

# Ofsted statistics show continuing drop in childminder numbers <sup>[1]</sup>

**Author:** Morton, Katy

**Source:** Nursery World

**Format:** Article

**Publication Date:** 13 Jun 2017

## AVAILABILITY

Read online <sup>[2]</sup>

## EXCERPTS

There were 500 fewer childminders registered with Ofsted in the last quarter, continuing the trend of steep decline.

The latest Ofsted statistics on 'Childcare providers and inspections' show as of 31 March 2017 there were 43,500 childminders, down from 44,000 on 31 December 2016.

This is a fall of nearly a quarter in the number of childminders (24 per cent) since 31 August 2012 (see graph, online).

Ofsted said the decline in childminder numbers during the last quarter was mainly driven by more childminders leaving than joining. Between 31 December 2016 and 31 March 2017, 1,400 childminders left the sector, while 900 joined.

Despite this, the number of places offered by childminders has fallen by just 10 per cent since 2012 because childminders are now, on average, offering more places. As of 31 August 2012, the average number of places offered by childminders was 5.1, whereas as of 31 March 2017, the average was 6.2.

In contrast, the latest statistics show a slight rise in the number of nurseries between 31 December 2016 and 31 March from 26,900 to 27,000, an increase of 100 settings. However, this is a fall of 3 per cent since 31 August 2012.

According to the latest figures, nurseries offered 80 per cent of all childcare places – estimated to be 1 million places, which is an increase of two percentage points since 2012. The overall number of childcare places on the Early Years Register has remained broadly stable at almost 1.3 million.

There are now 10,700 'home childcarers', nannies who have registered on the Voluntary Childcare Register.

The statistics also show the number of good and outstanding providers has remained stable. As of 31 March 2017, 93 per cent of all providers were rated good and outstanding, the same as the previous quarter.

Given the statistics on the number of childminders, Neil Leitch, chief executive of the Pre-School Learning Alliance, has warned that their 'sharp decline' could mean parents struggle to access flexible childcare under the 30-hour offer.

He said, 'It is incredibly concerning to see such a continued decline in the number of childminders. Childminders are a vital source of quality, flexible early years care and education and yet, every time Ofsted releases new statistics, we see yet another fall in numbers. This is simply not sustainable.'

'With the implementation of the 30-hour offer imminent, childminders will play a vital role in delivering the flexible childcare that Government has promised to parents. The question is, then: why isn't more being done to address this worrying trend?'

'The introduction of childminder agencies, which we long warned was a deeply flawed policy, has done nothing to prevent childminders leaving the sector in droves. The Government must now work with the childminding sector to look at what can be done to ensure that such a vital source of quality provision is not wasted.'

The National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA) shared the Alliance's concerns.

NDNA's chief executive Purnima Tanuku said, 'Overall, we are proud that nurseries continue to maintain their high standards despite all their current challenges.'

'But it is a concern that numbers of childminders continue to decrease, especially with demand for 30 funded hours expected to be high from September.'

A Department for Education spokesperson said, 'The number of early years providers rated good or outstanding remains at a record high, which is helping to make sure every child gets a world-class education at every stage of their life.'

'As well as improving quality, we are supporting families with the cost of childcare through our 30-hour offer, making it easier for parents

to get back to work or increase their hours if they choose to. This is backed by our record investment of £6 billion a year by 2020.

'Childminders are an important part of the childcare sector and we know they have different working patterns to larger providers, so we are making it easier for them to work outside of the home and play a full role in offering 30 hours free childcare. This includes setting out our expectation that they are paid monthly by councils, and offering start-up grants to those delivering the free offer.'

Liz Bayram, chief executive of the Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years (PACEY), said, 'This latest Ofsted data just reinforces PACEY's previous call for urgent action at national and local government level. Without renewed efforts to recruit new childminders and to support current childminders to remain in the profession, children and families will not benefit from this quality, flexible form of childcare.'

'The 30 hours offer could support more childminders to run sustainable businesses but only if local funding levels are high enough and there is an ongoing local focus on supporting individuals to enter and stay in childminding. We know some local authorities do this really well. But they are the minority and we need the DfE to do more to champion childminding with local authorities and, through its workforce plans, show how childminding is valued and rewarded as a profession. Without this action, sadly this trend is only set to continue.'

-reprinted from Nursery World

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[retention](#) <sup>[5]</sup>

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[2] <https://www.nurseryworld.co.uk/news/article/ofsted-statistics-show-continuing-drop-in-childminder-numbers>

[3] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/region/europe>

[4] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/workforce>

[5] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/retention>

[6] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/statistics>