

# ASSESSMENT AND RATING VISITS – NARA COMMUNITY EARLY LEARNING CENTRE’S EXPERIENCE



The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) has commenced the first round of assessment and rating visits. Nara Community Early Learning Centre (Nara CELC) had their visit in September and we thank their coordinator Gina Lousa for sharing their experience with readers. Nara CELC is a 46-place community-managed long day care centre in Preston.

## Can you tell us about your assessment and rating visit?

Overall the experience was very positive. The two authorised officers who came spent a large part of their time in the rooms and looking around the centre, both indoors and outside. They made staff feel comfortable by advising our educators that they planned to write a significant quantity of notes but that this was not negative or positive, just what they needed to do to make sure they documented all that they would need to prepare their draft report. On the day of the visit, Nara CELC had a prearranged booking for a live reptile exhibit/demonstration at the centre. This activity went ahead as planned.

We discussed the purpose of such an activity and how the day was different because of this. While they were in the rooms, the authorised officers spent time observing the children and what was happening as well as looking at all the programming documentation available in each room (this included children’s individual portfolios, program plans that were displayed on the walls and our daily reflective journals).

The authorised officers talked to the educators in a respectful and supportive way about many different aspects of their practice. They also asked educators about whether they’d had an induction process and appraisals. After observing lunch time and the transition to rest time, the authorised officers discussed sleeping patterns with the relief staff who were covering staff lunch breaks and asked them how individual children’s needs were managed in this process. The educational leader spent about 20 minutes talking with the authorised officers and during this process she was asked about whether she was given time to fulfil this role.

Later in the afternoon, I spent time with the authorised officers and they reviewed some of the service documentation, such as our enrolment forms and risk minimisation plans. We discussed a wide range of topics such as child protection training, environmentally friendly practices, celebrations, induction, and

complaints and grievances. On the day of our assessment and rating visit, the hot water system broke down (of course something had to go wrong that day!) and the authorised officers checked in with me about whether that had been attended to and how we managed that situation.

## How did you and the other staff feel before, during and after the assessment and rating visit?

We were extremely nervous heading into the visit. Although we thought we were prepared, it is a new system and it never feels like everything is done. The DEECD process was much more relaxed and positive than we had expected. Of course we were all a bit nervous but as the day went on, staff stress levels decreased and we stopped noticing the authorised officers were there as we went about the day. When it was over, staff felt really happy that they had been treated professionally and that they had all done a good job on the day. We don’t know our final result as yet, however I look forward to hearing about things we can adjust or improve on as part of the continuous improvement cycle – there is always something every centre can improve on. The main thing is it has been a positive experience for staff that they feel proud about! ▶▶





### **How did you prepare for the assessment and rating visit?**

I used the *Guide to the National Quality Standards* throughout my preparation. I referred back to it in detail as we were doing our Quality Improvement Plan and encouraged the educators to do the same. Whenever something came up or we were reviewing a practice or policy we would go back to that document. I prepared an evidence folder for each quality area – I did this because that was what worked under the old accreditation system, however the authorised officers didn't want to see it and I didn't need to refer to it on the day.

**By far the most useful thing we did as a team was to have lots of conversation about the purpose of our actions.**

I stopped telling the staff 'Yes, do it this way'. Instead, if the purpose of an educator's practices seemed unclear or if I thought something could be done differently to improve the outcome, I started asking them questions and encouraging discussion. The team started to ask each other why they do things a particular way and always went back to the Early Years Learning Framework as a guide. The framework was particularly helpful in encouraging us to constantly think about things from a child's perspective.

### **What advice would you give to other services to prepare for their assessment and rating visit?**

Make sure that staff at the service know they will be looked after and treated with respect. If staff have the time and resources they need in the preparation period and feel supported every day, they will feel more confident about implementing all the changes. For example, we make sure all staff have access to laptops, Internet, digital cameras and a colour printer. This has helped them keep up to date with resources and information, and work and communicate efficiently. Make sure there is time to talk and listen to each other. We have been out for a couple of dinners together to build a strong 'team' relationship. And of course use that big blue folder all the time! 📁