Actions and summary from NW Steering group of the Ofsted Big Conversation held on 10th January 2014

Attendees

- Jennie Johnson – Kids Allowed (Chair)
- Andrew Clifford – First Class Childcare Group (Co Chair)
- Jo Kinloch – Mulberry Bush Nurseries
- Clair Beswick – Shining Stars Nursery
- Susan McGhee – Bertram Nursery Group
- Nicole Politis – Portico Day Nurseries
- Rachel Buckler – Salford’s Children Services, Children’s Centres
- Sarah Neville - Knutsford Child minder
- Elaine Sagar – Grafton House Prep

In the afternoon, additional attendee of Kathryn Townsley – Senior Ofsted HMI for the Northwest

Apologies – Michael Cladingbowl – North West Regional Director of Ofsted

We commenced the meeting by looking through the key points suggested in the Next steps email of the 19th November. These being;

1. Consistency – we confirmed that the issues in the region identified in the open meeting of the 14th September 2013 where consistent with the overall objectives of the Ofsted Big Conversation. Although many issues were raised at the full meeting on the 14th September, the BIG issues we will be pursuing are;

   - Clarity of Ofsted’s dual role of regulation & improvement
   - Why have Ofsted moved to this move aggressive approach to inspection (stick and no carrot!) and overview (rather than specific) examples of the impact this is having on providers.
   - What is Ofsted’s vision of how they intend to raise quality
   - Why have they changed how they investigate complaints and do they think it is sustainable
   - Complaint led / brought forward inspections
   - Consistency of inspection outcomes (Consistency of inspector behaviour, interpretation)
   - Anonymous and malicious complaints
   - Concern that the procedure to complain against Ofsted themselves is not fit for purpose
   - The issue of very minor issues resulting in an inadequate outcome despite overall good and outstanding practice
   - The QA process and how this can change the outcome given on the day
2. Inclusive – the open meeting is just that – Open to all. The Steering Group has been able to say yes to all childcare providers that requested to be on it. It is a nine person group representing the following
   - Child-minders
   - One site nurseries
   - Small groups
   - Large chain
   - Children’s Centres
   - Local Government

   We agreed that the size of the Steering committee felt right and that if others want to join, they could go on a waiting list.

3. Keeping everyone involved and informed – We will always publish a summary of the meeting to the Ofsted Big Conversation Website and also email to the NW mailing list (these being the people that attended the open meeting and left their email addresses)

4. Agree the steering group number – done as per point 2

5. Regularity of meetings – Agreed that the steering group would meet once per quarter in line with the number of meeting Ofsted have agreed to attend and that the full group/open meeting would meet twice per year (although more often if a new issue raises its head that needs a quicker response)

The steering group had secured a meeting with the Regional Director of Ofsted on the afternoon of the above meeting (10th January 2014) and also the Chief HMI for the region. Unfortunately at the last minute the Director of Ofsted had to pull out of the meeting (Called to London) we believe it to be genuine and we are trying to rearrange the meeting to happen again sometime in the next 5/6 weeks.

However, we decided to meet with the HMI anyway, not to have the meeting originally intended as we were passionate as a group that this needed the Regional Director to be in attendance, but to hear from her about the direction of travel for Ofsted.

Below is a summary of the Key points from the meeting

- There was agreement that the meeting was a very positive move for engagement and that at the end of the day, we all wanted the same thing – that we ALL want all children to experience outstanding childcare.
- There was an acknowledgment that Ofsted are aware the sector is mobilising in a way they have never done before, and that we are being heard.
- It is clear that Ofsted themselves have issues. Not surprisingly one being that of resourcing the inspections (no wonder with all the complaint driven inspections they are doing)

- The opening line from the HMI was that there are a lot of “myths” around inspection. We were able just with real examples from those around the table highlight that although Ofsted would like to think they are myths, they are not and they really are happening to good providers. We were able to give real examples and this seemed a genuine surprise to the HMI and we feel the HMI has left with a better appreciation of the issues we are facing and a want to improve the consistency issue.

- Ofsted acknowledged that consistency is one of their biggest challenges. She was also interested in engaging with the group and the wider group to get feedback about what a good and what a not so good inspector is.

- We talked about wanting a real dialogue and that it needed to be productive and that we would be expecting to see progress, not just meeting for meetings sake.

- There seems a genuine interest to listen (time will tell) and a commitment to
  1. Reschedule the meeting with The Director and HMI asap (we are still waiting at the moment for a new date)
  2. Have regular meetings with the steering group – she suggested once a quarter - to review progress based on the issues raised.
  3. The HMI has also agreed to attend the next “Ofsted Big Conversation” open meeting – Agenda and timings to be agreed but it will be the morning of Saturday the 17th May 2014 – the location is likely to be in a school in Salford, location kindly proved by Salford Children’s Services as they have the size of facility to host a large open meeting. Please can everyone involved in the Ofsted Big Conversation “Save the date” and also spread the word to other owners, child-minders etc…the more that attend, the better.

The agenda for the meeting with the North West Regional Director and HMI will be the points identified on Page 1, point 1 of this document. We will publish full minutes of that meeting once it happens.

It is very early days, but as they say – it is good to talk!