

# Childminder agency inspection consultation

A report on the responses to the consultation

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This is a report on the outcomes of the consultation about the proposals for inspecting childminder agencies from September 2014.

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Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

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# Contents

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<b>Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
The consultation method	4
Parents' views	5
<b>Findings in full</b>	<b>6</b>
Detailed responses to each consultation question	6
<b>The way forward</b>	<b>8</b>
No notice of inspection to childminder agencies	8
Overall effectiveness judgement	8
Four-point scale	8
Use of self-evaluation	9
Views of childminders and parents or carers	9
Publication of childminder agency inspection reports on the Ofsted website	9

## Introduction

1. This report summarises the responses to the consultation on Ofsted's inspection framework for childminder agencies, to be introduced in September 2014. The Children and Families Act 2014 includes provision for the creation of childminder agencies, and gives Ofsted legal duties to register and inspect them. The Act also includes a range of regulation-making powers which the Department for Education will use to set out further details about how childminder agencies will operate. We want to use our existing knowledge of the sector to ensure that the regulation of childminder agencies supports improvement, is proportionate and efficient, and is centred on the needs of young children and their parents.
2. We launched the childminder agency inspection consultation on 23 January 2014. We sought views from a range of stakeholders. The consultation closed on Friday 21 March 2014.

## The consultation method

3. We used a range of methods to consult with a wide variety of people. Our main method was through an online questionnaire on our website. We also used forums and presentations to encourage people to complete the online questionnaires, and conducted direct discussions with parents/carers.
4. We received over 600 direct responses to the online questionnaire. In addition, we took views from a large number of people through the conferences, presentations and events where we spoke about our proposals. These came from a wide range of sources including registered nurseries, pre-schools and childminders, schools, early years representative organisations, local authorities and parents/carers.
5. Overall, the responses to the consultation support all the proposals and were strongly in favour of some of them. The following are the key findings.
  - A large majority of the respondents to the consultation (68%) strongly agreed or agreed with Ofsted's proposal to give no notice of inspection to childminder agencies; 21% strongly disagreed or disagreed with this proposal.
  - The majority of respondents (61%) strongly agreed or agreed with Ofsted's proposal to require inspectors to make an 'overall effectiveness' judgement on the overall quality of a childminder agency; 26% strongly disagreed or disagreed with the proposal.
  - The majority of respondents (63%) strongly agreed or agreed with the proposal that Ofsted should grade its childminder agency inspection judgements against a four-point scale; 18% strongly disagreed or disagreed with this proposal.

- The majority of respondents (64%) strongly agreed or agreed with Ofsted's proposal that childminder agencies' self-evaluation of their strengths and weaknesses should form part of the inspection evidence; 24% strongly disagreed or disagreed.
- A very large majority (85%) of respondents strongly agreed or agreed to Ofsted's proposal that the views of individual childminders who are registered with an agency, and parents involved with an agency, should form part of the evidence we gather at inspections to inform the inspection judgements; 10% strongly disagreed or disagreed with this proposal.
- A very large majority (88%) of respondents to the consultation strongly agreed or agreed with the proposal that Ofsted should publish its reports from the inspections of childminder agencies on its website; 5% of respondents strongly disagreed or disagreed.

## Parents' views

6. As part of the consultation, we spoke to some parents directly. Below is a summary of their views.
7. The majority of the parents we spoke to agreed that we should give no notice of inspections to childminder agencies. They said no notice is the best way to see how places are actually operating.
8. The parents agreed that Ofsted should make an 'overall effectiveness' judgement on the quality of a childminder agency. They said an overall rating of the agency will be useful for comparing one agency against another.
9. The parents agreed that childminder agency inspection judgements should be made against Ofsted's usual four-point grading scale (outstanding, good, requires improvement, and inadequate). They said it is sensible to use the same scale for everything for consistency.
10. On the proposal that Ofsted inspectors should take into account the agency's ability to use self-evaluation to improve their practice, parents said it is a sensible idea for Ofsted inspectors to take this into account. However, they also cautioned against too much reliance placed on an agency's view of itself, in case the agency is just promoting the positive things about itself and not highlighting its weaknesses.
11. The parents agreed that Ofsted should incorporate the views of individual childminders and parents involved with agencies into the inspection evidence, to contribute to its inspection judgements. They said that it is absolutely essential that the views of both groups are included.
12. The parents agreed that childminder agency inspection reports should be published on the Ofsted website. They said it would also be helpful to indicate the size of the agency.

## Findings in full

### Detailed responses to each consultation question

Q1. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we should give no notice of inspection to childminder agencies?

13. Of the total responses to the consultation, more than two thirds (68%) strongly agreed or agreed with this proposal; 21% strongly disagreed or disagreed.
14. The comments received about this proposal show strong support for a 'no notice' inspection. For example:
  - 'Zero notice means you will see a genuine view of the work taking place.'
15. Some comments questioned how a 'no notice' inspection would work with the childminder agency model, which includes sampling individual childminders.

Q2. To what extent do you agree or disagree that Ofsted should require inspectors to make an 'overall effectiveness' judgement on the overall quality of a childminder agency?

16. The majority (61%) of the respondents to the consultation strongly agreed or agreed with this proposal. A small minority (26%) of respondents strongly disagreed or disagreed.
17. Most of the comments on this proposal show respondents were strongly in favour. For example:
  - 'We strongly agree that Ofsted should make a judgement of overall effectiveness of the agency.'

Q3. To what extent do you agree or disagree that childminder agency inspection judgements should be made against this four-point scale?

18. The majority (62%) of respondents strongly agreed or agreed with this proposal, while 18% strongly disagreed or disagreed.
19. There is strong support to use a four-point scale as it is seen as allowing consistency across the sector and is clearly understood by parents and enable them to make informed childcare decisions. For example:
  - 'We strongly agree that the childminder agency inspection judgements should be made against the four-point scale as this will bring it in line with other services and make it easier for service users to compare with other childminder agencies.'

Q4. To what extent do you agree or disagree that Ofsted's inspections should take into account the agency's ability to use self-evaluation to improve their practice

20. The majority of respondents (64%) strongly agreed or agreed to this proposal; 24% strongly disagreed or disagreed.
21. The comments indicate general support for this proposal. Respondents support the benefits of self-evaluation as an essential tool for agencies to reflect and improve their services and ultimately, outcomes for children. For example:
  - 'Self-evaluation will help the childminder agency to demonstrate their competence in leading and engaging with the childminders'.
22. However, some raised a concern about the reliability the agency's self-evaluation.

Q5. To what extent do you agree or disagree that Ofsted should incorporate the views of individual childminders and parents involved with agencies into the inspection evidence to contribute to its inspection judgements?

23. A very large majority (85%) of respondents strongly agreed or agreed with this proposal; 10% strongly disagreed or disagreed.
24. The majority of comments endorsed the idea that the views of individual childminders and parents using an agency should contribute to the agency's inspection judgements. There was a strong view that the best way to get a true picture of agencies' performance is by seeking the views and opinions of individual childminders and parents. For example:
  - 'Most definitely, this is the only way you will get a true picture of how the agency is actually working. The agency will obviously say that they are providing a good service and that everyone is happy but this may not in fact be the case.'

Q6. To what extent do you agree or disagree that childminder agency inspection reports should be published on the Ofsted website?

25. A very large majority (88%) of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that agency inspection reports should be published on the Ofsted website; 6% strongly disagreed or disagreed.

26. The common reason given for the large support for this proposal is transparency of the agencies' performance and the importance of being able to hold underperforming agencies to account. Respondents felt that publishing agencies' inspection reports will help parents make informed choices about which childminding provision their children attend. For example:
- 'We strongly agree that the childminder agency inspection reports should be published on the Ofsted website in order to ensure a transparent system'.

## **The way forward**

27. We are grateful to all those who responded to the consultation. The views given by respondents have shown strong support for our proposals. Furthermore, the comments we received highlighted some areas of importance, which we will consider carefully in taking forward our proposals. When we publish our inspection framework for agencies, we will be clear about how Ofsted will inspect agencies, including how we will sample individual childminders registered with an agency as part of the agency's inspection.
28. Since the consultation concluded, the Department for Education has published a consultation on the proposed requirements that childminder agencies will have to meet. This helps to clarify the relationship between Ofsted's judgement of the agency's overall effectiveness and the agency's judgement of the quality of its childminders. Going forward, we will ensure that our inspection documents are also clear about this relationship.

## **No notice of inspection to childminder agencies**

29. We will provide further clarity around the practicalities of inspecting agencies with no notice, given that part of the inspection will involve sampling individual childminders. Ofsted's approach is to give all providers little or no notice, which is a fundamental part of seeing an organisation at inspection 'as it is'. We will give this proposal careful thought as we develop our inspection arrangements.

## **Overall effectiveness judgement**

30. Given the support for this proposal we will include an 'overall effectiveness' judgement in our inspections of childminder agencies. We will be clear in our inspection guidance about the meaning of the agency's 'overall effectiveness' judgement.

## **Four-point scale**

31. We welcome the support for this proposal, and will implement a four-point grading scale for childminder agency inspections.



## **Use of self-evaluation**

32. The clear support for this proposal indicates that we should encourage self-evaluation as a means through which agencies can identify strengths and weaknesses and develop plans to improve. Given the potentially wide variety of businesses and organisations that will run agencies, we do not think it is sensible to prescribe a particular form of self-evaluation, nor can we require agencies to do this when it is not a legal requirement. We will therefore develop an inspection framework that allows inspectors to take into account the outcomes from an agency's self-evaluation, whatever form that takes. In addition, we will make clear in our evaluation schedule for childminder agencies that the failure by an agency to undertake any kind of assessment of its strengths and areas for improvement may affect its quality judgement at inspection.

## **Views of childminders and parents or carers**

33. We believe that evidence from stakeholders is important in helping to inform the inspection judgements, and this was endorsed by those who responded to the consultation. We will therefore make it clear that we expect the agency to seek the views of its individual childminders and parents or carers as part of assessing its own quality. These views are likely to influence the judgements that we make about the quality of the agency.

## **Publication of childminder agency inspection reports on the Ofsted website**

34. We will publish childminder agency inspection reports on our website. We will ensure that we develop an inspection report template that makes it clear to parents and childminders how we have reached our judgements about the quality of the agency.