

Drop in 'good-rated' childminders [UK] ^[1]

Education, BBC News

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EXCERPTS

A smaller proportion of childminders in England are offering childcare rated "good", say Ofsted inspectors.

The share of childminders rated good or outstanding fell from 62% to 54% in the past three years, with poorer areas generally having the lowest standards.

The Ofsted report also showed the proportion of inadequate childminders rose from 3 to 6% over the last year.

But overall, childcare settings including nurseries and childminders had improved, said Ofsted.

The Ofsted report comes shortly after the BBC News website reported that more and more childminders were quitting because of the burden of increasing regulation.

Ofsted said some may not have grasped the demands of its inspection regime.

Childminders account for about one fifth of the registered childcare places in England.

Figures for March this year from Ofsted put the number of registered places with childminders at 299,000. This compares to 1.25 million places for under eights in other types of day care.

Deprivation factor

The key issues identified by Ofsted among struggling childminders included being unable to identify or respond to child protection concerns and a lack of training in, and understanding of, first aid.

Ofsted's director for children, Michael Hart, said: "We are always concerned about any provision that comes out as inadequate - that extra 3% does concern us.

"But the encouraging thing is that when we do go back and reinspect, 95% of those provisions inspected for the second time will come out as satisfactory or better."

Mr Hart said the small percentage of inadequate childminders needed to be viewed against a background of much higher rates of inadequacy in previous years.

He also highlighted concerns about the disparity in the quality of childcare in deprived areas and affluent areas.

The report said overall, quality was generally poorer where there was most poverty and social deprivation.

"In the 30 most deprived areas, 53% of childminders provide good or better childcare compared with 60% in the rest of the country," it said.

It found that in Hackney, east London, 29% of childminders were judged to be good or better, compared to Wokingham in Berkshire where the proportion was 81%.

Mr Hart said: "For the first time in the report we have looked in some detail at different local authorities.

"We are concerned that there's a variation and it doesn't seem fair that children in deprived areas seem to get a worse deal than those in more affluent areas."

The report, Early Years Leading to Excellence, was based on evidence from 90,000 inspections of 84,000 early years and childcare settings, over three years.

In childcare settings overall, it found notable signs of improvement.

However, fewer than half of the 10,000 registered out-of-school schemes for children aged three to seven were judged to be good or outstanding.

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Inspectors pointed to low ratios of staff to children and a shortage of qualified leaders.

'Ridiculous' paperwork

Last week, it emerged there had been an 11.5% drop, or a fall of 8,400 registered childminders, between June this year and a peak in June 2004.

More than 100 childminders and parents contacted the BBC News website about the issue.

Many childminders said they were considering quitting because of the extra pressures of Ofsted inspections and statutory guidelines, the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), that come into force in September.

One, Alyson Garland, from Calne in Wiltshire, said: "I am a childminder who has been doing the job for three years, and I am thinking of giving up, the paperwork side of it is ridiculous.

"We now have to do risk assessments, observations, planning and we have to now be registered as a food premises because we give snacks or a meal."

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Childminder Pat Adams said she had always been rated "good" by inspectors, but this year was down-graded to "satisfactory". She says that was because her paper work was not up to scratch.

She is considering giving up because of the increasing regulation.

"There will be a lot of pressure plus all the paperwork that will be involved, daily diaries and profiles. It's all added to the cost and we don't earn a lot," she said.

A spokesman for the Department for Children, Schools and Families said: "Childminders have a vital role to play, and we know they are valued by many parents for the unique type of childcare they provide.

"The EYFS is based on the advice of qualified early years professionals and we consulted widely on it - and it's supported by the National Childminding Association who say the EYFS is a positive development."

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- reprinted from BBC News

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