

## **Case Study**

### **St Bede Childminder Agency**

#### **Background:**

St Bede Academy, Bolton was the first school in the country to launch its Childminder Agency in October 2014 as part of an on-going commitment to wrap around childcare. A charity organisation, St Bede's Childcare operates throughout Wigan, Leigh and Bolton. It comprises of eight out of school clubs and six nurseries of which one is on the St Bede Academy site. St Bede Academy is a church school that has served the community for 160 years. As a growing two form entry Outstanding Primary School, the decision was taken to expand childcare provision through establishing a Childminder Agency. This would enable the school to offer families a wider range of childcare options that reflected the same high quality of the schools early years provision.

#### **Purpose for setting up a Childminder Agency:**

The Governors understood that not all parents would like to use a nursery or after school facility for their child and childminders were still very much a favourable choice for many parents. The breakfast and after school club on the school site has been established for ten years. Adding nurseries into the project was a natural progression and therefore when the opportunity arose to register a Childminder Agency, it was seen as the means of offering additional childcare options at a reasonable cost.

The Governors believed that the reputation for quality practice both in the school and in the childcare sites and the skills, knowledge and expertise of the staff could be utilised when setting up a Childminder Agency.

Throughout the pilot St Bedes approached all the schools that they serve through their breakfast and after school clubs and completed a parental questionnaire about the demand, although this came back as very low, it was acknowledged that some parents did not use the breakfast and after school club because they had a preference to use a childminder.

ST Bedes plan to be able to stretch the offer of flexibility for the families, so for example, a parent may need a 7am start with a childminder, who then takes the child to the school nursery setting at 9am and at 3.30pm they are then able to access after school club until 6pm if needed. The childminder could also offer flexibility at the end of the day should the parents require childcare until 7pm.

An example of this is the service that has been taken up by one of the St Bedes parents who uses St Bedes for more flexible childcare. The agency registered childminder looks after a child from 7am and then takes them to St Bede School for 9am. After school the child then accesses Morris Green OOSC until either her Mum or the childminder collects her.

### **The St Bede Academy Childminder Agency model:**

The model was designed to be a pick and mix style approach for childminders, they choose how much they pay and what level of support they require from the St Bede Academy staff to fulfil their role. The Agency offers childminders the support they need to set up their own business. They support them with the initial registration and training process whilst offering business support where needed. They also provide policies and procedures and can provide that crucial support network for lone working professionals. The main benefit to St Bede's of having a Childminder Agency is that flexible wrap around childcare is available to meet the individual needs of families.

### **Registering the Agency:**

The St Bede Academy was the first organisation to register as a Childminder Agency. Having been part of the Childminder Agency pilot programme in 2013, the Academy had a very clear vision of what they wanted to achieve. The experience of the pilot and the information provided in the "Step by Step Guidance to setting up a Childminder Agency" were used to guide the staff through the registration process. The registration visit was undertaken by two Ofsted inspectors as it was the first one to be completed. The inspectors asked questions that confirmed that the staff were clear about both the purpose of the Agency and their commitment to the childminders that were recruited.

### **Recruitment:**

The St Bede Academy Childminder Agency has recruited its first childminder who had previously worked in one of the nurseries. This has been useful as she already has links with St Bedes Childcare and is known to parents. The parents that use the childminder like the flexibility of the model of childcare that she is able to offer and use her for a wraparound service as she is prepared to care for children outside the hours of 8am and 6pm. Many parents in this area have irregular working shift patterns so the Academy believes that this flexibility will appeal to parents.

St Bede's are now moving forwards with the recruitment of both childminders and agency staff to ensure the progression of the agency supports the 30 hour introduction in September 2017 and we can offer a mixed bag of provision for those who need it.

### **Qualifications:**

Each new childminder taken onto the agency's books is provided with a complete training package tailored to the childminder's specific needs. Every new childminder receives full training in key elements such as policies and procedures, food hygiene, first aid, safeguarding, finances, EYFS training and business support. Additional skills can be added such as special needs, behaviour management and IT. All training takes place using the on-site facilities at St Bede's.

St Bede's can offer training from NVQ's right through to the Early Years Teacher degree which they believe will be a selling point of the Childminder Agency.

### **Childminder support:**

St Bede's Childminder Agency offers a variety of packages of support. The prices range from £8 to £20 per week depending on the amount of support required by the childminder, and whether they are new or established childminders. The business packages available to childminders joining the

agency include networking sessions, venue, home and resource checks, telephone support and access to the sensory room.

St Bede's believe that they are able to offer the ideal package to support both new and established childminders.

**Quality Assurance:**

The agency is responsible for inspecting the work of each childminder on its books. Agency managers audit every childminder on a frequent basis. The agency will provide pre-inspection advice and development as well as tracking support. The regular involvement with each childminder will ensure that Agency managers can monitor the quality of the provision. Visit reports will be available on the St Bede Childminder website as a way of promoting each childminder's business.

**Next steps:**

St Bede's Childminder Agency joined the agency pilot scheme in 2013 and have used their experiences to develop a model which they believe will be attractive to new childminders. The focus is now on recruiting more childminders so that they can offer families in the community access to flexible childcare that meets their individual needs.

**Lessons learned:**

- It took much longer to complete the registration process than first anticipated.
- It is important to focus on effective recruitment. Research the existing childminder market in the area. When recruiting childminders ensure that your charges are realistic and can be justified.
- Be clear about the market you are aiming for. Different working hours / flexibility can be a selling point in the recruitment of childminders and also for parents looking for childcare to meet their working pattern.