

Childcare 'worse in deprived areas'^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

Families living in deprived areas are more likely to receive a poorer standard of childcare, according to a new study.

Around six in 10 childminders (61%) working in the most disadvantaged areas are rated as good or better by Ofsted, compared to 77% of childminders in the richest areas, a new report by the Policy Exchange think-tank claims.

The study, due to be published at the end of the month, suggests that only around one in 10 nurseries and childminders were rated outstanding by Ofsted last year.

A poll of around 1,600 people, conducted as part of the study, found that just under half (47%) of those who earn under £20,000 consider cost to be an important factor when choosing childcare, compared to 34% of those earning between £40,000 and £60,000.

Around 45% of those earning under £20,000 said the quality of childcare was an important factor, compared to 60% of those with salaries of between £40,000 and £60,000.

The report is due to call for the Government to focus on improving the quality of early years education, and suggest that Teach First - which trains top graduates to work in schools in disadvantaged areas - should be extended to pre-school education.

Report author Harriet Waldegrave said: "Early years education will only have a positive impact on a child's development if it is of a high quality. While provision is improving, it's not doing so fast enough.

"Most worryingly of all, lower quality provision in disadvantaged areas means positive effects of early years education are less likely to be seen for the children who need it most."

The initial findings come just days after Schools Minister Elizabeth Truss said England should follow the lead of nations such as France and allow nursery workers and childminders to care for more youngsters at once. She suggested that England's adult-to-child ratios are too restrictive, and that salaries for working with young children are too low.

Shadow education secretary Stephen Twigg accused the Government of planning to cut the numbers of nursery staff, which could threaten safety and quality of care.

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