

# School Age Care Environment Rating scale (SACERs)

The School-Age Care Environment Rating scale is the official assessment tool to evaluate the quality of out of school (OOS) childcare settings in Devon, such as holiday schemes.

The scales are arranged into seven categories, which are:

- space and furnishings
- health and safety
- activities
- interactions
- programme structure
- staff development
- supplementary items for children with special needs.

In each category there are several quality identifiers which help assess each out of school setting.

All out of school settings should be asking two main questions.

- What are the main components of high quality care in out of school time and how are they measured?
- How can we improve our SACERs rating?

Knowing the answers to these questions will help each setting determine their strengths and weaknesses and create a plan for improvement.

## How is quality measured?

It is measured in two ways:

- structural indicators
- quality assessment process.

**Structural indicators** are things like staff to child ratios and space requirements which can be regulated through Ofsted. They provide a minimum basis for quality, but cannot guarantee that a setting provides quality care.

**Quality assessment process** is based on observing the setting, looking at interactions between adults and children, seeing how the space is arranged, and looking at the resources available in the play space.

Each Setting will be offered a SACERs assessment by an Early Years and Childcare Adviser. When the assessment is completed, the setting can develop an action plan to improve the quality of the service it provides. The SACERs result can also be used as evidence for each setting's Self-Evaluation Form (SEF).

## Tips for improving your SACERs score

### Space and furnishings

- Indoor space should be in good repair, for example no peeling paint. Indoor space should be set up to allow children to move freely
- Set aside a space for children to be alone, making sure that the space can be supervised or observed. Allow children to create their own space, for example a fort made out of material.

### Health and safety

- Provide a handbook for parents and employees with information on procedures for when a child gets sick or injured during a session, managing contagious illnesses, administering medication, evacuation procedures, arrival and departure procedures, consents from parents and carers, staff training, paediatric first aid, food hygiene and safeguarding.

- Undertake risk assessments for fire safety, and daily inspections of the grounds, facilities and equipment to identify and eliminate potential hazards.

### Activities

- Provide enough materials in each area for three or more children to use at any time.
- Remember to set up space that is suitable for messy activities, for example art activities near the sink or science activities near an external door.
- Provide a variety of age-appropriate materials that are accessible for children to access on their own such as:
  - construction materials, Lego, blocks, carpentry materials and tools
  - CDs, dance props, and musical instruments
  - dressing up clothes, props, and puppets
  - an aquarium, measuring tools, magnifying glass, plants and science books, crossword puzzles, dictionaries, encyclopaedias, and games like Junior Scrabble or Pictionary
  - puzzles, chess, board games such as Monopoly for older children and snakes and ladders for younger children.

### Interactions

- Have individual conversations with each child when they arrive, introduce the options for the day and integrate them into the setting. Share information and relate warmly to parents and children when they depart.
- Consistently respond to children in a warm and supportive manner, with relaxed, cheerful voices and frequent smiling.

- Enter into conversations with children and encourage discussion. Do not use communication solely to manage behaviour. Ask 'why, how, what if' questions to get more complex answers from children and require more thought than just 'yes' or 'no' answers. Have frequent conversations that are back and forth, taking turns. Make an effort to talk with each child.
- Model good social skills, such as being calm, listening, and empathising. Help children develop appropriate social behaviours with their peers, teach them to talk through conflicts with their peers rather than solving it for them.

### Programme structure

- Display a written schedule in the setting. Include at least one indoor and outdoor activity daily and reflect that on the written schedule.
- Be flexible, have several activities that are age-appropriate available daily. Include a variety of activities that go on at the same time, some planned, some spontaneous. Be prepared for children upon arrival, plan smooth transitions between activities.
- For at least two thirds of the time allow children to freely choose from a wide variety of age-appropriate games, materials and activities.
- Encourage children to choose their own companions. Have opportunities for individual, small groups, and large group activities.

### Staff development

- Provide thorough inductions for all staff on all policies and procedures. Provide on-site training regularly.
- Supply professional resources which contain current materials on a variety of OOS subjects. Encourage staff members to attend courses and get qualifications.