

Childminding: a passion to be outstanding

What are the secrets of successful childminding? We asked outstanding providers; here is what they told us.

This leaflet also tells you about the best practice that inspectors have seen so far in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

It ends with 10 questions to think about for your own practice.





Introduction



Inspectors have judged 9% of childminders to be offering outstanding Early Years Foundation Stage provision: a tremendous achievement.¹

A further 55% are good, 30% satisfactory and 5% inadequate.

We want to see many more providing outstanding or good service for children and their families.

That's why we're sending this leaflet to all registered childminders. It includes:

- what outstanding providers said were the keys to their success
- what best practice looks like in:
 - keeping children safe
 - diversity and inclusion
 - learning and development
 - planning
 - partnership
 - improvement
- 10 questions for you to think about when reflecting on your own practice.

We hope you will use some of these ideas to continually improve and excel in all you do with the children in your care.

¹This covers the period from September 2008 to June 2009. The percentages are rounded and do not add exactly to 100.

What outstanding providers say

We asked outstanding childcare providers for the secrets of their success. Most said they are passionate about what they do, work closely with parents and carers, and always strive for improvement.

Passion

Outstanding providers told us they are passionate about their work and they are determined to do it well. They care deeply for the children. Their vision is to provide an excellent service for the children and their families that makes a positive difference to their lives. They are dedicated and focused on making this happen.

‘Our enthusiasm inspires the children and helps children to fly’

‘It’s about passion – not about financial gain’

‘It’s about having fun, enjoying the job, and being professional’

Parents and carers

Outstanding childcare providers told us that their excellent liaison with parents and carers is crucial. They obtain regular information about the child and the family, so they understand the child’s needs and interests in the context of the family background.

Outstanding providers work hard to make parents and carers feel welcome and to involve them as partners in their child’s learning and development. They recognise that parents and carers have the best knowledge of the child and they treat them as ‘part of the team’. They encourage parents and carers to observe the child at play in the home and to use this to help develop their learning.



They use different ways to communicate with parents and carers. These include: daily diaries of significant events for their children; text messages; email for photos; regular newsletters; social events; and workshops.

They involve parents and carers in the setting, for example in supporting children's pre-reading development. They are open and receptive to parents' and carers' suggestions for improvement.

Outstanding providers support parents and carers who are worried. They are open and honest with them. In this way they build their trust.

'We feel it a privilege that parents trust us with their children'

'We help parents achieve the best for their children'

Improvement

Outstanding providers told us that reflective practice is crucial to their success. They are not complacent but aspire continually to do better. They regularly review what they do and how this helps children. They look at areas of weakness and learn from mistakes, because they are highly motivated to move forward. They like to think creatively and be adventurous to find and try new ways to make a positive difference.

'We don't label ourselves as outstanding; we constantly reflect on our practice'

'We never stand still; we're always striving for more'

'We want to change and develop ideas but also to look at what has worked and revisit it to find out why'

Outstanding practice inspectors have seen

Keeping children safe

Safeguarding children from harm or abuse

Fortunately, serious child protection concerns are rare. However, childminders need to be vigilant and must know how to identify and deal promptly with any concerns.

The best childminders:

- help children to be confident and to learn how to keep themselves safe
- have a thorough knowledge and understanding of the signs of possible abuse and neglect
- have clear procedures so they know what they will do if they have concerns about a child
- explain their procedures clearly to parents and carers
- keep contact details readily available so they can obtain advice or report any concerns without delay
- attend refresher courses regularly to keep their knowledge up to date.

Risk assessment²

The best childminders:

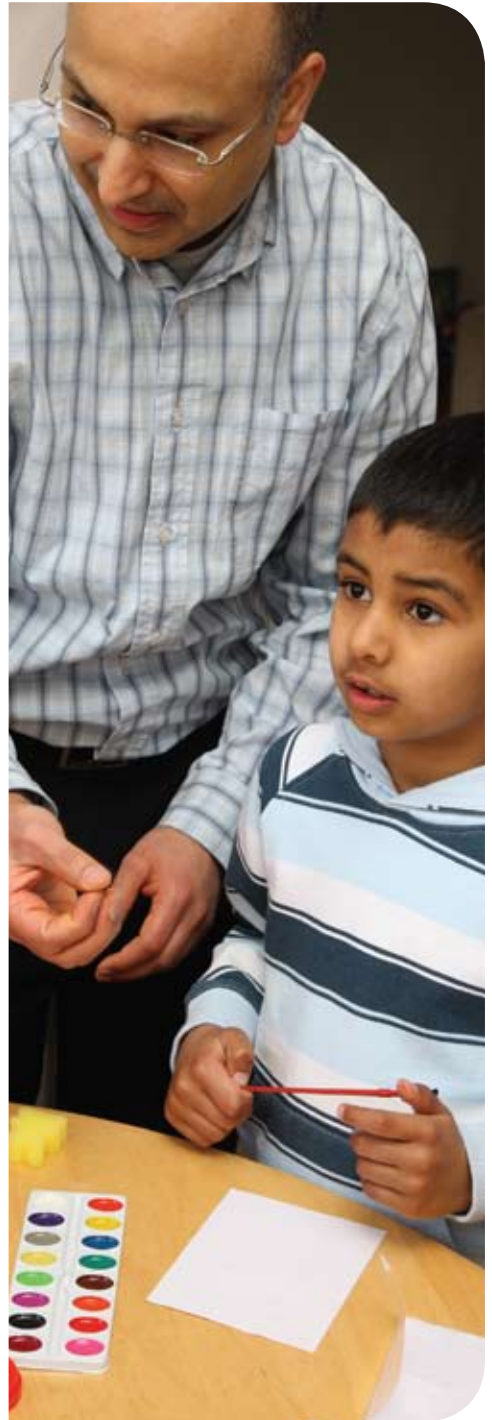
- think carefully about the safety of all areas of their home and how to keep children safe on outings without limiting children's access to exciting learning opportunities
- consider all activities and make any necessary adjustments to ensure all children can participate safely at all times
- check daily all areas used by children
- make sure that any required safety equipment is in place
- make sure that places they visit, such as parks, toddler groups or friends' homes, are safe
- carry out a thorough review of the risk assessment at least annually as well as every time a new child attends or something changes.

Childminders wrote in their self-evaluation forms:

‘During a topic on health and safety, the children helped me carry out risk assessments for my home and outings. They graded each hazard according to how much they thought they might be hurt and whether it was likely to happen. For instance, they looked at knives and sharp objects and thought the danger was high; they could cut themselves so it was best to leave sharp objects alone.’

‘I talk to the children about stranger danger and the need to stay close by and not go with people they don’t know. I explain that if I can’t see them, I can’t keep them safe.’

‘I have risk assessments for my home and outings. I encourage the children to make their own choices, take risks and manage challenges appropriate to their age. We learn about road safety and about why they must be careful when we’re out. We read a booklet about a child telling adults about traffic dangers and I ask them to tell me when they think it is safe to cross the road. We talk about fire safety and about why they shouldn’t play with fire or matches. We discuss what to do if the smoke alarms go off and we practise the drill.’



Diversity and inclusion



The best childminders:

- recognise that the background, needs and preferences of each child are unique
- avoid making assumptions about children or their families
- make sure that they meet each child's needs by working very closely with parents and others involved
- make sure all children can be fully included in all the activities, adapting the activities when necessary
- carefully consider how they can provide activities and resources to engage each child's interest and help them make good progress at their own pace
- help children learn to appreciate differences in the people they know and in the wider community
- attend regular training on issues such as specific learning needs of children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities; how to support boys or under-twos in their learning; and how to develop children's curiosity about the lives of others.

An inspector wrote:

'The childminder makes sure that left-handed equipment is easily available and that she has different height stools so that all children can reach the food preparation area in comfort.'

Childminders wrote in their self-evaluation forms:

'Philippa struggles with her physical development and walking. I work closely with her parents and healthcare professionals. I have a risk assessment to cover her additional needs. Philippa takes part in a normal session of activities but I also include some special games for her which the other children enjoy too.'

'I have worked hard to understand the background and culture of every child and I include these in daily discussions and activities. I introduce topics on diversity so all children develop awareness and respect for others. All the children know about the countries each child comes from, their language, their families and other cultural differences. To support our learning about others I have a wide range of resources,



Learning and development

including books, maps and photos of children from other countries, as well as dolls and dressing-up clothes. At story times I introduce books about children with different backgrounds or special needs so the children can get to know about children other than themselves.

'I challenge stereotypes as children become aware of their own gender and cultures. For example when a child said "girls like pink" I asked all the children to say what colour they like, to show that some girls like pink but others like blue and yellow.

'One child speaks English as an additional language. I ensure that she is included in all conversations and I give her time to answer questions. We talk about her country and culture and use words in her language so we are all learning as well. She is progressing very well in English and her parents report a good improvement of fluency in her home language too.'

'At the library, I always try to pick books that show families from diverse backgrounds in a positive way. These have covered subjects like divorce, which two of my children were going through, about having grandmothers from different ethnic backgrounds or two dads.'

The best childminders:

- organise their homes so each child can make independent choices and extend their play and learning
- make excellent use of both outdoor and indoor areas to provide activities which support all areas of learning
- help children feel confident to explore, express their feelings and ask for help
- provide a wide range of toys and resources
- evaluate how well they support children's learning and development.

An inspector wrote:

'The garden is equipped superbly, enabling children to enjoy creative activities. Children paint and chalk on a board attached to the fence. Growing flowers captures their interest and increases their knowledge of the natural world.'

Observing, assessing and planning for learning

The best childminders:

- recognise that children learn best when they are:
 - having fun
 - interested and excited by what they are doing
 - building on what they already know and can do
- have an excellent understanding of the six areas of learning and how to use the Early Years Foundation Stage Practice Guidance to support children's development³
- are clear about each child's starting points
- frequently observe and assess the children so they know what they enjoy doing, their learning journey and their progress towards the early learning goals
- use their knowledge of each child to make good decisions about the next steps in their learning
- carefully plan and support the progress of children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, or who speak English as an additional language
- actively involve the children, their parents, carers and others in making decisions about what they do
- provide a balance of adult- and child-led activities to meet children's individual needs and interests, covering all six areas of learning
- ask questions which encourage children to think about what they are doing and solve problems
- are flexible to changing circumstances and unexpected events.

An inspector wrote:

'The childminder has noted that some children are fascinated with objects that roll or spin. One child is currently interested in rotating everything so she offers activities and materials for him to enjoy and explore rotation further.'

A childminder wrote in her self-evaluation form:

'I assess each new child carefully when they begin and talk with their parents and other childcarers so that I know what they can

³The Early Years Foundation Stage identifies six areas of learning and development: personal, social and emotional development; communication, language and literacy; problem solving, reasoning and numeracy; knowledge and understanding of the world; physical development; and creative development.



Partnership

achieve. By talking, listening and playing with the children I am able to learn about their individual interests and learning styles.

‘Each week I watch the children and record any observations I think relevant to their individual development. This allows me to provide stimulating and challenging activities and experiences for each child across all areas of their learning.

‘I write a play plan for each child at the start of each week, as well as an overall plan of activities. This is a very simple outline of what we may do each day. I look through my resources to find what is relevant to my play themes and may go to the library and toy library to collect more. I think about what will be suitable for all of the children, as well as about their individual abilities and interests.

‘At the beginning of the day I look at my plan so I know what I intend to do. However, what we do may vary depending on the needs of the children or the weather. Often the children take the activities in a totally different direction and I always encourage this and adapt my planning accordingly.’

The best childminders:

- give parents and carers clear information so they know exactly what will be provided for their child and have written agreements in place so there are no misunderstandings
- find out about children’s developmental ‘starting points’ (what they can already do and know), as well as their routines, interests and other special requirements before they start
- exchange information with parents and carers daily, for example through discussions, diaries and email, ensuring continuity so children are settled and comfortable
- fully involve parents and carers in monitoring and planning their child’s learning and development
- suggest how parents and carers continue to support their child’s learning at home
- work closely with pre-school staff, other childminders and health professionals to promote the children’s care and development.



Inspectors wrote:

‘The childminder uses daily contact books to inform parents of children’s activities, meals, sleeping and moods. She records memorable moments to share with parents and provides wonderful records of children’s time with her through photographs, DVDs and assessment files.’

‘The childminder enables parents to be fully involved in their child’s learning and progress. Interesting “All about us” scrapbooks include photographs of the children busy with their daily activities and topic work, and samples of their drawings. Diaries show details of their child’s day. The weekly planning is displayed and development records are shared regularly.’

‘Parents receive newsletters three times a year outlining topic work and ideas for them to extend their children’s learning at home.’

Childminders wrote in their self-evaluation forms:

‘I run a Bookworm Reading Club supported by my local library. Children take books home to share with their parents. This encourages parents to read with their children. I discuss

with parents and children what they have enjoyed or disliked about the book.’

‘With parents’ permission, I always visit other settings the child attends. I talk with the child’s key person at the beginning and end of each session. I give them a copy of my “aims”, I explain what I am doing with the child, and we discuss the child’s progress. One child was having a very emotional time. I visited him and his key person to discuss how we could both help him. She was fascinated because the child was not showing the same level of confidence and abilities at pre-school, but we recognised this was because he was new there. We agreed the key person would focus on developing his personal, social and emotional skills and we would both work on toilet training. The child liked me coming to see him and went on to progress well.’

Continuous improvement

The best childminders:

- attend regular training to gain recognised childcare qualifications and to keep up to date with developments
- consider how what they do promotes children's care and learning
- use resources such as the Ofsted self-evaluation form, childminding adviser visits, networks and quality assurance schemes to help them identify and make improvements
- obtain the views of parents, other childcarers and children through discussions, questionnaires and meetings
- use these views to make improvements.

A childminder wrote in her self-evaluation form:

'I have met all the recommendations from my last inspection. I now have regular fire drills; I make parents aware of my child protection arrangements; and I record when my assistant is working. This has helped to ensure the children are safer.

'My assistant and I constantly assess our service. We discuss what improvements we

would like to make and how to achieve them. We ask for feedback from parents and our partners at pre-school. We are very happy to take on board what people have to say and make changes. For example, we have a Christian family who don't want their child to celebrate Hallowe'en. So when the child was present we made sure the activities respected their beliefs.

'I regularly share children's progress with the pre-school leader. She has provided a slot in their milestones booklet for contributions from the parents and myself.

'We have free flow to the outdoors and allow children to take things out as they want. I watched how they use the space and resources. As a result I have provided a table and areas for sitting, mark-making and reading outside. Now the children use the space more effectively.'

Ten things to think about

- When did you last update your knowledge of the Local Safeguarding Children Board guidance?
- How well do children understand and manage risks to themselves?
- How well does your planning take account of children's starting points and interests?
- How effective is the balance between adult-led and child-directed learning?
- How well can children play freely indoors and outdoors?
- How well do you help parents and carers to support their children's learning?
- How effectively do you work with parents and carers on a daily basis to make sure that children's needs are addressed?
- How successfully do you include all children and families in the opportunities available?
- How well does your self-evaluation include the views of parents, carers, children and other professionals?
- How involved are you in regular networks, training or programmes of study to extend your knowledge about childcare and development?



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