

The Northumberland Church of England Academy Childminder Agency

Background:

The Northumberland Church of England Academy serves the communities of Ashington, Newbiggin and Lynemouth in the south east of Northumberland. This is an ex- mining community and an area of high unemployment. The Academy is an all through school offering early learning and education for two to nineteen year olds. It is made up of five primary campuses; one secondary campus and a special school for children with moderate and severe learning difficulties. The Academy offers breakfast and after school clubs at each of its primary sites to children from Reception age upwards. In 2015, the Academy extended its provision through the opening of three nurseries for two year olds.

Purpose of setting up a Childminder Agency.

It has always been the vision of the Governors and Senior leadership team of The Northumberland Church of England Academy to offer provision from birth. Having explored the possibility of setting up full day care, the Governors decided not to go along this route as there were already two well established day nurseries within the area and the ethos of the Academy was to work in partnership and not in competition in the community. When the possibility arose to set up a Childminder Agency, the Governors saw this as the means to offer parents the opportunity to share the ethos of the Academy from birth.

The Academy had considered working with local childminders but the benefits of establishing their own Childminder Agency would ensure that the service would reflect the quality of the Early Years provision within the Academy and enable families to access high quality childcare from birth.

The decision to establish a Childminder Agency that was made by the Governors in 2014 was strengthened further by the announcement by the Government of the 30 hours childcare offer for three and four year olds. The Childminder Agency was seen as the route that the Academy would offer to meet the needs of the parents who were eligible for the additional fifteen hours.

Registering the Agency:

The process of registering the Childminder Agency was straightforward but took a significant length of time from submitting the application to receiving a date for the registration visit. The Ofsted "Step by Step Guidance to registering as a Childminder Agency" booklet was extremely useful in outlining the main points in the process. The Statement of Purpose also took time to write but is still used as an excellent tool for keeping the focus of the Childminder Agency at the forefront of plans.

The Ofsted registration visit was very thorough. The two inspectors ensured that the information in the Statement of Purpose was accurate and that the Childminder Agency staff had all the procedures and policies in place and were clear about how the Agency would be run.

Recruitment:

The Academy took the decision that all their agency childminders would be self – employed. The recruitment process began as soon as the Ofsted registration was agreed in November 2014. Advertising targeted both existing childminders and those who were new to the profession. The agency manager attended several childminder drop-ins and network meetings to explain the purpose of the agency to existing Ofsted registered childminders. The recruitment process took longer than expected. Existing childminders were reluctant to join the agency as their occupancy levels were high and they believed parents valued their Ofsted inspection grading which, for the majority in the area, was good or outstanding. Existing childminders were also able to buy into a service level agreement with the Local Authority for on-going training.

The decision was made to target new childminders and to target parents of pupils attending the Academy. Following discussions with the local further education college, a CACHE Level three training bundle was developed which included Paediatric First Aid, Safeguarding and a Level three child development unit as well as training in the running of a business. The course would be delivered over fourteen weeks. Although this would not give participants a full level three qualification, it was agreed that it would provide them with the necessary knowledge and skills to be able to join the agency, with the opportunity to continue at the college to gain the Level three in either Early Years or Playwork. Northumberland College will offer this bundle as an on-line qualification to other Childminder Agencies across the country. The Northumberland Church of England Academy will fund the course for those childminders who join the Agency with the expectation that they will pay back the costs of tuition once they are childminding and earning an income. On going support will be provided by the Academy to help the childminders put the theory into practice and facilitate the opportunity for them to spend time in the Academy two year old provision to consolidate their understanding of the delivery of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

A webpage is being set up on the Academy website. It will provide information and pen portraits of registered childminders and information about the Childminding Agency. The Statement of Purpose will also be available on the webpage.

Qualifications:

The Northumberland Church of England Academy believes that high quality early years experiences for young children are essential. This is reflected in the importance that the Academy places on qualifications and training, and the requirement that all NCEA childminders will have a relevant Level three qualification.

In April 2016 our first childminder will be registered. As a member of support staff in the Academy Centre for children with additional needs, she is qualified to Level three with a specialism for children with specific needs. This will add a further dimension to the service we will be able to offer as a Childminder Agency. The first child that she will be childminding is a pupil from The Centre who has profound needs. Our childminder works with him in the Centre and will be providing additional wrap – around care out of school hours and at weekends. This will ensure that there is continuity of care for the child and that he will be looked after by a highly well trained childminder who is competent and experienced in meeting his needs. His parents are delighted that this service is

available to them as previously they were unable to access any additional childcare. They are also reassured that the care he receives will meet his complex needs.

Two parents have also expressed an interest in registering as childminders with the agency, are prepared to undertake the qualification and are in the process of completing the application process.

Childminder support:

Registering with the Northumberland Church of England Academy Childminder Agency will provide childminders with a comprehensive package of support that will guide them through the registration process and with delivering a high quality childcare service.

In the first year of registration, childminders will receive at least one visit per half term. Following the registration visit, an action plan will be drawn up and subsequent visits will focus on the progress of the actions identified and provide advice and guidance. In the third term an inspection visit will be undertaken. This is likely to be undertaken by an experienced Ofsted inspector on a freelance consultancy basis. The senior leadership team believe that this will support the commitment to high quality childcare that the Academy believe to be essential for all children. In subsequent years, childminders will receive three visits per year. Two of these visits will be to support the actions identified following the inspection visit and provide advice and guidance. The third will be the annual inspection visit. Should a childminders provision be considered to be less than good quality, additional visits will be undertaken to address the areas for improvement.

In addition to visits, childminders will have a personal training plan and will be able to access a range of early years training. This will include access to the Professional Learning Programme offered to the Academy Early Years staff and also bespoke training for childminders. Childminders will also be able to spend time in the two year old provision.

Childminders will be supported with policies and procedures that reflect the existing Early Years policies of the Academy. All documentation will be standardised.

Quality Assurance:

In line with the findings from the EPPE research and the interim report from the SEED research project, the main focus of the Northumberland Church of England Academy Childminder Agency is to provide high quality early years and childcare for the community it serves. The comprehensive programme of advice, guidance, support and training and the schedule of visits will ensure that the service that the childminders provide will be of the same quality as children experience in our settings and classes. This will support the seamless provision for those children eligible for the thirty hours childcare from the Academy nursery classes to the childminders home.

In the on-going assessment of the quality of provision, the NCEA Childminder Agency manager, a qualified teacher, will use the "Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale" by Thelma Harms, Debbie Cryer and Richard M Clifford. In addition, the Ofsted framework for the inspection of childminders will also be used. A grade will be awarded following the final visit in the third term following registration.

One visit per year will be undertaken by a freelance Ofsted trained Early Years inspector.

Next steps:

The NCEA Childminder Agency will continue to recruit more childminders in order that when the 30 hour funded entitlement for three and four year olds is implemented in September 2017, there will be capacity to meet the needs of parents and offer seamless provision of high quality childcare to all eligible children. In addition, the Academy will be able to offer high quality childcare for children from birth through a network of knowledgeable, well trained, caring childminders who share the Academy vision in recognising the benefits of quality early years provision.

The Academy has been asked to support schools who are considering setting up a CMA. NCEA staff visited the REACH Academy in Feltham to share their expertise in the registration process and the benefits to the school of establishing a CMA.

Lessons learned:

- Allow plenty of time for the registration of the Agency and the registration of childminders.
- The process for undertaking all the necessary checks on prospective childminders took much longer than first anticipated. Much of this time was spent finding the right person to provide the information. This was particularly true of the Local Authority check where there was caution about the sharing of information and the purpose of the request due to a lack of understanding of what a Childminder Agency is.
- Recruitment was, and still is, an issue. Existing childminders were very cautious about the Childminder Agency and viewed it as a threat to them. Having spent time explaining the purpose of the Agency and the emphasis the Academy will place on quality, closer working relationships are being developed.
- There is a substantial amount of work involved with setting up and running a Childminder Agency. It is essential that to ensure quality, the support and guidance for childminders is seen as a priority.
- Marketing is crucial in helping parents and other professionals with their understanding of the Childminder Agency concept.