

Childminder agencies: inspection handbook

Guidance and evaluation schedule

This document contains instructions and guidance for inspectors preparing for, and conducting, inspections of childminder agencies. It also contains the evaluation schedule for inspectors on judging the effectiveness of the childminder agency and sets out the main types of evidence that inspectors will collect and analyse.

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Introduction

1. This handbook sets out the main activities undertaken by inspectors who conduct inspections of childminder agencies in England from 1 April 2015. It also sets out the judgements that inspectors will make and on which they will report.

2. The handbook has two parts.

Part one: How childminder agencies will be inspected – this contains instructions and guidance for inspectors preparing for, and conducting inspections.

Part two: The evaluation schedule – this contains guidance for inspectors on judging the effectiveness of the childminder agency and sets out the main types of evidence that inspectors will collect and analyse.

3. This handbook should be read in conjunction with 'The framework for the regulation of childminder agencies'¹ and 'Childminder agency handbook'.²

Part one: How childminder agencies will be inspected

4. A childminder agency is obliged by law to:³

- regulate the suitability of childminders in the agency, including, where appropriate, their capacity to deliver the statutory requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage⁴
- support the training and development of childminders
- provide a clear way for parents and carers to find and work with a childminder registered with the agency
- improve the quality of provision
- monitor the standard of care and education provided by the childminders they register.

5. Childminder agencies are required to register with and be inspected by Ofsted. Ofsted will undertake the first inspection of newly registered agencies within 12 months of the date that an agency registers its first childminder. Subsequent inspections will take place within 36 months of the first or previous inspection.

¹ 'Framework for the regulation of childminder agencies', Ofsted, August 2014;

www.gov.uk/government/publications/framework-for-the-regulation-of-childminder-agencies

² 'Childminder agency handbook', Ofsted, 2016; www.gov.uk/government/publications/childminder-agency-regulation-guidance-for-agencies-and-ofsted-staff

³ Children and Families Act 2014; <http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2012-13/childrenandfamilies.html>

⁴ 'Statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage' (from September 2014), DfE, 2014; www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-foundation-stage-framework--2

Before the inspection

Inspectors' planning and preparation

6. The lead inspector is allocated a day to prepare for an inspection.
7. The planning day is used to make the initial notification telephone call to the agency, consider information and identify initial lines of enquiry. The lead inspector will consider:
 - any concerns and complaints about the agency raised with Ofsted
 - any regulatory notifications made to Ofsted by the agency
 - any enforcement activity since the previous inspection
 - the list of all childminders registered with the agency to enable selection of the 'sample' (requested during the initial telephone call)
 - the up-to-date statement of purpose
 - the content of the agency's website
 - evidence of any self-evaluation and/or any development plans that the agency has, if this is available electronically
 - previous inspection reports for the agency.
8. The law requires the childminder agency to have a statement of purpose setting out how it meets the legal requirements. This may be available on the agency's website or obtained as part of the inspection preparation. Inspectors will consider the effectiveness of the agency's statement of purpose and take account of any omissions and/or weaknesses when reaching the judgements made at the end of the inspection.
9. Where Ofsted has received information that indicates potential non-compliance with regulatory requirements, the inspector must pursue these as specific lines of enquiry during the inspection. The lead inspector will outline the concern to the childminder agency at the beginning of the inspection.
10. At the end of the planning day, the lead inspector will draw up a short inspection briefing and send this electronically to team inspectors. The team briefing should also be shared with the agency and include:
 - key contact details
 - where the team will be based
 - lines of enquiry/inspection themes
 - the inspection programme
 - a brief summary of contextual information.

Notification of inspection

11. The agency will normally receive a phone call in the morning on the planning day before the start of the on-site inspection. Where there are safeguarding concerns or issues relating to children's welfare, the inspection may be carried out with no notice.
12. The telephone call is the first opportunity to initiate a professional relationship between the inspector and the agency. It should be short and focused on practical issues. Inspectors should not use this conversation to probe or start inspecting.
13. The purpose of the notification call is to:
 - inform the agency of the inspection
 - confirm the agency's registration status and clarify any issues relating to the registration
 - make sure that the agency is aware of its statutory duty to inform childminders and parents of the inspection
 - confirm domestic arrangements, such as base rooms, refreshments and car parking arrangements
 - give the agency the names of the inspectors in the team and their responsibilities and the contact details for the lead inspector
 - make sure the agency is clear about the scope of the inspection, reporting arrangements and any other key issues
 - provide details about how to access documents related to the inspection on the Ofsted website
 - confirm arrangements for access to premises and, if available, space for the inspectors to work
 - confirm the relevant documents needed for the inspector's pre-inspection planning, where possible, including:
 - the list of all childminders registered with the agency and their quality grading (see Annex A)
 - the up-to-date statement of purpose
 - evidence of any self-evaluation or development plans, (if these are available electronically, confirm how inspectors will gain access to them. If the agency's records are held electronically, inspectors should not ask for hard copies unless these are already available, although they may ask for specific reports or documents to be printed)
 - agree arrangements for choosing childminders to be sampled, how they will be contacted and clarify the proposed timetable for these visits

- ask the agency to provide the details of any meetings or training sessions that will occur during the inspection
- arrange the initial meeting with the agency's nominated/lead person
- arrange to hold discussions with key people including the agency leader, key staff, stakeholders, parents and childminders – these may be made by telephone
- provide an opportunity for the agency to raise any questions.

Requests for deferral

14. If an agency requests a deferral of its inspection, the inspector must immediately make Ofsted aware. Ofsted will decide whether the request should be granted in line with the deferral policy. A decision will be made by the Regional Senior HMI on a case by case basis. The absence of the manager is not normally a valid reason for deferral.
15. Inspection should not be delayed if there are any concerns about the agency, or if to do so would mean that Ofsted would not fulfil its legal duty to inspect all agencies within the prescribed cycle. In the case of a serious safeguarding concern, Ofsted will work in partnership with all relevant agencies to ensure the safety and well-being of minded children. Arrangements will be made to ensure that any inspection procedures do not compromise the work of external agencies.

During the inspection

Days allocated to the inspection and inspection team members

16. The inspection will be led by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI); other members of the inspection team comprise other HMI and/or early years inspectors.
17. The size of the inspection team and duration of the inspection will vary according to the size of the childminder agency being inspected and the geographical area the agency covers.

The start of the inspection

18. The lead inspector will hold an initial meeting with the agency's nominated or lead person for the inspection. This meeting **may** take place on site or by telephone. If the initial meeting is on site, all inspectors must show their Ofsted identity badge to confirm their identity. The inspector must allow the agency time to check the identification and to contact Ofsted to confirm it, should they wish to do so.
19. The purpose of this initial meeting is to:

- clarify the role of the key people involved in the inspection, both in the inspection team and the agency, including the lead and other inspectors, the agency's nominated/lead person, and the arrangements for communication between the inspection team and the agency
 - confirm the accuracy of, or any changes to, the information about the agency
 - discuss the available evidence and the lines of enquiry for inspection – the agency's nominated/lead person will have the opportunity to clarify the self-evaluation and to provide any new contextual information
 - agree a timetable for inspection activities, including arrangements for joint observations, meetings and arrangements for completing the sample of childminders
 - confirm arrangements for providing feedback at the end of the inspection, and to agree who will attend the feedback meeting.
20. Depending on the size and location of team members, where appropriate, the inspection team should have a short team meeting to clarify inspection activities, the areas to be explored initially and individual roles and responsibilities.

Gathering and recording evidence

21. The inspector will gather a range of information as evidence to support the inspection. This should include (but is not limited to) the following:
- the geographical spread covered by childminders and the numbers of childminders registered with the agency
 - the profile of children cared for by childminders registered with the agency, such as their ages or whether any have particular needs
 - the length of time that individual childminders have been registered with the agency
 - the range of judgements that the agency has made about the quality of individual childminders' practice
 - the levels of qualifications held by childminders registered with the agency
 - attendance levels at training courses and other events run by or on behalf of the agency.
22. The detail of activities undertaken and discussions held will vary depending on the lines of enquiry for each individual inspection. Inspection activities will be determined by the lead inspector but usually include:
- discussion with agency leaders and managers
 - discussion with agency staff and other key partners, for example training providers

- visits to a sample of childminders registered with the agency, to include gathering their views about the agency, to check the accuracy of the agency's assessment about the support it provides, impact of its training and to see the childminder at work (see below on selecting the sample)
 - observation of recruitment and training sessions wherever possible
 - accompanying a member of agency staff on a 'support/monitoring' visit to a childminder
 - examining relevant records and documents to assess the impact of the agency's services to childminders and parents; this may include training plans and records, recruitment policies and procedures, case files, monitoring and quality assessment records
 - case tracking of childminders who have recently been recruited or undergone training and assessment by the agency.
23. Throughout the inspection, inspectors maintain a record of their evidence. Evidence should be clear, precise, evaluative and sufficient for the purpose of supporting the judgements. Evidence should avoid identifying individual staff, individual children or parents by name, unless this is necessary to aid understanding of the evidence or for the protection of a child or related to a concern that needs to be followed up. Inspectors should identify clearly any information that was provided 'in confidence'.
24. It is important that inspectors record accurately the time spent gathering evidence during a particular activity, for example a meeting with senior leaders, or the time spent gathering evidence during a visit to a childminder as part of the sample.
25. The lead inspector will collate the full evidence base from the inspection team. All inspection records are retained in accordance with Ofsted's published retention policy.
26. Evidence may be scrutinised for retrieval, for quality assurance monitoring, or as a source of evidence in the event of a complaint and where a Freedom of Information request is received.

Sampling childminders

27. The lead inspector will determine the size of the sample of childminders to be visited, depending on the size and geographical area covered by the agency. Normally, the inspection will include visits to around 10% of the childminders registered by the agency. For a small agency, the proportion of childminders visited may be higher than 10%. For a large agency, the lead inspector will need to determine the level and type of sampling, including whether it is appropriate to combine visits to childminders with other sampling activities, including telephone interviews and examination of records.

28. The purpose of the sample is to confirm the accuracy of the agency's evaluation of the quality of practice of the childminders registered with it and to assess the impact of the steps taken by the agency to improve the quality of its childminders. Inspectors will consider the extent to which:
- the agency is accurate in its assessment of individual childminders' strengths and weaknesses
 - any support, guidance or training is helping the childminder to comply with the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage and/or the Childcare Register (if appropriate)
 - any support, guidance or training is helping the childminder to improve their practice
 - monitoring is sufficiently rigorous to improve childminding practice
 - the agency has tackled weaknesses and underperformance
 - the agency has disseminated good practice to childminders.
29. The lead inspector selects the sample of childminders using information provided by the agency and from the initial inspection discussion and agrees with the agency the arrangements for contacting the childminders.
30. The reason for selection should be clearly recorded in the evidence base and explained to the agency. Evidence must refer to any particular line of enquiry that links to concern(s) or any safeguarding concerns. The sample should include, where appropriate:
- childminders assessed by the agency to be of different quality
 - a newly recruited childminder
 - a childminder who has been registered for more than six months
 - childminders operating in different geographical locations
 - a childminder who has been the subject of a safeguarding concern.
31. The sample should also consider different groups of children that are placed with childminders in the agency, using information included in the agency's records or through discussion with staff. The sample of childminders may include those who offer places for:
- a baby
 - a funded two-year-old child
 - a boy and girl who are soon to transfer to school
 - a child with disabilities and/or special educational needs
 - a looked after child or child in need or subject to a child protection plan (a child placed by the local authority)

- a child who speaks English as an additional language
- a boy and/or a girl from any groups who may be disadvantaged
- a child living in an area of high deprivation
- a child for whom the childminder receives the early years pupil premium.

Childminder case records

32. Inspectors should scrutinise a proportion of childminders' case records held by the agency in line with the requirements for registration and the criteria set out in the evaluation schedule. In some cases, and where possible, it may be helpful to review records with senior agency staff. Case records must always include examination of the record of Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks for all childminders registered with the agency. They may also include the following, although this is not an exhaustive list:
- the registration process undertaken for each childminder in the sample
 - training and professional development records
 - evidence of monitoring/inspection of the childminder by the agency
 - the way the agency deals with any complaints and the actions the agency has taken.
33. Inspectors need to scrutinise these records before the visit to the childminder so that they can follow up any lines of enquiry with the childminder.

Visits to childminders who are registered with the agency being inspected

34. Inspectors should explain the purpose of the visit to the childminder as set out above. The visit is **not** an early years inspection. Childminders will not receive a judgement or feedback from the visit.
35. Where the agency has provided business support, inspectors should note the extent to which the childminder feels this has benefited their business.
36. Inspectors observe the childminder's practice to gauge the extent to which children's learning and development are being promoted, how well children are progressing and the effectiveness of care practices. This helps the inspector to assess the effectiveness of the agency's arrangements for assuring the quality of its childminders and the accuracy of the agency's evaluation of quality.
37. When evaluating the impact of the agency's services on the quality of education and care provided by its childminders, inspectors should evaluate:
- the range of activities children take part in and the role of the childminder in ensuring that it promotes their learning
 - the quality and timeliness of the childminder's interactions and interventions with children

- the level of challenge of the activities for the children’s age/stage of development
 - the development levels at which the children are working, including whether they are exceeding, reaching, or likely to reach typical levels of development for their age
 - ways in which communication and language are developed and literacy is taught
 - whether and how the childminder is supporting children to make progress, including how well they are developing skills that help them to be ready for school
 - how well any learning they demonstrate is built upon by the childminder
 - the children’s care arrangements, including intimate care, and the levels of privacy afforded to the child during personal hygiene tasks.
38. Inspectors must check the childminder’s arrangements for safeguarding children, including child protection procedures and what action s/he would take if there are concerns about a child in their care.
39. Inspectors will talk with children and the childminder. Incidental conversations prompted by what is observed can contribute to the evaluation of the agency’s strengths and weaknesses, although the inspector should take care not to disrupt the childminder’s practice and usual routine.
40. Inspectors may ask to see a sample of the childminder’s documentation. The request for documentation should link to any lines of enquiry for the inspection. This may include the childminder’s planning and assessment of children’s learning to support the inspector’s observation of the childminder’s practice. Inspectors should not routinely expect to see detailed written plans for the activities they observe. The inspector should focus on the overall quality of the approach and whether the planning, interventions and evaluation of activities ensure that there is a consistent approach to teaching and learning.
41. Inspectors must hold a discussion with the childminder to gauge the impact of support and training provided by the agency. Inspectors should agree with the childminder when to hold this discussion in order to avoid disrupting the care of the children. They may agree to hold this discussion by telephone later in the day.

Discussion with agency workers

42. Inspectors should, where possible, hold discussions with any childminder agency staff that provide support to the childminders visited as part of the sample. The purpose of this discussion is to explore how the agency is supporting the childminder’s practice and bringing about improvement. Inspectors may also carry out joint observations of childminders’ practice with agency staff.

Observations

43. Inspectors may observe the agency's staff at work in order to evaluate the quality and impact of the agency's work. Observations of a range of sessions/activities could include:
- recruitment visits to childminder applicants
 - assessment/monitoring visits of childminders registered with the agency
 - training sessions delivered and/or commissioned by the agency
 - support meetings run by agency staff
 - drop-in sessions at outreach sites (as applicable).
44. Inspectors will choose which, and how many, sessions and activities to visit in discussion with agency leaders. They will give agency leaders/managers/the nominated person the opportunity to conduct joint observations of agency staff. Observations will enable the inspector to:
- assess the accuracy and quality of the agency's monitoring and evaluation of practice
 - discuss the effectiveness of the agency's performance management arrangements and professional development programme for staff
 - help the agency manager to understand the judgements inspectors are making about the quality and impact of practice and how it might be improved.
45. The leader/manager/nominated person is able to choose whether or not to take part in joint observations. If the opportunity is declined, this should be recorded in the evidence base along with the reason given.
46. Where a joint observation takes place, the inspector and the relevant member of agency staff must discuss their views about the quality of the session/visit. Any differences in the analysis and evaluation of the session/visit should be explored and, where appropriate, be used to inform the judgement made.
47. After a joint observation, the inspector and agency manager/leader should agree how to manage the feedback and when this should take place. The inspector may observe the agency manager/leader giving feedback in order to evaluate the manager's assessment about the quality of practice observed and to observe how s/he conducts and delivers feedback.
48. The inspector should record evidence about joint observations in the usual way, including comments about the quality and accuracy of the agency's evaluation.

Examination of records, policies and procedures

49. Inspectors do not routinely examine all policies, procedures and documentation but **must** check all DBS records and record in their evidence base that they have done so. Inspectors must:
- check DBS records for any agency staff who have direct contact with children
 - check DBS records for individual childminders they visit
 - ask for evidence of how safe recruitment has been carried out for agency staff who do not have direct contact with children
 - ask for evidence of how the agency ensures the ongoing suitability of agency staff, including systems for performance management, and the ongoing suitability of childminders that it has registered
 - check whether all staff and childminders have been trained to understand the agency's safeguarding policy and procedures and that the training enables staff and childminders to identify possible signs of abuse and neglect at the earliest possible opportunity and to respond in a timely and appropriate way.
50. Where appropriate, inspectors should also check a small sample of other policies, procedures and documentation, including:
- a selection of recruitment policies, procedures and records
 - case files
 - qualifications of agency staff
 - a sample of induction, training and professional development records that show
 - how the agency's leaders carry out the performance management of agency staff
 - how the development of childminders helps them improve their practice
 - the agency's complaints record and the actions taken by the agency to deal effectively with complaints raised by childminders and/or parents.

Gathering views from stakeholders

51. As part of the inspection, the agency should arrange for the inspector to see or hear the views of childminders who are registered with the agency. This may include inspectors attending any existing groups that meet during the inspection, or the inspectors may make telephone calls to childminders.
52. The inspector will ask childminders if they have been given an opportunity to give their views about the agency. The content of discussions with childminders

depends on any lines of enquiry identified. The inspector must make it clear that Ofsted will seek to maintain confidentiality of the information provided by the childminder in the evidence collected for the inspection.

53. Inspectors should also speak directly to a sample of parents, including any parents who ask to speak to them; this can be done by telephone. Inspectors will take account of the results of any surveys carried out by the agency and/or commissioned by the agency.

Safeguarding

54. If serious issues of concern arise during the inspection, for example in relation to the failure of the agency or a childminder registered with the agency to follow child protection procedures, the inspector must notify the agency manager as soon as possible unless to do so might put children at further risk. Where relevant, the inspector must ensure that the matter is dealt with appropriately by the agency, for example checking whether a referral is required to the designated officer. If an inspector identifies a serious safeguarding concern during the inspection, they must always follow Ofsted's safeguarding policy and procedures and contact the Applications, Regulatory and Contact team (ARC) team if they need advice.⁵

Reaching final judgements

55. Inspection activity, including observations, should continue throughout the inspection. Inspectors should avoid giving any impression that they have reached final judgements before the inspection has finished.
56. The lead inspector must set aside time towards the end of the inspection to consider the evidence and make the final judgements. At the final team meeting, final judgements should be recorded and key points for feedback identified.
57. Part 2 of this handbook sets out the judgements that inspectors must make and the aspects they should consider when doing so. The inspectors must use professional judgement to weigh up the evidence gathered for each key judgement. It should be considered against the descriptors to reach fair and reliable judgements that reflect the quality of the provision.

Inspection feedback

58. During the inspection, inspectors share emerging findings about the childminder agency's key strengths and weaknesses. Shortfalls that could have an immediate impact on the safety of children, or another serious concern that

⁵ Ofsted's safeguarding policy, July 2015; www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-safeguarding-policy

may lead to the agency being judged ineffective should be brought to the immediate attention of the nominated/lead person.

59. At the end of the inspection the lead inspector must give formal feedback to the agency's nominated/lead person. If the nominated/lead person is not able to be present, the inspector should give feedback to the manager as the representative. The inspector must not defer feedback to another day.
60. The lead inspector must arrange the timing and location of feedback with the agency's nominated/lead person. By agreement with the lead inspector, the agency's nominated/lead person should make arrangements for others to attend the formal feedback session.
61. Before leaving, the lead inspector must ensure that the agency's representative(s) is clear about:
 - the main findings of the inspection and each of the judgements made
 - the need for confidentiality until the agency receives a copy of the final inspection report because the judgements might be amended as a result of quality assurance
 - the main points provided orally in the feedback which will be referred to in the text of the report
 - the recommendations for improvement and any actions as a result of any failures of regulatory requirements
 - procedures leading to the publication of the report
 - the post-inspection survey, which the agency is encouraged to complete
 - the complaints procedure.

Writing the report

62. The lead inspector is responsible for producing the inspection report using the agreed template and guidance and having regard to the 'Guide to Ofsted's house style'.⁶
63. Following a quality assurance process, the agency will receive a draft copy of the report for comment. The agency will, typically, receive an electronic version of the final report within 14 working days of the end of the inspection. In most cases, Ofsted will publish the inspection report on the website within 19 working days of the end of the inspection.
64. Where Ofsted decides that a report should be subject to further quality assurance, the agency will usually receive an electronic version of the final

⁶ Guide to Ofsted's house style, April 2016; www.gov.uk/government/publications/guide-to-ofsteds-house-style

report within 23 days. The report will usually be published on the website within 28 days.

The inspection evidence base

65. The evidence base must be retained for the time specified in Ofsted's guidance.⁷ This is normally six months from when the report is published. Inspection evidence must be kept for longer than six months when:
- an action relates to safeguarding
 - the provision is being monitored or an investigation is linked to the inspection
 - there is a potential or current litigation claim against Ofsted, such as a judicial review
 - there is an appeal against enforcement action, or an ongoing complaint.

Quality assurance

66. Responsibility for assuring the quality of the inspection and the subsequent report lies with Ofsted. The lead inspector is expected to set clear expectations for the team and ensure that those expectations are met. The lead inspector must ensure that all judgements are supported by evidence and that the way in which the inspection is conducted meets the expected standard.
67. Inspections may be subject to quality assurance by senior staff in Ofsted; this may be through a telephone call or a visit. When a quality assurance visit is scheduled, the lead inspector should explain clearly the purpose and likely format of the visit during the initial telephone conversation with the agency manager.

Handling concerns and complaints during the inspection

68. The great majority of our work is carried out smoothly and without incident. If concerns do arise during an inspection visit, they should be raised with the lead inspector as soon as possible while the inspection is taking place. This provides the opportunity to resolve issues before the inspection is completed.
69. If an agency raises a concern, the lead inspector should resolve it if they can, and seek advice where necessary. Any concerns raised and actions taken to redress any problems should be recorded in the inspection evidence.
70. If it has not been possible to resolve concerns during the inspection, the agency may wish to lodge a formal complaint. The lead inspector should ensure that

⁷ Handling and retention of inspection evidence, Ofsted, 2010;
www.gov.uk/government/publications/handling-and-retention-of-ofsted-inspection-evidence.

the agency is informed of the complaints procedure and that it is also available on the Ofsted website.

71. Complaints must be submitted no more than 10 working days after the publication of any inspection report or letter. Ofsted does not normally withhold or withdraw publication of an inspection report or letter while complaints are investigated.

Handling agencies of concern

72. In some circumstances, we may consider a childminder agency to be identified as an agency of concern. An agency would be identified as a 'service of concern' if:
 - it is judged to be ineffective at inspectionor
 - it had been the subject of three or more qualifying complaints since either registration or its last inspection.
73. Any agency falling into this category is overseen by a named HMI. The agency must develop an action plan for improvement and submit this to the HMI. This action plan is subject to monitoring and review, to a frequency determined by the HMI, to support implementation of the action plan.
74. An agency of concern is reinspected within 12 months of the date at which they were identified as being in this category. If the agency has failed to improve within the 12-month period, the normal approach will be to take steps to cancel the agency's registration.

Part two: The evaluation schedule – how childminder agencies will be judged

75. The evaluation schedule sets out the inspection criteria and grade descriptors that guide inspectors when they inspect childminder agencies. It must be used in conjunction with Part one of this document. The evaluation schedule is not exhaustive and inspectors **must** use a best fit approach, applying professional judgement when making each of the judgements.

Judging the overall effectiveness of a childminder agency

71. Inspectors will judge whether the childminder agency is effective or not by taking into account three key judgements:
 - the effectiveness of the leadership and management of the childminder agency
 - the quality of the agency's services

- the impact of the agency's services on the quality of the education and care provided by its childminders.
- 72. In reaching the overall effectiveness judgement, inspectors must evaluate how well the agency:
 - assesses and identifies the quality of childminders registered with it
 - improves and/or maintains the effectiveness of childminding provision
 - ensures that childminding services contribute positively to children's well-being and progress.
- 76. Inspectors must use their professional judgement to assess the impact of any breach of regulation against other aspects of the service provided by the agency. However, it is expected that in an agency judged to be effective, there are no breaches of regulations which directly affect the safety and well-being of children.
- 77. If the inspector considers that a regulation/requirement is not being met, but there is no impact on the quality of the childminding practice, the inspector must state this clearly in the areas for improvement.
- 78. If one or more requirements are not met and there is a direct impact on the quality of the childminding practice, the inspector is likely to judge the leadership and management of the agency as 'ineffective', which is likely to lead to an overall judgement of 'not effective'.

Inspectors should consider:

- the evidence and judgements from across the evaluation schedule
- the context in which the agency works, including specialising in placements for particular groups of children
- how the agency is supporting the improvement of childminding provision in areas of high deprivation
- how the agency is improving the quality of weaker childminders taking account of the length of time that childminders have been registered with it
- the effectiveness of the agency's systems to undertake its role as the regulator of the childminders registered with it
- the seriousness of any failure on the part of the agency to meet regulations and requirements for registration and the potential impact of that failure on childminders registered with the agency and children.

Effective

The childminder agency is effective overall, if:

- the agency understands its own context well, enabling resources to be targeted

appropriately to improve the quality of childminding practice

- the agency provides a good service to childminders, including those who take children in areas of deprivation and the quality is improving strongly
- safeguarding meets requirements and the agency's policies and guidance support childminders well to keep children safe and secure
- the agency's leaders are clear about and fulfil their responsibility as the regulator
- childminders understand the agency's expectations for them to continually improve their practice
- the agency demonstrates that the quality of childminding and children's experiences of the early years are improving as a clear result of its work.

Not Effective

The agency is likely to be judged not effective if:

- any one of the key judgements are ineffective;
and/or
- there are failures in regulatory requirements, which have a significant impact on the safety and well-being, and/or learning and development of children.

The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the childminder agency

79. Inspectors must consider:

- how well leaders and managers demonstrate a clear vision and strategic direction for the agency
- how well leaders and managers promote British values, equality and diversity
- the rigour of self-evaluation in measuring the impact of actions taken and in setting challenging targets for improvement
- the effectiveness of the agency's recruitment policies and procedures to check the suitability of childminders at registration and their continuing suitability to work with young children
- the effectiveness of partnerships with stakeholders and external agencies
- whether systems to monitor the quality of childminding provision and to identify what support is required to improve the provision are robust
- the extent to which leaders and managers take account of the views of parents and children
- the effectiveness of systems for supervision, performance management and continuing professional development of agency staff
- whether arrangements for safeguarding meet requirements.

Grade descriptors: the effectiveness of the leadership and management of the childminder agency

Effective

Leadership and management of the agency are effective, if:

- leaders and managers are ambitious for the agency and communicate high expectations to all in the agency. Self-evaluation is thorough and accurate and the actions taken by the agency to improve the quality of the agency and childminders' services are carefully planned, concerted and effective
- leaders and managers implement robust procedures to support childminders to meet safeguarding and welfare requirements and to ensure that children are safe
- the promotion of British values, equality and diversity can be seen in the agency's policies and practice
- rigorous and precise monitoring enables the agency to have a comprehensive understanding of childminders' strengths and areas for development. Poor performance is tackled systematically leading to improvement
- thorough checks and clear recruitment policies ensure the suitability of agency staff and childminders who apply to register and their continuing suitability to work with young children
- the agency works effectively with partners to provide support for childminders to improve their practice
- leaders and managers take account of the views of parents, childminders and children in order to drive improvement
- regular monitoring and professional development support childminders to improve
- performance management and professional development of agency staff are thorough and lead to improvement
- the commitment of leaders and managers to improving the quality of childminding is such that they do not restrict applications to childminders previously judged as good or better
- childminders who consistently fail to meet the agency's standards are de-registered promptly.

If the inspector considers that a regulation/requirement is not being met, but there is no impact on the quality of the childminding, the inspector must write this as an area for improvement.

Ineffective

Leadership and management are likely to be ineffective if one or more of the following apply:

- leaders and managers do not monitor the work of the agency staff and/or childminders' practice well enough
- known weaknesses in childminders' practice are not tackled quickly enough, so provision is not improving and/or children' health, safety and well-being are at risk
- leaders and managers are not working effectively with external agencies to meet regulations and ensure that prompt action is taken to protect children

and keep them safe from harm

- recruitment processes do not ensure the suitability of agency staff and/or childminders
- professional development does not lead to improvement and, consequently, childminders, whose practice is weak, remain registered with the agency for too long
- self-evaluation is not accurate. As a result, leaders and managers do not secure improvement and hold an overly high view of the quality of childminding practices
- the agency does not promote British values, equality and diversity, or ensure that childminder's registered with it do
- strategies for working with parents and other agencies are weak and parents are not satisfied with the service provided
- arrangements for safeguarding children do not meet statutory requirements and give serious cause for concern.

The quality of the agency's services

80. Inspectors must consider:

- the quality and accessibility to support, training and guidance to ensure childminders meet the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage framework and/or requirements of the Childcare Register
- how well support is targeted to help childminders improve their practice
- the breadth and range of services provided to childminders to enable them to improve the quality of their provision
- the effectiveness and accuracy of the agency's assessment of the needs of registered childminders and the extent to which support meets their needs
- any observations of training and support work taking place during the inspection period.

Effective

The quality of the childminder agency's services is effective if:

- high levels of participation in the agency's well planned programme of training enable childminders to improve their practice
- the agency supports childminders to meet all statutory requirements by providing high-quality policies and guidance
- childminders are challenged and supported well to improve weaker aspects of their practice through individual programmes of support that develop their knowledge skills and confidence
- childminders and parents are positive about the services the agency provides and can point to the impact they have had
- belonging to the agency enables childminders to learn from best practice and to work together to improve outcomes for children

- childminders develop knowledge, skills and confidence to improve their practice because of the broad range of events and activities the agency provides.

Ineffective

The quality of the agency's services is likely to be ineffective if one or more of the following apply:

- childminders are not improving their practice because the agency is failing to provide quality training and/or support
- opportunities for childminders to attend training are not frequent enough and do not lead to improvement in practice
- services provided do not match the needs of the childminders registered
- the agency is slow to tackle weak practice
- lack of clear policies and guidance mean that childminders are not meeting statutory requirements
- childminders and parents are dissatisfied with the agency's services.

The impact of the agency's services on the quality of education and care provided by its childminders

81. Inspectors must consider how well the agency assures itself:

- that children are kept safe at the childminder provision
- of the quality and range of experiences offered to children and opportunities provided for their parents to be involved in their learning
- of the progress made by children in childminder provision registered with the agency, especially in their speech, language development and ability to communicate
- that gaps in achievement between groups of children in the local area, particularly those in receipt of government funding, are narrowing
- that childminders use any additional funding they receive for children in their care effectively
- that the quality of provision in childminding is continually improving.

Effective

The agency can demonstrate that:

- all childminders registered with it meet safeguarding requirements and, as a result, children are safe and secure
- childminders provide children with a wide range of experiences that are well suited to their development needs
- advice and guidance to parents support children's development needs
- childminders understand how to develop children's skills in communication and language and so meet children's learning and development needs
- childminders assess children's skills and abilities well and plan targeted

programmes to help children at risk of falling behind to catch up with their peers

- additional funding is targeted effectively and is making a significant difference to raising the development levels of children with funded places
- training and development provided by the agency have made a positive impact on improving the quality of childminding practices.

Ineffective

The quality of services is likely to be ineffective where the agency has not identified and/or tackled weaknesses so that one or more of the following apply:

- not all childminders meet safeguarding requirements and, as a result, children are at risk
- the quality of experiences provided for children is poor and consequently gains in learning and development are too slow
- parents are not engaged with or supported to help their children to develop
- childminders' knowledge of the 'Statutory framework for the early years foundation stage' is weak, particularly in communication and language. Consequently, children are not making enough progress
- childminders do not assess children's skills and abilities well enough to be able to plan appropriate support for children who lag behind to catch up with their peers
- additional funding is not targeted well and/or the agency has no records of how additional funding is spent.

Annex A – Childminder Records

Childminder's name	Address	Contact Number	Date joined the agency	Evaluation of quality	Number and age range of children	Does the childminder look after any children: (tick all that apply)				
						with disabilities and/or special educational needs	from any groups who may be disadvantaged	entitled to the Early Years Pupil Premium	placed by the local authority	who speak English as a second language

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