

In for a pound: The relationship between staff wages and Ofsted grades in group-based childcare provision ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

Full report PDF available for download ^[2]

Introduction

The first five years of a child's life is a time of rapid development. The experiences of children in this period lay the foundations for their later physical and intellectual development, communication and social skills, problem solving and understanding of themselves and the world around them. Unfortunately, developmental gaps between the most disadvantaged children and their peers begin in the early years. Research consistently demonstrates that, alongside other indicators of good development, children from lower-income families, children with special educational needs (SEND) or the children of parents without experience of higher education are likely to have a less extensive vocabulary and lower language skills at age five than their contemporaries (Melhuish, 2004). Some 64 per cent of all children achieved the expected level of development in their early learning goals – an assessment that usually takes place in reception classes – but just 42 per cent of children on free school meals achieved this level in 2015, a gap that failed to narrow over the last five years (Department for Education, 2015a). There are also significant differences in children's development outcomes at five between boys and girls and between different ethnic groups.

Children's outcomes are influenced by individual factors such as their character, abilities and behaviours as well as those that relate to family environment. Parental (particularly maternal) levels of education, family income and parents' engagement with their children's learning all have a strong association with children's development outcomes. Outside of the family environment, the quality of early education and childcare is also strongly associated with children's outcomes. Access to high quality care has the capacity to narrow the development gap between disadvantaged children and their peers at five years, and enable children to start school on an equal footing (Mathers et al 2014). Attending a nursery can also help the earlier identification of special needs or welfare issues, so that support can be put in place at the soonest opportunity.

Developmental inequalities that start in the early years often endure throughout the rest of disadvantaged children's education. If children fall behind by the time they start compulsory schooling at five, it becomes much harder for them to 'catch up' and, as a result, their life chances are irrevocably damaged (Pascal and Bertram, 2013).

It is for these reasons that the Government funds part-time early education places. In England all three and four year olds receive 570 hours of free early education every year, amounting to 15 hours per week over 38 weeks of the year, with this provision recently extended to the 40 per cent most income deprived two year olds. Some 56 per cent of two year olds and 38 per cent of three and four year olds received their free early education in private and not-for-profit provision where regulations governing staff qualifications are different from those in state nursery classes and schools.

Free early education for three and four year olds will be extended in September 2017 to cover 1,140 hours per year in working families that meet the required income and employment criteria (HM Treasury, 2015). Many families use additional hours of early education and childcare, on top of their free provision, to enable parents to work. Quality is equally important in this 'purchased' care.

Region: Europe ^[3]

Tags: wages ^[4]

childcare workforce ^[5]

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