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Official Statistics

# Methodology report: childcare providers and inspections as at 31 March 2020

Updated 21 September 2020

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## Introduction

This document contains methodology and quality information about Ofsted’s official statistics release of childcare providers and inspections data, which we publish 3 times a year. The publication forms the main part of the early years and childcare official statistics collection.

This official statistics release reports on:

- the number of providers on the Early Years Register (EYR) and the Childcare Register (CR), both the compulsory and the voluntary part
- the number of providers that have joined or left the early years sector
- the number of childcare places offered by providers on the EYR
- inspection outcomes for all Ofsted-registered childcare providers in England

The publication provides and reports on providers in 2 different ways, with each focusing on a specific reporting period:

### Most recent inspections for all providers, carried out up to a specified cut-off date

This provides data on the quality of providers, broken down by geographical area and by individual provider. The data is reported at the end of a specific period, where the inspection reports were published on our website by the end of the subsequent month.

### All inspections carried out within a set time period

This provides data on all inspections that have taken place over a specific reporting period, broken down by geographical area. This is referred to as provisional data. In addition, we revise data for the previous reporting period with each new release, to include the small number of inspections that were not published within the subsequent month following the end of the reporting period. This is referred to as revised data.

This information should not be used to assess the overall quality of childcare provision in a geographical area. We carry out inspections in a targeted way to help drive improvement in early years providers. Therefore, a 3- to 5-month period of inspection volumes does not necessarily represent a balanced statistical sample.

Official statistics publications are released according to the following timetable (see Table 1).

## Table 1: Childcare providers and inspections release schedule and data reporting periods

| Month of publication | Information about all childcare providers registered with Ofsted on | Information about all childcare inspections within the period |
|---|---|---|
| March | 31 December | 1 Sep–31 Dec |
| June | 31 March | 1 Jan–31 Mar |
| November | 31 August | 1 Apr–31 Aug |

The publication refers to 4 types of early years providers:

- childminders
- childcare on non-domestic premises – for example, pre-schools and private nurseries
- childcare on domestic premises
- home childcarers – for example, nannies

These providers are registered on 2 different childcare registers:

- Early Years Register (EYR)
- Childcare Register (CR), which is divided into 2 parts:
  - compulsory part of the Childcare Register (CCR)
  - voluntary part of the Childcare Register (VCR)

Providers can be registered on a single register or on a combination of registers. More information on these registers is provided in the glossary.

Additionally, there are 4 different types of inspection for these providers:

- full EYR inspection
- out-of-school day care EYR inspection
- no children on roll (NCOR) EYR inspection
- CR inspection

Full EYR inspections result in a judgement of outstanding, good, requires improvement or inadequate. Good, requires improvement or inadequate providers may also receive actions or recommendations to help them improve.

CR, NCOR and out-of-school day care inspections result in a judgement of ‘met’ or ‘not met’ requirements. In instances when the provider does not meet one or more of the requirements, the inspector must either issue actions for the provider to take or consider enforcement action.

## Methodology

This section details the reporting methodology used to aggregate and analyse statistics on Ofsted-registered childcare providers and inspections.

The publication reports on early years and childcare inspections that have taken place since 1 September 2008, when the early years foundation stage (EYFS) was introduced. This is the statutory framework for the early education and care of children from birth to the 31 August following their fifth birthday. However, the main focus of the publication is on inspections carried out during the common inspection framework (1 September 2015 to 31 August 2019) and since the introduction of the education inspection framework (EIF) on 1 September 2019.

## Compiling the data

We collect data on the number of childcare places that providers offer at registration and record this in the Ofsted corporate Cygnum system. This is a live administrative data system that we use to schedule, monitor and register childcare providers and inspections.

We collate our official statistics from data in Cygnum at the end of the reporting period and provide the number of providers and places. The data is then aggregated for presentation and analysis.

There is a time delay between the end of the reporting period and the publication cut-off date of 1 calendar month. This accounts for the time required to write up, verify and publish the inspection reports after the inspection has taken place. This helps ensure that the majority of inspections completed within the reporting period are captured within the official statistics.

## Coverage

The publication reports on childcare registered with Ofsted. Most provision in the early years age range is carried out by childcare providers that are registered with Ofsted, either on the EYR or the CR. However, there are some providers of childcare that are exempt from registration with Ofsted, for example, state-funded schools, independent schools or academies providing childcare for children aged 2 and older.

These exempt providers receive a judgement for their early years provision at their section 5 school inspection, but not during a section 8 inspection. Section 8 inspections will confirm whether the overall effectiveness is good or outstanding, but will not provide or update a previous early years provision judgement. For more information, see our official statistics on state-funded schools and academies and on independent schools.

A small number (around 100) of early years providers on the site of association independent schools are registered with Ofsted but are inspected by another inspectorate. These providers will not have any inspection data recorded in our administrative system but will be included in our registration statistics.

We inspect childcare providers on a 4-year inspection cycle. The previous cycle ran from 1 September 2012 through to 31 July 2016 and the current cycle runs from 1 August 2016 through to 31 July 2020. We are committed to inspecting all providers that were on the EYR at the beginning of the cycle, by the end of the cycle. However, due to the impact of coronavirus (COVID-19), we paused our routine inspections in mid-March.

Providers registered on the EYR will normally have their setting inspected at least once within the 4-year cycle. We will normally inspect newly registered providers on the EYR within 30 months of their registration date.

A provider’s most recent inspection is either a full EYR inspection or an out-of-school day care EYR inspection for providers on the EYR, or CR inspection for providers only on the CCR and/or VCR.

The publication also provides information on most recent EYR inspections where no children were present at the time of the inspection. These are referred to as NCOR EYR inspections.

When describing the quality of the early years sector, the summary statistics and the main findings document refer to the most recent full EYR inspection, for providers on the EYR. This includes a small proportion of providers that have had a more recent NCOR inspection. However, it excludes providers that, under the EIF, are classed as out-of-school day care providers but may have previously had a full EYR inspection.

## Places offered by providers on the EYR

Since September 2012, providers are required to give details on the number of places they offer at the point of registration. Providers must calculate this based on the legal requirements of the EYFS. The places information compiled and presented in the publication is a proxy for the size and capacity of the early years sector.

Places data is reported only for the providers registered on the EYR, with a high proportion of these also being registered on the CR. When considering places data, it is important to note that it covers all places for children up to the age of 8. This encompasses all EYR places for children under 5 and CCR places for 5- to 7-year-olds.

The number of places offered by a provider is the legal maximum number of children it can provide childcare for at any one time.

The majority of childminders are registered as offering 6 childcare places because this is the maximum number of places allowed under EYFS guidelines for a childminder with no assistants. However, the number of places a childminder provides or intends to provide might be lower.

It is important to note that the legal maximum number of places is for any one time. Therefore, different children may be looked after in the morning and in the evening by any one provider.

Aggregated data relies on estimated places numbers for a small number of providers where actual places numbers are not recorded. We calculate estimates using the mean for each provider type, after excluding any outliers with 600 or more places.

## Quality

The UK Statistics Authority Code of Practice for Statistics provides producers of statistics with a framework based on 3 pillars:

- trustworthiness
- quality
- value

This code is consistent with the European Statistics Code of Practice, where statistical output quality is broken down by 5 dimensions:

- relevance
- coherence and comparability
- accuracy and reliability
- timeliness and punctuality

- accessibility and clarity

This section will discuss these 5 dimensions and will provide additional information on meeting user needs.

## Relevance

Ofsted regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. Our official statistics are released to promote reform and improvement across government through increasing transparency and citizen participation.

The Childcare Act 2006 gives Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector (HMCI) responsibility for regulating childminding and childcare on domestic and non-domestic premises in England. It gives HMCI responsibility for the registration and inspection of providers registered on the EYR and the CR, and for enforcement when it appears that legal requirements are not being met.

These official statistics releases report on early years and childcare inspections under Sections 49 and 50 of the Childcare Act 2006.

By aggregating the most recent inspection judgements of individual childcare providers, the publication presents the quality of provision nationally and in different geographical areas.

We analyse the data by region, provider type and childcare register to identify important differences, patterns and trends. The official statistics aim to draw out the main messages from the data and communicate these in an understandable way.

## Coherence and comparability

Ofsted has reported on childcare providers and places information and inspection outcomes as official statistics since 2010.

The important dates that have affected the comparability of early years data over time are below.

In July 2018, Ofsted moved to a new administrative database system, Cygnum, for recording information on providers and inspections. This introduced several changes that affect comparability. The main areas affected were places data, inspection actions and recommendations and the geography of home childcarers.

The move to Cygnum has improved the way places data is recorded. Cygnum has simplified the recording of places data, resulting in more coverage of places in each provider and therefore less estimation. Therefore, this change resulted in a rise in the number of places recorded on 31 August 2018 (using the new system) compared with 31 March 2018 (using the previous system).

The 31 August 2018 statistical release references the move to Cygnum.

## Dates affecting early years and childcare data and its comparability over time

| Date | Change and effect on comparability |
|---|---|
| November 2013 | ‘Satisfactory’ judgement replaced by ‘requires improvement’ judgement. Ofsted committed to re-inspecting all childcare on non-domestic premises judged ‘requires improvement’ within 12 months.<br>All judgements of ‘satisfactory’ since the EYFS (2008) are comparable to judgements under the revised framework of ‘requires improvement’. This policy only applied to childcare on non-domestic premises, not childminders, home childcarers or childcare on domestic premises. Therefore, childcare on non-domestic premises may have had more frequent opportunities to demonstrate improvement at inspection than other childcare provider types. |
| September 2014 | Childminder agencies introduced: childminder agencies are registered with Ofsted. New childminders can register directly with childminder agencies without registering with Ofsted directly. Existing childminders may also de-register from Ofsted and register with an agency instead.<br>The impact of this change on the comparability of data is low due to the relatively small number of childminder agencies that have registered with Ofsted. However, while we publish information on the number of childminder agencies, these agencies are not required to provide information on the number of childminders registered with them. |
| February 2015 | Ofsted publishes responses to its consultation on early years official statistics.<br>Based on these findings, releases are now published 3 times a year, corresponding to academic term dates (see Table 1). |
| March 2015 | Small Business, Enterprise and Employment Act (SBEE) gains Royal Assent.<br>From this date, a single company can now register multiple providers of childcare with Ofsted on a single registration. |
| September 2015 | A new common inspection framework across education, skills and early years remit areas is introduced.<br>The ‘personal development, behaviour and welfare’ judgement is comparable with the ‘contribution of the provision to the well-being of children’ judgement from the previous framework. The ‘effectiveness of leadership and management’ judgement is comparable with the ‘quality of leadership and management’ judgement. The ‘outcomes for children’ and ‘quality of teaching, learning and assessment’ judgements are new as of September 2015 and therefore not comparable with any previous judgements. |
| August 2016 | Childminders judged requires improvement are now re-inspected within 12 months when possible.<br>Ofsted prioritised inspections of childminders who were previously judged as requires |

improvement to be re-inspected within 12 months.

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July 2018

Ofsted introduces a new administrative database, Cygnum, to replace the previous system for early years data. This results in some structural changes to the data.

The geographical information about home childcarers is now based on the registered organisational address, instead of the primary setting where the childcare took place, as used previously. We do not publish the address, such as street or postcode, of home childcarers.

There are some slight changes to some field names. These are reflected in the data dictionaries in the underlying data files.

CR inspections are now recorded with 2 judgements where applicable. These reflect how well providers meet standards on both the compulsory and voluntary parts of the CR. When a judgement is given on both parts, priority is given to the judgement on the compulsory part in our reporting.

The number of places offered by a provider is recorded differently in Cygnum from how it was previously. This has resulted in improved coverage of places data and contributed to a rise in places numbers between 31 March 2018 and 31 August 2018.

We identified some technical issues with the mapping of the data relating to inspection actions.

This has resulted in the actions and recommendations table (Table 10) being temporarily withdrawn from the release pending further investigation.

From this investigation, we identified changes to the structure of the actions and recommendations data. As a result of these changes, the historic actions and recommendations data was not fully compatible with the Cygnum data. Therefore, to limit complexity in the published data table, we published Table 10 with effect from 1 September 2018. We selected this date to align with the first published dataset following migration to Cygnum.

As a consequence of the restructuring of the data, first aid actions are now incorporated into the qualifications category.

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April 2019

Local authority boundaries restructured in the South West.

Three existing local authorities in the South West region (Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole) have been re-structured into 2 new ones (Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole, and Dorset).

As a result, there is a break in continuity for the numbers of joiners and leavers for these local authorities for the 31 August 2019 release. Because the boundary of Dorset has been re-structured, provider numbers and outcomes cannot be reasonably compared over time for this local authority.

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September 2019

The EIF is introduced.

The 4 key inspection judgements changed to ‘quality of education’, ‘behaviour and attitudes’, ‘personal development’ and ‘leadership and management’. These are not directly comparable to the previous key judgements.

Also, there are now out-of-school day care inspections. Providers on the EYR, which only offer care before and after school or during the school holidays, no longer have to meet the learning and development requirements of the EYFS. They do have to meet the safeguarding and welfare requirements. These providers do not receive grades against the 4 EIF judgements but only an overall effectiveness judgement of ‘met’, ‘not met with actions’ or ‘not met with enforcement’.

Data comparing childcare providers at their most recent inspection is also presented in Data View; users should select ‘Early years’ from the ‘Remit’ dropdown. Ofsted is responsible for childcare inspections in England. The following organisations are responsible for childcare inspections in the devolved administrations of the UK:

Wales:

- Care and Social Services Inspectorate: CSSI, for childcare inspections
- Estyn, for inspections of non-school settings for children under 5

Scotland:

- Care Inspectorate, for childminder inspections
- Education Scotland, for all other childcare inspections

Northern Ireland:

- 5 separate Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts for different regions of the country

## Accuracy and reliability

The official statistics data is extracted from Ofsted’s administrative systems. More information on the issues relating to the use of administrative data, as well as other considerations on the quality of data, is available in the various standards for official statistics documents.

Although these systems are not designed primarily for statistical purposes, the inspection outcome data taken from Ofsted’s administrative systems is considered of a high quality. This is due to the rigorous checks that we carry out before publishing inspection reports, the legislative and reputational importance of maintaining accurate information on childcare providers and the high level of public scrutiny to which inspection reports are regularly subjected to.

Our reporting is accurate to the administrative systems that we report from. Errors in recording data and manual data entry may affect the quality of the source data. We make every effort to ensure that the data is produced without any errors. If an error is discovered, we will publish a corrected version as soon as possible.

## Timeliness and punctuality

We produce the publication 3 times per year. The release schedule and data reporting periods are set out in Table 1.

To include all inspections published 1 month after the cut-off date of the reporting period, data from the administrative system is taken on the first of the month following the end of the reporting period. It then takes 6 to 8 weeks to extract, aggregate, quality assure, analyse and produce the main findings document and supplementary products.

We publish the official statistics at 9:30am on the date pre-announced in the publication schedule.

Pre-release is given in accordance with the Pre-release Access to Official Statistics Order (2008). You can find the list of postholders granted pre-release access on a separate document accompanying each release.

### Accessibility and clarity

We publish our releases in an accessible format on the GOV.UK website. The information is publicly available and there are no restrictions on access to the published data.

Supporting underlying data in an accessible format accompany each release to allow users to perform their own analysis. This underlying data consists of provider-level and inspection-level files in open document spreadsheet (ODS) format.

If you have any feedback on the accessibility, clarity or any other aspect of the quality of our release, you should send your comments to childcaredataqueries@ofsted.gov.uk.

## Meeting user needs

Users of these statistics include the Department for Education (DfE), local authorities, early years and childcare providers, and the voluntary sector.

The official statistics can help inform policy decisions about the quality and geographical location of childcare provision and contribute towards the findings in Ofsted’s Annual Report to Parliament.

We carried out a consultation in September 2014 that resulted in us merging the 2 separate publications: ‘Registered childcare providers and places’ and ‘Early years and childcare inspections and outcomes’ into the current publication format ‘Childcare providers and inspections’.

## Confidentiality, transparency and security

When we hold sensitive or personal data, we have disclosure control processes in place to ensure that this data is not published. The contact, name and address details of childminders, domestic childcare providers and home childcarers are redacted. This redaction is also applied to a small number of providers of childcare on non-domestic premises due to reasons of personal and national safety.

All data releases follow Ofsted’s confidentiality and revisions policies. See our statement on confidentiality and data access.

# Glossary

Definitions of terms are in our statistics glossary

# Further information

We publish the following information on the inspection of early years providers:

- early years and childcare statistics
- EIF
- framework for the regulation of provision on the childcare register

## Contact us

If you have any comments or feedback on this publication, you should contact Anita Patel on 03000 130 914 or Anita.Patel@ofsted.gov.uk.

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