

# Exceeding the National Quality Standard in South Australia



Education  
Standards  
Board



Understanding Exceeding practice in early childhood settings under the National Quality Standard (NQS).

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## Exceeding NQS after 1 Feb 2018

When the NQS was updated in 2018, there was a national agreement to strengthen how the Exceeding rating was awarded. This was in response to services asking for a clearer and more consistent understanding of Exceeding practice. Changes included:

- Introducing three exceeding themes for each standard to identify 'above and beyond' Meeting level practice
- Requiring all three themes to be met to achieve Exceeding for a Standard.

Further information on how the National Quality Standard is rated overall can be found [here](#).

By 2022, only 38% of services in South Australia had been rated under the new Standards. When the Education Standards Board (ESB) began focusing its activities on re-assessing services against the 2018 Standards, a trend emerged. Services previously rated as Exceeding, are more commonly now receiving a Meeting rating. Some reasons for this include:

- the benchmark for Exceeding practice was raised when the themes were introduced
- the time between assessments and rating cycle time in South Australia is long, and is above the national average
- services and educators are not as familiar with the new NQS and the exceeding themes.

In response, we are working with services to provide guidance and support to increase knowledge and experience.

Assessments will occur more frequently to allow services to further embed their understanding of Exceeding practice and to demonstrate their continuous improvement in a more timely manner.

## Three Exceeding themes

### **Theme 1: Practice is embedded in service operations.**

This theme requires consistent, high-quality practice to be in place regardless of the staffing situation on any given day.

Educators must be able to articulate what they are doing and why, and how this practice led to positive outcomes for children.

### **Theme 2: Practice is informed by critical reflection.**

This theme requires a service to demonstrate a culture of ongoing, deep self-assessment. Critical reflection leads to informed decisions about changes to practice, new practice or continuing practice.

### **Theme 3: Practice is shaped by meaningful engagement with families and/or the community.**

This theme requires a service to use engagement to shape or inform educator practice that reflects the community and service context and builds a sense of belonging for all.

The [Guide to the NQS](#), provides information and guidance for each Standard in helping services to understand what Exceeding practice may look like. This includes a series of reflective questions for services to explore and questions used by authorised officers to establish Exceeding NQS practice. There are case studies on the ACECQA website that are helpful in identifying what [Exceeding practice](#) might look like.

## A service is no longer rated Exceeding NQS. Has quality declined?

Quality is contextual and each service is unique. Exceeding practice will depend on the service type, location and its community. As educators, children, families, communities, best practice expectations and regulatory requirements change, practice needs to evolve and adapt too.

If a service has not retained its Exceeding rating when rated against the 2018 NQS, it does not necessarily mean that quality has dropped. The outcome may mean that some practices at the service have not evolved from the way things were done previously and is therefore no longer considered 'above and beyond' Meeting level practice.

Achieving a Meeting rating means high quality practices are in place at the service. It is more challenging now for a service to achieve an overall rating of Exceeding.

Services and their communities should celebrate achieving a Meeting rating and what the service's strengths are, including if any Exceeding themes were achieved.