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Dear Wendy

Inspection of Childminding Matters Childminder Agency

Thank you for your cooperation during the inspection on 14 and 15 May 2018. I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. This was the agency's first inspection and was carried out under the Childcare Act 2006, as amended by the Children and Families Act 2014.

Childminding Matters Childminder Agency is effective

Leadership and management are effective

The quality of the agency's services is effective

The impact of the agency's services on the quality of the education and care provided by its childminders is effective

Summary findings

Childminding Matters Childminding Agency is run by two directors who have extensive experience in providing support and training for childminders. The agency provides a comprehensive service for childminders. It puts high emphasis on the safety, well-being and learning of children. It promotes an aspirational approach to improvement for both experienced and new childminders. The agency is 'user friendly' because it is organised and efficient, with a helpful website and a broad range of training and support packages. Both directors work collaboratively to evaluate and improve the agency. They challenge one another and double-check key decisions so that overall management is rigorous and robust. Childminders report that they greatly value the services provided by the agency.

The agency takes very seriously its responsibility to make sure that only suitable individuals are registered as childminders. It has decided not to register, on occasion, when it has not been satisfied that legal and agency standards will be met. Processes for checking adults' suitability, including whether a person is disqualified from providing childcare, are rigorously applied to ensure that relevant people are safe to be around children. Information is recorded and organised to provide a clear overview that helps to ensure that nothing is missed.

All childminders regularly confirm with the agency that they and their assistants remain suitable, and that they understand their duty to report any change in circumstance. However, a very small minority of childminders are not knowledgeable about all of the offences that might make a person disqualified. They rely on the agency for this information rather than knowing it themselves. The impact of this lack of knowledge is very low as the childminders work closely with agency staff when undertaking recruitment and checking suitability. The agency recognises that all childminders need to know and understand what makes a person disqualified and has planned further training to support this.

The agency carries out rigorous monitoring and support visits to check that children receive good quality care and to help childminders improve their practice. It carries out a higher number of visits than is required by regulations, adopting a tailored approach so that each childminder receives the support they need. The agency sets 'actions' as points for further development that result from this support. When a childminder is found to be in breach of the requirements of the early years foundation stage (EYFS), the agency sets a notice to improve, which it also calls an 'action'. This confuses some childminders as they do not distinguish between something that is desirable to improve practice further and something that must be done to meet the requirements of the EYFS.

Children benefit from interesting learning experiences that promote their development well. Childminders receive an effective induction and ongoing training programme. As a result, they demonstrate an effective understanding of how children in their care learn and develop.

Recommendations

- Take effective steps to make sure all childminders have a comprehensive understanding of what makes a person disqualified from providing childcare.
- Make a clear distinction between actions set to improve practice further and actions that are set as a result of a breach of the EYFS to help childminders understand the urgency of improvements needed.

The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the childminder agency

- The agency takes effective steps to keep itself and its childminders up-to-date with safeguarding information. For example, it provides child protection information that reflects the local areas served by the childminders. It also tests that childminders' knowledge is current, asking them to identify possible courses of action to scenarios and checking that the responses cover the required steps. As a result of the training and documentation provided, the agency and its childminders implement rigorous safeguarding procedures to help protect children. Agency staff are knowledgeable and childminders know what to do if they have concerns about a child's safety and well-being.
- Childminders are supported in effective procedures from the start so that they effectively identify and manage risks. Safer recruitment processes are embedded in agency practice and this is disseminated to childminders wishing to take on assistants.
- The Statement of Purpose outlines how the agency will approach enforcement matters to fulfil its role as a regulator. This is underpinned by the full understanding of regulatory responsibility by both directors, together with a wealth of clear supporting documentation. The agency understands when to take appropriate action. Its thresholds are defined sufficiently well to protect children and ensure that the requirements of the EYFS are met.
- The agency fosters effective partnerships. It is responsive to feedback from childminders and adapts its practice to meet their needs. For example, in a recent survey, childminders said that they would like to meet together more frequently. As a result, a get-together has been arranged at a local venue. This is intended to provide an opportunity to socialise, but also to give them a chance to learn more about new data management legislation. The agency also plays a part in improving systems for its childminders, such as liaising with other agencies over financial schemes so that appropriate funds can be claimed.
- Systems to monitor and evaluate the quality of childminder provision enable the agency directors to form an accurate view of provision. The agency takes effective and proportionate steps to address any weaknesses. It allows a reasonable timeframe to improve provision that is not yet good. This gives childminders a realistic opportunity to make necessary changes.
- Both directors are committed to running an agency that enables childminders to provide the best possible care for children. Systems of overall evaluation are detailed and improvements over the first year of operation are evident. The directors are realistic about plans for expansion and are aware of their own capacity, choosing to prioritise high-quality support and childcare over recruiting large numbers of childminders.

The quality of the agency's services

The agency knows its childminders very well and provides a highly personalised service. When childminders express a concern or lack of confidence, the directors react quickly to provide telephone support and set up a visit to discuss and reassure. Where there are concerns that provision is not good enough, visits are expedited so that swift action can be taken and monitored.

- The training of childminders is a particular strength of the agency. Childminding Matters has a wealth of face-to-face and online training opportunities that cover almost every aspect of childminding and the EYFS. It is also accredited to deliver a recognised level 3 childcare qualification. Childminders make good use of this training provision. All childminders attended a recent session on observation, assessment and planning. A large majority of those registered attended a session on helping children to be ready for school.
- Childminders are encouraged to take responsibility for identifying the training they require. A review of their 'continuous professional development log' is a part of the agency's routine monitoring to ensure childminders plan, experience and use learning opportunities to improve their practice.
- Records show how the agency tailors its support to individual need, setting targets for further improvement with each childminder. The number of visits provided depends on the confidence, experience and ability of the childminder. These include unannounced visits and inspections as well as regular support visits.
- The agency's evaluation of the quality of its childminders is accurate. Good practice and development are celebrated. The agency recognises that all childminders need to know and understand what makes a person disqualified and has planned further training to support this. Weaker aspects of practice are identified and improvement is discussed and implemented. The agency is also committed to sharing best practice and makes effective links between childminders to do this.
- The agency provides a broad range of materials that assist childminders to set up their business and to develop their provision. The 'business toolkit', for example, provides an extensive range of information and templates, which childminders personalise to reflect their own provision and policies. The documentation available accurately reflects the requirements of the EYFS, and so assists childminders to be fully compliant with what is required.

The impact of the agency's services on the quality of the education and care provided by its childminders

- Registration visits are both rigorous and supportive. The agency is clear in its intention to only register those childminders who are able to reach and sustain good practice. It gives applicants an opportunity to make further improvements before registration if the provision is not quite ready at the first

registration visit. This ensures a fair process whereby applicants are given every opportunity and effective help to become a childminder.

- The agency and its childminders take effective steps to keep children safe. Evaluation and improvement planning identifies additional training for both childminders and agency directors, on topics such as advanced safeguarding or safe use of computers and electronic tablets.
- A recent survey shows that childminders are overwhelmingly positive about the quality, approachability, timeliness and impact of the agency's services. This includes support given by telephone and email as well as through face-to-face sessions and visits. All childminders stated that they felt able to deliver a high quality childminding service as a result of the support they receive.
- Parents speak positively about the difference the agency makes to their childcare arrangements. They express the view that their childminders are 'passionate' about caring for children as a result of the high level of support and encouragement the agency provides.
- Childminders find the business support from the agency very useful in ensuring that they run an efficient provision. Guidance on matters, such as tax and invoicing, for example, helps ensure efficient practice. Information about taking on apprentices has also been worthwhile and appreciated.
- The help given to childminders on assessment has helped to improve their practice and overall confidence. They make good use of recent training, 'baseline' information and agency 'learning journey' documentation. In addition, the agency has recently provided electronic systems of assessment to those childminders who wish to use it. As a result of this training and support, observations and assessment have improved and teaching reflects children's individual needs more accurately.
- Most childminders place a particular emphasis on developing children's communication and language skills, and can demonstrate successful outcomes as a result.
- Good use is made of funding. Childminders help children to accelerate key aspects of their development, such as their personal, social and emotional development, so that they catch-up with their peers.
- Children who require additional support, such as those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, benefit from the effective partnerships between the childminder and agency. Advice available includes a range of strategies and ongoing dialogue about how best to support the individual child. This has resulted in an enjoyable learning experience and improved outcomes.

This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Susan Mann
Senior Her Majesty's Inspector (Early Years)
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Information about the inspection

The inspection was carried out by one Senior Her Majesty's Inspector and one Senior Officer. A second Senior Officer was also present in a shadow capacity. The inspectors held meetings with the leaders and managers of the agency, including the designated safeguarding lead. They reviewed a wide range of documentation including safeguarding information, the Statement of Purpose, self-evaluation documentation and policies and procedures. They also sampled childminder case files, information about training and support offered to childminders and inspection guidance and report format. They reviewed childminder responses to a satisfaction and feedback survey. During the inspection, inspectors visited three homes where childminding was taking place, observing four childminders in total: one of these visits included a joint observation with the partner who fulfils the role of quality and improvement manager. Inspectors also spoke on the telephone to two parents who use childminders registered with the agency.

Information about the agency

Childminding Matters was registered as a childminder agency in July 2017. It is a private organisation operated by two directors who also work directly with their registered childminders to provide training, monitoring and support. It registers childminders that care for both early years and later years children. The broad area served by the agency covers most of Swindon, Wiltshire, Oxfordshire, South Gloucestershire, West Berkshire, Northamptonshire, Warwickshire, North West Hampshire, South East Worcestershire, and North Buckinghamshire. Childminding Matters is also an accredited training provider and offers a range of training and development opportunities for childminders. There are currently 12 childminders registered with the agency.