

Decline in number of childminders [UK] ^[1]

Education, BBC News

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EXCERPTS

There has been a fall in the number of registered childminders in England as they have faced increasing regulation.

The latest figures - from Ofsted - show there were 11.5% or 8,400 fewer registered childminders in June this year than at a peak in June 2004.

Many childminders blame an increasing amount of regulation linked to Ofsted and statutory guidelines on caring for children coming into force next month.

The government said its guidelines did not place a burden on childminders.

Pat Adams, a childminder with 21 years experience, says all the childminders that she used to attend a playgroup with have given up in recent years.

Mrs Adams, of Warrington, Cheshire, says she is very concerned that the new statutory guidelines, contained in the "Early Years Foundation Stage" and due to come into force in September, will mean she has to give up a job she loves.

...

"I do appreciate there has to be regulation of some sort but they are expecting us to do what nurseries do.

"There is a place for nurseries, but they have extra staff who they employ to do all that paperwork.

"I am now 99.9% certain that I will be joining the ranks of those giving up child minding - I've had that many sleepless nights and worries about it."

Ofsted say although there has been a drop in the number of registered childminders, there has been no reduction in the overall number of child-care places.

A statement from England's inspectorate said: "Ofsted has no evidence to suggest that the EYFS is the reason for the drop in registered childminders.

"Not all childminders tell Ofsted why they have resigned. But those childminders who do share their reasons cite lack of demand for places, pregnancy, and making a career move, sometimes to work in other forms of childcare or in schools, for example as teaching assistants.

"Often, childminders maintain their registration for a period in case their circumstances change, even if they are not actually caring for any children."

The EYFS provides a statutory framework that all child care providers have to follow.

The government launched it in March 2007 to ensure that all children in childcare settings were looked after to a high standard.

It sets out a series of learning and development requirements, as well as legal requirements for safeguarding children.

And steps towards certain learning and development goals have to be recorded.

'Vital role'

Childminders as well as nurseries have to have regard to the guidelines and would have to explain why they had departed from them, if that was the case, when inspected by Ofsted.

Mrs Adams - who looks after three children aged 10 months, two and three - says the guidelines mean that she would have to plan a year ahead what they would do on a daily basis.

She would also have to make a note of when each child reached a developmental stage such as crawling, taking their first steps or holding a

pencil correctly.

In the past, she says, the reaching of such milestones was communicated informally to parents.

She gave the example of how she called the doctor mother of a little boy she cared for, when he took his first steps, and asked her if she could get down at all that afternoon to witness his progress.

Children's Minister Beverley Hughes insisted the new guidelines were not a burden on childminders because most of them would be doing it already - helping children learn and develop through play.

"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 Early Years Foundation Stage (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.

"The number of registered childminders has always varied over time, for a number of reasons.

"For example, Ofsted has recently undertaken an exercise to prune the register by removing childminders who are no longer actively looking after children. This will have resulted in fewer people on the childminding register."

- reprinted from BBC News

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