

Plans for regulation shake-up for childcare set out^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

All childminders that are outstanding or good will automatically be eligible for Government funding for two-, three- and four-year-olds, ending the local authorities' role as 'gatekeepers' to the funding, education and childcare minister Elizabeth Truss said.

Currently only 10 per cent of childminders offer funded places.

Ministers say that the change will mean that 80 per cent of nurseries and more than 70 per cent of childminders will be able to access the funding.

The plans are outlined in *More Affordable Childcare*, published by the Department for Education, and put out for consultation today, alongside a summary of responses to the Childcare Commission.

The Government also intends to introduce a national funding formula for early education to address the historic unfairness in funding, although it does not say when this will happen.

Schools will also be encouraged to stay open longer before and after school and during the school holidays, either alone or working with private and voluntary providers.

Some academies and free schools are starting to offer this. Harris Academies has said that every new primary academy it opens will provide wraparound care from 8am to 6pm as a minimum.

Appearing to go back on earlier plans that local authorities should no longer have a quality improvement role, the Government is now saying that this change will 'free up' local authorities to work with Ofsted to improve weaker providers and attract strong ones to their areas.

Planning restrictions will also be removed to enable nurseries to expand more easily.

Regulation

The Government intends to remove red tape so that:

- There will be more flexibility for schools to offer provision from 8am to 6pm for three- and four-year-olds and primary school children, also enabling schools to accept two-year-olds.
- After-school learning requirements in the EYFS will also be removed for Reception children, who are already taught during the school day.
- Introduce a single set of safety requirements for all children, with separate learning requirements for those not in school.
- Nurseries and childminders will no longer need to complete 'learning journeys' for children.
- Extending the hours of informal childcare, so that parents can make commonsense arrangements for their children to be looked after with friends and neighbours for up to three hours a day, up from two hours.

Nansi Ellis, head of education policy at the Association of Teachers and Lecturers, said, 'The Government is right to prioritise making childcare accessible how, where and when parents need it and at a price they can afford. But the needs of children must not be sidelined.'

'The Government must ensure the quality of care is not sacrificed to cost, that buildings are fit for young children, with accessible toilets, suitable areas for eating, and outdoor play, and that those who work with young children are well-qualified to meet their range of different needs.'

Local authorities' role in childcare

Alongside the consultation, the Department for Education has published a summary of responses it received to plans set out in *More Great Childcare* to reform the role of local authorities in childcare and education.

Updated guidance for local authorities has also been published, setting out how their role has changed, so that they can focus on supporting families to take up the two-year-old offer.

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