law and Regulations and all services must comply with the Law and Regulations. The National Law and Regulations ensure that services are safe.

Compliance and quality go hand in hand, and both are important in ensuring positive outcomes for children.

## How often are services assessed and rated?

Families may want to know how regularly your service or educators are visited by the regulatory authority. You can explain that the NSW Regulatory Authority takes a risk-based approach to scheduling assessment and rating, so the more areas identified as needing improvement, the more likely a service will be prioritised for assessment and rating.

You can also explain that compliance visits happen independently of assessment and rating visits. Even if you haven't been assessed for a while that doesn't mean the regulatory authority has not visited.

## What other visits does the regulatory authority conduct?

Monitoring and compliance visits are used to provide feedback on the way your service is operating, or instigated in response to an issue that comes to the regulatory authority's attention, such as a serious incident or a complaint.

These visits are also done proactively. The NSW Regulatory Authority aims to visit services at least once every 12–18 months, but more frequently if needed.

## What if I have a provisional rating?

If you have not yet been assessed, you can explain the quality areas to families and tell them how you will plan to continually self-assess your service to ensure you are meeting the quality areas when you do get assessed. This will not only help build relationships with families, it will help you prepare for your assessment and rating.

### Where can families and services find out more information?

For information for families about service quality ratings, visit our Choosing a quality service web page:

[education.nsw.gov.au/choosing-a-service](http://education.nsw.gov.au/choosing-a-service)



## Unpacking the 7 quality areas

Familiarising families with the 7 quality areas and what they really mean will help them to understand your rating.

### Quality Area 1: Educational program and practice

Educational programs and practices should be play-based, child-centred and enhance learning and development.

In early childhood, the educational program includes all aspects of a child's development including socialisation, life skills, hygiene and emotional regulation.

In school-aged care, the educational program should complement a child's school education as well as provide opportunities for social and emotional learning.

Assessment of Quality Area 1 will look at how your service program and practices meet the educational and developmental needs of all children through ongoing observation and assessment of all children and documentation of progress under the Early Years Learning Framework and My Time, Our Place: Framework for School Age Care in Australia.

### Quality Area 2: Children's health and safety

Children's health and safety relates to both the physical and emotional wellbeing of children.

This includes supporting each child's growing competence, confidence and independence, and encouraging healthy lifestyles.

Assessment of Quality Area 2 will look at your service policies, procedures and practices that ensure the health and safety of children, including those related to physical safety, hygiene and food handling, injury, illness, excursions and emergencies.

### Quality Area 3: Physical environment

Physical environment refers to the spaces where children learn, play and rest. These spaces should be safe and provide opportunities for different experiences that contribute to both learning and wellbeing.

Quality environments should reflect the interests and cultural background of the children who attend the service and include age appropriate opportunities for both individual and group play, sensory learning and physical activity.

### Quality Area 6: Collaborative partnerships with families and communities

Positive relationships with families and the wider community are an important aspect of service quality.

Assessment of Quality Area 6 will look at how your service collaborates with and supports families. Consideration will be given to how your service supports children's access and inclusion in the program and their engagement in the local community.

### Quality Area 4: Staffing arrangements

Staffing arrangements relate to the qualifications and experience of staff members. Services must meet minimum ratio and qualification requirements under the National Law and Regulations.

Assessment of Quality Area 4 will look at how your service utilises its staffing arrangements to support children's learning and development, and how professionalism of staff is promoted as an individual and as a team.

### Quality Area 7: Governance and leadership

Governance and leadership set the tone for the whole service. Strong leadership and good governance feed into all the other quality areas.

Assessment of Quality Area 7 will look at the relevance of your service philosophy, governance, leadership and the management systems, including policies and the roles and responsibilities that are in place. It will also look at how educators and staff are supported in their roles and professional development.

### Quality Area 5: Relationships with children

Strong relationships between educators and children are vital for the wellbeing of children. These relationships should foster trust and respect and provide children with a sense of security and belonging.

This quality area also covers children's relationships and interactions with each other and how educators help them to develop positive relationships that contribute to all aspects of children's learning.

### Where can services find out more information?

For guidance and information sheets about quality practice and the NQS, visit the ACECQA website:

[acecqa.gov.au/resources/supporting-materials/infosheet](https://www.acecqa.gov.au/resources/supporting-materials/infosheet)

