

Information for parents and carers using childcare services

What we do

We register and inspect those who provide childcare for children aged from birth up to their eighteenth birthday. We do this to help reassure you that when your children are in registered childcare they are cared for by people who are suitable.

We hold two different registers for childcare providers: the Early Years Register and the Childcare Register. The Childcare Register is in two parts – a compulsory part and a voluntary part.

Some types of care do not need to register with us. You can find details in our fact sheet *Registration not required*, which is available from www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/080134.

Most people who want to provide childcare for children aged from birth to the 31 August following their fifth birthday (known as the early-years age group) **must** register on the Early Years Register and deliver the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) – a framework for the education and welfare of young children.

People who want to provide childcare for children older than the early-years age group but under eight years old must register on the compulsory part of the Childcare Register.

Those who do not have to register may choose to join the voluntary part of the Childcare Register.

No matter which register people join, we will be able to:

- register the childcare provided, suspend registration and cancel registration
- inspect the childcare provided, usually without arranging this beforehand (an unannounced visit)

- investigate those who do not keep to the standards and regulations, and
- take enforcement action in serious cases.

Registration

We register people who want to provide childcare. For everyone who applies to register we carry out a series of checks. These include a check against police records on the person applying to register.

For providers who must register on the Early Years Register, we also carry out other checks such as checks on their health and checks with the local authority. We check some other people who are part of the setting, for example we check managers of nurseries and playgroups. We do not check other people who work there, but we expect the person who registers with us to do so.

Our inspectors also visit providers who must register on the Early Years Register to carry out an interview and to check that the premises and equipment are suitable to be used for childcare. Inspectors must be sure that applicants can deliver the Early Years Foundation Stage and meet all the requirements for registration. For full details of the Early Years Foundation Stage, see www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/eyfs.

We do not visit providers who want to join the Childcare Register, although we do carry out some checks, such as a check of their police record. We also ask them to send us a valid first aid certificate. As part of their application, providers who want to join the Childcare Register must sign to say that they agree to meet a set of requirements about:

- the people who have access to children
- the premises, and
- the childcare provided.

You can find the requirements of the Childcare Register in our guidance for providers, *Guide to Registration on the Childcare Register*, which is available from www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/080032.

Inspection

We inspect providers on the Early Years Register at least once every three to four years and write a report, which we publish on our website. Your childcare provider should give you a copy of this report. It will tell you about the quality of the childcare service that you use – what it does well and what it needs to improve.

Each year we inspect a percentage of those who are registered on the Childcare Register and check that they keep to the requirements. If the care provided is in the child's own home, we will ask permission from the child's parents to enter the premises before the inspection. After these inspections we write a letter to the

provider. If the provider does not meet all the requirements, we tell them what needs to be put right. We publish copies of these letters on our website.

Investigation

We will follow up any concerns that you or others raise with us about whether providers can meet the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage or the Childcare Register (or both). We will decide whether they are still suitable for registration, or if they need to take any action to put matters right. To help us decide, we visit the provider or ask them to look into the concerns and report back to us. If the provider must take action as a result of our investigation, we will publish the concern and the action taken on our website.

We do not follow up complaints about matters that are not related to the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage or the Childcare Register, such as complaints about fees or other contractual arrangements with your childcare provider.

You can find more information about sharing concerns with us in *Building better children's services: concerns and complaints about childcare providers*, which is available from www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/080120.

Enforcement

If providers do not meet the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage or the Childcare Register, we set out the action they must take to put things right in a letter called a 'notice to improve'. In most cases, the provider will make the changes needed. However, if they do not put things right, we take firmer action that we can enforce by law.

The action we take depends on the risk to children. It can range from issuing a legal notice setting out what the provider must do, to cancelling their registration where we have serious concerns about the quality of care.

Those who choose to be registered on the voluntary part of the Childcare Register can continue to run their childcare, even if we have cancelled their registration. This is because they do not have to register to run their childcare, and only do so on a voluntary basis. We cannot inspect, or take other action against, any provider who is not registered with us, and does not need to be.

You can find more information about our regulatory role in the *Framework for the regulation of those on the Early Years and Childcare Registers*, available from www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/080024.

Information about childcare choices

If you want information about the availability of childcare, you should contact your local authority's family information service. They hold information on the facilities that childcare providers in your area offer. You can find your local family information service through the national family information service website at

http://www.familyinformationservices.org.uk/index.php?option=com_comprofiler&task=userslist&listid=7&Itemid=72

How to use our information to help you choose childcare

Every provider registered with us has their own page on our website. You can find the pages for childcare providers in your area by putting your postcode into the search box on the following page:

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Inspection-reports/Early-years-and-childcare>

Each provider's page gives a range of information about their childcare, such as:

- their name, address and telephone number (unless they are a childminder or a home childcarer. If you want to use this type of childcare you can get their contact details from your local authority if the provider has agreed to make these available)
- previous inspection reports we have written about the childcare
- details of any conditions we have put on the provider's registration, for example about the numbers of children they may care for or whether they are allowed to care for children overnight
- information about any concerns or complaints people have made to us about the provider, if we judged that some action was necessary to put things right
- details of any action taken by us or the provider to make sure they continue to meet the requirements for registration, for example details of any legal notices we have issued.

We do not publish any information about complaints or other steps taken where the provider did not need to take the action to meet the requirements for registration. However, all childcare providers must keep their own record of complaints and you can ask to see their record when you visit to see whether the childcare is suitable for your child.

If you notice on our website that the provider has had complaints or other action taken, you may also want to ask them about this when you visit. You could ask

them about what steps they took to put matters right, and what they are doing to make sure they keep to the improvements they have made.

If the provider's record says that we have put conditions on their registration, you can check when you visit that they are meeting those conditions. For example, if we have included a condition about the number of children the provider can care for, you can check to see if they are looking after more children than this. A provider who does not meet their conditions of registration is committing an offence and we can prosecute them.

You can use inspection reports to help you decide which providers to visit, to confirm what you found as a result of the visit, or as a result of a recommendation by someone else. They give you information about what the inspector found on the day of the inspection and focus on the question 'What is it like for a child here?'. All inspection reports include grades about the quality of provision, and things the provider can do to improve. You can check when you visit what the provider has done.

What providers must do

Providers must display their certificate of registration during their hours of operation, so that you can see it easily. Home childcarers should show their certificate if you ask to see it. Each certificate gives information about the childcare provided and any conditions of registration that apply.

We also send providers a copy of their inspection report. For those on the Childcare Register this is a letter. Providers on the Early Years Register or the compulsory part of the Childcare Register must give you a copy of their report or letter if your child goes there regularly, or you can ask for one if your child does not. Providers on the voluntary part of the Childcare Register must share information about their service with parents.

Childcare providers must also:

- investigate any written complaint that relates to the Early Years Foundation Stage or the requirements of the Childcare Register
- keep a record of the complaints, and
- share the results of any investigation with the parents who made the complaint.

For more information about making a complaint see *Building better children's services: concerns and complaints about childcare providers*, available from www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/080120.

How we take account of your views

We inspect registered childcare with little or no notice. This can make it difficult for you to share your views directly with us. If we do give your childcare provider notice of an inspection they should tell you when we will inspect. For home childcarers we will ask parents for permission to enter the premises. Inspectors will normally display a poster to say an inspection is in progress. Please try to make time to talk to us. Your views are important so do not be afraid to say what you think.

If we do not tell your childcare provider about the date of the inspection you can still let us know your views by phoning our helpline on **0300 123 1231**. Your provider should display a poster giving details of how you can contact us.

We are interested to know:

- whether your child is happy and settled
- whether your childcare provider could do things better, and
- how well your childcare provider involves you, consults you and keeps you informed about the care your child receives.

What to do after your child starts in childcare

Although we check people when they first register with us, we do not repeat the checks we carry out on a regular basis. We will check people who are new to the setting, for example a new manager, but we will not carry out any new checks on people who have been there for some time, unless we have concerns.

You can continue to look at our website to see whether we have added any new information to the provider's page, such as new complaints information.

If you have any concerns about a person who has contact with your child in the setting, or if you hear or see anything about them that worries you, then you should raise this directly with the provider concerned. They should tell you what has happened as a result of your concern, to reassure you that they have taken any necessary action. If you have concerns about the provider or you are not satisfied with what they have done then you should tell us.

While we do inspect childcare and follow up on concerns and complaints made by parents and others, we cannot be in every setting, every day. We may see things when we carry out an inspection, but you will be in the setting far more regularly than us. When you take your child to and collect from the childcare, you can see for yourself whether there are any issues that make you concerned. If you are concerned about anything you see, then you should raise this with the provider directly.

What to do if you have concerns you cannot share with your childcare provider

It is important for you to develop a good relationship with your childcare provider to help your child's wellbeing, development and progress. You can deal with most concerns by talking to your childcare provider. However, if you have any concerns about your childcare provider that you cannot discuss with them, please let us know. Most of the enforcement action that we take against registered providers comes from information that parents give us.

How to complain about Ofsted?

We treat all complaints about us very seriously. If you have a concern about our work, please phone our helpline on **0300 123 1231**. Our complaints procedure is available on our website at: www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/2473.

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