

DNSSAB Quality & Inclusion Support Services (QISS)

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PRESENTED BY

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District of Nipissing
Social Services
Administration Board




Conseil d'administration
des services sociaux
du district de Nipissing

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Guidelines for Educators & Providers

Purpose of QISS at DNSSAB

Quality & Inclusion Support Services (QISS) strengthens inclusive, high-quality early learning environments across the district. Educator Teams and QIPS work together to understand children’s strengths, identify needs, and implement strategies that support belonging, engagement, and development.

How QIPS Support Your Program

Classroom Observations

Quality and Inclusion Program Specialists (QIPS) complete classroom observations to develop a shared understanding of educator team and children’s strengths, emerging needs, and the overall learning environment. Observations are intended to support reflective practice, enhance inclusive approaches, and strengthen educator team capacity—not to evaluate practice. They help guide collaborative planning, promote belonging for all children and adults, and ensure indoor and outdoor learning environments are safe, inclusive, and responsive.

Observations occur regularly, with frequency and duration determined based on the needs of the educator team, children, and program. Visits may be brief or extended depending on what is developmentally or contextually appropriate, ensuring support remains responsive, purposeful, and respectful of classroom rhythms.

QIPS work alongside educators to:

- Understand individual children’s strengths, needs, patterns in engagement, and approaches to learning.
- Explore group dynamics—including routines, transitions, interactions, and participation—to identify what supports or challenges children’s involvement.
- Examine environmental factors that promote safety, accessibility, sensory needs, inclusive materials, and adaptive tools or modifications—identifying factors that support or prevent meaningful participation for all children.



- Engage in reflective dialogue with educators before, during, and after observations to co-interpret what is seen and determine next steps together.
- Schedule observations collaboratively to ensure they are respectful, transparent, and aligned with classroom goals, flow and routines.
- Maintain a non-evaluative, supportive role focused on collaboration, shared learning, and strengthening inclusive practice.

Reports

During each on-site visit, QIPS will observe program delivery to understand daily operations, engagement practices, and the quality of interactions between the early learning team and children. This includes assessing communication strategies with children, families, and teams to ensure inclusive, positive, and developmentally supportive dialogue.

QIPS will also review the learning environment to determine whether it is safe, accessible, and welcoming. This includes examining the layout for mobility and sensory needs, the availability of calming or quiet spaces, and the presence of inclusive materials such as diverse books, toys, and visual aids. Attention will be given to supports for children with exceptional needs, including adaptive tools or environmental modifications. Materials, equipment, and any items used by children will be observed for safety and appropriate use.

Time in program will depend on many factors such as the type of visit, size of program, spaces used by the program and every day routine schedules. It will also depend on if the purpose of the visit is a regular visit or follow up or if the visit was requested by the agency.

All visits aim to assess and support the program's overall quality, with a particular focus on inclusive practices that promote belonging for all children, including those with exceptional needs

Types of Visits (not limited to)

- General Program Visit: 1 to 3 hrs
- Virtual: via zoom if unable to attend in person
- Drop-Ins: 30 minutes
- Mentoring and Coaching: 1 to 3 hrs



- Goal Check in: 30 to 60 minutes
- Resource drop off: 30 minutes
- Complaint Follow-Up: 30 to 60 minutes

Types of Reports

General Site Visit Reports

These reports are completed when the QIPS conducts a visit to a program for broad, program level purposes rather than for matters related to a specific child.

Reports will include:

- **Observations of the program** — A factual, nonevaluative account of what was seen during the visit, such as routines, interactions, environments, transitions, and overall flow of the day. These observations ground the report in evidence rather than interpretation.
- **Reflective questions asked** — Key questions posed to educators or leadership during the visit to support reflection, deepen thinking, and explore decision making. These questions help programs consider “why” behind practices and identify opportunities for growth.
- **Strengths and areas for growth** — A balanced summary highlighting what the program is doing well, alongside gentle, constructive notes about practices or processes that could be strengthened. This section reinforces capacity building and aligns with a supportive, partnership-based approach.
- **Recommendations and/or suggestions** — Practical, actionable ideas offered by the QIPS to enhance quality and/or inclusion. These may include strategies, resources, or considerations that support continuous improvement without being authoritative.
- **Next steps** — Agreed upon actions that the program and/or QIPS will take following the visit. This may include timelines, responsibilities, or follow-up activities that ensure clarity and shared accountability.
- **Follow-up if required** — Notes indicating whether additional support, resources, or a future visit is needed to extend support from this visit. This section ensures continuity and helps track ongoing quality and inclusion work.



Individual Support Reports

An Individual Support Report is completed when a child's unique experiences, behaviours, or developmental needs require focused, individualized attention that goes beyond what can be addressed through classroom wide strategies. It provides a structured way for providers to understand the child's strengths, emerging needs, and patterns over time, and to plan inclusive, responsive supports that promote the child's full participation in the program.

Report includes:

- **Key strengths and emerging needs** - This section highlights the child's demonstrated competencies, interests, and successful engagement within the environment, alongside early indicators of areas where additional support may be beneficial. Strengths anchor the report in a developmental, asset-based lens, while emerging needs help guide intentional planning before challenges escalate.
- **Patterns in behaviour, engagement, or regulation** - Capturing consistent themes observed across routines, transitions, play, and social interactions. Patterns may relate to emotional regulation, sensory processing, communication, peer engagement, or responses to environmental demands. Identifying patterns helps differentiate isolated incidents from ongoing trends that require targeted strategies.
- **Recommended strategies and environmental adaptations** - This section outlines practical, developmentally appropriate approaches educators can implement to support the child's participation and success. Strategies may include coregulation techniques, communication supports, sensory tools, visual aids, or predictable routines. Environmental adaptations focus on modifying the physical or social environment to reduce barriers and promote inclusion.
- **Reflective questions to engage educator teams in planning** - These open-ended prompts encourage educators to think deeply about the "why" behind the child's behaviours and experiences. Reflective questions support



collaborative problem-solving, help teams consider the impact of routines and expectations, and promote alignment with responsive, relationship-based practice.

- **Suggested next steps or referrals** - This section outlines recommended actions moving forward, such as implementing specific strategies, monitoring progress, connecting with families, or exploring referrals to specialized services. Next steps ensure clarity, shared responsibility, and continuity of support, while maintaining a gentle, nondirective tone.

Group Consultation Reports

A group consultation visit typically occurs when a program would benefit from classroom wide support, rather than support focused on a single child. It allows the QIPS to observe the overall learning environment, routines, educator practices, and group dynamics to identify strengths and opportunities that impact the whole class. These visits help providers enhance inclusivity, strengthen team capacity, and ensure that universal strategies are in place to support regulation, engagement, and positive interactions for all children.

Report includes:

- **Classroom-wide strengths** - This section highlights the collective competencies of the educator team and the overall functioning of the classroom. Strengths may include positive relationships, responsive interactions, effective routines, inclusive practices, or well-designed learning environments. Naming strengths reinforces what is working well and provides a foundation for building further capacity.
- **Opportunities to enhance routines and transitions** - This identifies moments in the daily flow where small adjustments could improve predictability, engagement, or regulation for the whole group. Opportunities may relate to timing, pacing, visual supports, role clarity among educators, or how children are prepared for upcoming changes. The focus is on gentle, practical enhancements that strengthen consistency and reduce stress for both children and educators.



- **Strategies that support the whole group** - This section outlines universal approaches that benefit all children, not just those with identified needs. Strategies may include coregulation techniques, visual schedules, sensory friendly practices, group management tools, or communication supports. These approaches promote inclusion, reduce barriers, and create a more responsive learning environment for the entire classroom.
- **Environmental recommendations** - This focuses on how the physical and social environment can be adjusted to better support engagement, independence, and regulation. Recommendations may include room layout, traffic flow, material placement, noise management, or creating defined spaces for different types of play. Environmental changes often have the greatest impact with the least disruption, making them a key part of group consultation.
- **Reflective questions to engage educator teams in planning** - These open-ended prompts encourage educators to think critically about their practices, routines, and decision making. Reflective questions help teams explore the “why” behind children’s behaviours and experiences, consider alternative approaches, and co-construct solutions. This supports shared ownership and strengthens professional judgment across the team.

These reports help providers understand not just what was observed, but how those observations translate into meaningful action, shared understanding, **and practices that strengthen inclusivity**, ultimately supporting improved outcomes for children and classrooms.

Working With Families

Meaningful, respectful partnerships with families are central to high-quality, inclusive early learning and child care settings. Families are recognized as experts on their children and are valued collaborators in planning, decision-making, and ongoing support. All interactions with families are grounded in respect, cultural responsiveness, transparency, and a strengths-based view of children as competent, capable, curious and rich in potential.



Role of the Educator Team

Educators are the primary relationship holders with families. They are responsible for establishing and maintaining a trusting, and responsive relationship that supports open communication and shared understanding.

Educators:

- Share observations about children using strength based, factual and child-focused language, connected to everyday experiences within the program.
- Build and maintain responsive, respectful, reciprocal relationships with families that foster trust and a sense of belonging through regular communication.
- Engage with families as partners when discussing children's experiences, emerging needs, and strategies used within the program.
- Implement inclusive, child-focused strategies that promote participation, engagement, and well-being within the early learning environment and reflect on their effectiveness.
- Collaborate with QIPS to support consistent messaging, while maintaining the central role as the family's primary point of contact.
- Support families' participation in decision-making and respect family perspectives, priorities, culture and lived experience.

Role of the Quality and Inclusion Program Specialist (QIPS)

QIPS work collaboratively with educator teams to build capacity, strengthen inclusive practice, and support thoughtful, respectful engagement with families. The QIPS role complements the educator-family relationship by offering coaching, guidance, and expertise, rather than replacing it.

QISP support educator teams by:

- Supporting preparation for sensitive or complex conversations with families through reflective dialogue and collaborative planning.



- Modelling and encouraging the use of clear, strength-based and factual language that reflects children’s capabilities.
- Helping the educator team to explain child-focused strategies, inclusive approaches that support engagement, well-being and participation in the program.
- Assisting the educator team in identifying and explaining next steps, including supports or referrals, when appropriate.
- Supporting educator team and families’ understanding of referral pathways, consent process, and roles of community partners, while ensuring that families feel respected and informed.
- Encouraging inclusive, culturally responsive, and accessible communication practices that reflect the diverse needs of families.

Role of Families

Families are valued partners and active participants in the quality and inclusion process. Their insights, knowledge, and perspectives are essential to understanding each child’s strengths, interests, and needs.

Families are encouraged to:

- Share their knowledge about their child’s experiences, strengths, routines, culture and family priorities.
- Participate in collaborative conversations about strategies, goals and supports.
- Ask questions and seek clarification to support a shared understanding.
- Engage in shared decision-making related to referrals, supports, and next steps, at a pace that feels comfortable for them.
- Work in partnership with the educator team and QIPS to support consistency, inclusion and belonging across environments.



Shared Commitment

- Fostering open, respectful, and responsive communication grounded in trust and relationship.
- Keeping the child's well-being, belonging, engagement and expression at the centre of all discussions and decisions.
- Promoting inclusive practices that reduce barriers, honour diversity and support equitable participation for all children and families.

Role of the Educator Team

The educator team plays a central role in creating high quality, inclusive early learning environments. In alignment with HDLH? the educator team views children as competent, capable, curious and rich in potential, and recognize that inclusive practice is strengthened through relationships, reflection and collaboration.

The educator's team daily interactions with children and families provide essential knowledge that informs inclusive planning, responsive strategies and shared decision-making. The role is foundational to supporting children's belonging, well-being, engagement and expression.

The educator team contributes to quality and inclusion by:

- Planning and intentionally designing a quality and inclusive learning environment
 - Educator teams thoughtfully plan and design learning environments that communicate to all children and families that they are valued, capable, and welcome. Where questions or challenges arise, educator teams may engage collaboratively with the QIPS, to support a physical and social environment that reflects respect for diversity, promotes equity, and invites meaningful participation for every child.
- Sharing observations and insights from daily interactions
 - Educator teams share strengths-based, factual observations grounded in children's everyday play, routines, and relationships.



These insights inform collaborative reflection with QIPS and support shared understanding of children's participation, interests, and learning.

- Co-implementing strategies and documenting progress
 - Educator teams implement inclusive, child-focused strategies within the classroom, while QIPS support reflection, and alignment with inclusive practice. Documentation is used as a shared tool to reflect on what is working, identify emerging needs, and guide next steps together.
- Communicating openly and collaboratively with QIPS and supervisors
 - Ongoing communication supports consistency, transparency, and shared responsibility. Educator teams and QIPS engage in regular dialogue to discuss observations, strategies, successes, and challenges, strengthening inclusive practice through collaboration.
- Engaging in reflective meetings with QIPS when needed or possible
 - Meetings with QIPS provide opportunities for coaching, shared inquiry, and reflective dialogue. These conversations focus on strengthening environments and inclusive practices.
- Collaboratively developing Individual Support Plans (ISPs)
 - Educators, families and QIPS work together to develop ISPs that are strengths based, child centred, and embedded in everyday practice. Educator teams contribute their deep knowledge of the child and classroom context, while QIPS support planning, alignment, and inclusion focused strategies.
- Co-initiating and supporting case conferences, transition to school meetings
 - Educator teams play a key role in identifying when collaborative planning is needed and, with support from QIPS, initiating and organizing case conferences and transition meetings. Together, educator teams and QIPS support families in planning for continuity,



and successful transitions.

- Engaging in shared reflective practice
 - In alignment with HDLH?, educator teams and QIPS reflect together on environments, interactions, and strategies. This shared reflection supports professional learning, continuous improvement, and the removal of barriers to quality and inclusion.
- Building strong, trusting relationships with families
 - Educator teams remain the primary relationship holders with families. QIPS support educator teams by providing guidance to support family conversations, while respecting and reinforcing the educator–family relationship.
- Maintaining ongoing developmental monitoring
 - Tools such as ASQ and LookSee are used collaboratively to support reflection and conversation. Educator teams share insights with QIPS to support a holistic, strengths-based understanding of every child.

Shared Responsibility and Expertise

The educator team’s deep knowledge of children, families, and the classroom environment is at the heart of quality and inclusion work. When this knowledge is shared and strengthened through the coaching, mentoring, and inclusive support of QISS, educators and QIPS work together as partners to support responsive, reflective, and inclusive practice that benefits children, families, and educator teams.

Case Conferences & Team Meetings

QIPS may support with:

- Completing developmental observations and initiating necessary referrals
- Supporting the creation of the Individual Support Plan
 - Requirements:



- An ISP is required for every child with special needs enrolled in licensed child care, EarlyON Child and Family Centre and approved recreation program.
- Developed before starting in a program, or as soon as a need is identified; reviewed at least annually and whenever needs change.
- Families, the child (as appropriate), professionals, or others who support the child, must be consulted.
- Identify the need:
 - Collaboratively support the development of an ISP for children who have an identified need within the program.
 - Work with the team to gather relevant documentation, including observations, developmental checklists, and professional assessments.
- Working together to navigate the process of setting up case conferences and transition to school plans
 - Responding to program requests for support in planning and facilitating meetings.
 - Cocreate an agenda that begins with family goals, child strengths and interests, and aligns with the HDLH foundations (Belonging, Well-Being, Engagement, Expression).
 - Help keep the discussion child centered, positive, and solution focused.
 - Foster collaborative and inclusive planning with families when additional services or supports may be helpful.



- Preparing documentation and language with educators to support them in having conversations with families
- Facilitating communication between families, educators, supervisors, and partners
- Clarifying roles, next steps, and follow-up actions

These meetings ensure shared understanding and coordinated support.

Referrals & Follow-Up

QISS Support & Referral Process

Individualized support is initiated when an early learning team identifies that a child may benefit from additional assistance beyond what is typically provided in the group setting. This process may involve collaboration with QIPS, who works alongside the early learning team, to assess needs and develop appropriate strategies.

Where appropriate, individualized support may also include access to further services as outlined below in the Referral Process. This ensures that children receive timely and targeted interventions that promote inclusion, a sense of belonging, development, and overall well-being.

How QISS Supports Early Learning Teams

QISS works alongside educators to:

- Observe patterns in a child's engagement, participation, or regulation that may benefit from additional support.
- Collaborate with early learning teams to assess and document areas of concern using structured tools and templates (ex: behaviour tracking, ASQ).
- Review observations and strategies already implemented to understand what has been effective and what may need more consideration.



- Explore how the environment, routines, interactions and transitions influence the child's engagement and identify helpful adjustments.
- Provide coaching and resources to support educators and guide respectful conversations with families.
- Outline the referral process and answer questions for educators and families.
- Assist educators in understanding referral pathways, gathering documentation, communicating with families, and monitoring progress through follow-up.

When a Referral May Be Appropriate

A referral may be needed when:

- A child shows ongoing challenges beyond general classroom strategies with participation, regulation, or engagement.
- Strategies have been attempted but additional support is required.
- The classroom environment needs additional support to meet diverse needs.
- A program requires tailored strategies to ensure responsive and inclusive practices.

Referrals may be initiated by early learning teams, supervisors, external supporting agencies or families.

Steps in the Referral Process

QIPS supports teams with each stage, including:

1. Scheduling initial observations
2. Gathering observations and developmental checklists
3. Supporting programs with supportive language and information to share with families
4. Participating as support in family meetings if required



5. Completing the QISS Referral Form with signed family consent
6. Attaching relevant documents (ISPs, screening summaries, observations, professional recommendations)
7. Engaging in ongoing collaborative follow-up

QISS remains available throughout the process to provide guidance, coaching, and inclusive support.

Program Annual Goal Setting

Goal setting is to support intentional, reflective, and continuous improvement across programs by identifying meaningful priorities that strengthen pedagogy, inclusion, and educator practice. Through collaborative reflection, goal setting helps teams understand where they are now, where they want to grow, and why that growth matters for children, families, and educators. Well-developed goals provide a clear focus for the year, align practice with the program's values and *How Does Learning Happen?* and create a shared sense of direction and accountability.

QIPS' do not set goals *for* programs; rather, they work **alongside educator teams** to guide thinking, deepen reflection, and support implementation and follow through.

QIPS support occurs continuously throughout the year and is not intended to be a onetime activity. Goal setting is a living process and living document that evolves as programs reflect, learn, and grow over time. Through ongoing dialogue, coaching, site visits, and reflective check-ins, goals are revisited, monitored, and refined to remain responsive to emerging needs, strengths, and priorities. This continuous approach ensures that goal setting stays meaningful, relevant, and embedded in everyday practice, supporting quality sustained improvement rather than static compliance, and builds educator capacity through mentorship, collaboration, and ongoing support.

Overview of the Annual Goal Setting Cycle

- **Preparation and Orientation**

QISS communicates annual expectations, provides goal-setting tools, clarifies timelines, and supports understanding of inclusive and reflective practices.



- **Collaborative Reflection**

QIPS facilitates reflective discussions across pedagogical areas including responsive relationships, learning through exploration, educators as co-learners, environments, documentation, reflective practice, and inclusive services.

- **Goal Development and Documentation**

QIPS collaborates with educator teams to develop meaningful, measurable, and achievable goals that reflect program strengths, challenges, and inclusive values.

- **Review and Feedback**

QIPS reviews submitted goals, provides written feedback, and ensures alignment with pedagogy, inclusion, and accountability expectations.

- **Ongoing Monitoring and Support**

QIPS provides continuous coaching, mentoring, site visits, and reflective check-ins throughout the year to support implementation.

- **Year-End Reflection and Next-Step Planning**

Programs submit year-end reflections to QISS, who support celebration of successes and identification of priorities for the next cycle.

Enhanced Funding for Group & Individual Support

DNSSAB may provide Enhanced Funding to support and strengthen inclusive learning environments and support children's belonging, well-being, engagement, and expression when additional staffing or resources are required to meet established strategies. This funding is intended to enhance inclusion in the classroom and cannot be used to meet minimum staffing ratios under the Child Care and Early Years Act.

Enhanced Funding may be accessed through Individual Support or Group Support, based on needs identified through reflective practice and collaboration with Quality and Inclusion Support Services (QISS).

Detailed eligibility criteria, roles, and processes are outlined in the Enhanced Staffing – OnePage Overview, available on the DNSSAB website.



QIPS support programs in determining eligibility and navigating the request process when needed.

If funding is approved, programs are responsible for submitting monthly timesheets and invoices to the QISS Supervisor for review and approval.

Specialized Equipment vs. Regular Inventory

Based on the recommendation of a third-party specialist, DNSSAB may provide Specialized Equipment to support children's belonging, well-being, engagement, and expression when equipment is required to enhance participation, safety, or accessibility within the learning environment.

Specialized Equipment is identified through an Individual Support Plan (ISP) and is distinct from typical classroom materials. Requests are supported through collaboration with Quality and Inclusion Support Services (QISS) and a third-party specialist, when the equipment is required to support inclusion and is not available through other means.

Items considered part of regular classroom inventory remain the responsibility of the program.

Detailed eligibility criteria, examples, and the application process are outlined in the Specialized Equipment – OnePage Overview, available on the DNSSAB website.

QIPS support programs in determining eligibility and navigating the request process when needed.

Shared Goal

To create inclusive, high quality early learning environments across the Nipissing district where every child, family, and educator feels included, supported, valued, and able to thrive.



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