



**What to look for
when choosing
childcare**



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Ofsted reports

You should always visit the childcare provider to make sure they are suitable for your child. When you do so, ask to see a copy of their Ofsted report and registration certificate. Or you can view these online at the Ofsted website or at www.lancashire.gov.uk/childcare through the childcare search facility. You can also see details of any complaints or concerns raised against the childcare provider that have been investigated by Ofsted.

The report shows the Ofsted inspector's findings together with basic information about the childcare provider. It's an important source of information to help you assess the quality of childcare. It tells you:

- how effective they are;
- what they do well;
- what recommendations have been made to help them improve further; and
- any actions they must carry out by law to raise the standard of their care.

The Ofsted inspector gives each childcare provider a grade out of 4, to give an indication of the learning, development and the quality of care they provide to children:

- Grade 1 - Outstanding
- Grade 2 - Good
- Grade 3 - Satisfactory/Requires Improvement
- Grade 4 - Inadequate

There are two categories for grade 4 (inadequate):

Category 1

The childcare has been judged as weak. In this case, Ofsted will send the childcare provider a notice to improve letter that contains actions that must be taken, and by what date, to deal with the most significant weaknesses.

Category 2

The childcare has been judged as poor and needs urgent attention. In this case Ofsted may take enforcement action. That could mean they give the childcare provider a welfare requirements notice explaining which requirements are not being met, including what must be done to improve and by when. In some rare cases where Ofsted believe children are at risk, they may suspend or cancel the childcare provider's registration with immediate effect.

If a childcare provider receives an inadequate grade, they will receive a monitoring visit within three months and will be re-inspected by Ofsted within six months.



Ofsted say that 'Good' and 'Outstanding' childcare providers make a stronger, more positive difference to children's learning and development than those that are graded as 'Requires Improvement' or 'Inadequate'.

Ofsted do not publish all childminder's names or addresses in order to safeguard the welfare of children and protect their privacy. Childminders must individually request to publish their personal details.

It is important to keep in mind that Ofsted assesses childcare providers on how well they support children's development according to their individual needs. The assessment is not just about education, but includes how well they meet the social and emotional needs of children in their care.

You should use the inspection reports to help you:

- decide which providers to visit;
- confirm your own thoughts about a provider you have visited, or one someone has recommended; or
- check the Ofsted quality rating of the provider you are using.

Childcare providers on the Early Years Register will be inspected typically, at least once every three to four years. Inspections are undertaken with little or no notice, with the exception of childcare which takes place in the child's home.

If you want to look at Ofsted registered childminder reports online, you will need their Unique Registration Number (URN). You can get this from the childcare provider or give us a call on **0800 195 0137**. For more information, or if you have any concerns about a childcare provider, contact the Ofsted complaints department - phone **0300 123 1231** or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.





Quality assurance schemes

In addition to being registered with Ofsted, some types of childcare provider may follow a quality assurance scheme. These schemes require providers to work towards high standards of care. Some are judged by the childcare staff themselves, others are judged by an independent professional organisation.

Although quality schemes are not required by law, they can demonstrate that the childcare provider aims to meet high standards. You may want to ask if your childcare provider is working towards or have achieved any quality schemes.

The childcare available in your area

It's easy to find out what childcare is available near you. You can get this information direct from www.lancashire.gov.uk/childcare using the online childcare search. Or if you want to give us a call on 0800 195 0137, one of our helpful staff will be happy to discuss your options and provide you with a childcare list tailored to meet your needs.

The information we supply for each childcare provider has been given to us by the childcare provider. Some of them give us more details than others. To protect the safety of the children, most childminders do not provide full address details.

Prices tend to vary depending on your family's specific childcare requirements; therefore the prices listed should only be used as a guideline for short listing purposes.

Most childcare providers offer a flexible service and will try their best to meet your needs. If there's a service you're looking for which isn't on their listing, it may still be worth giving them a call. For example, a childminder may not have included the school your child attends in their drop-off and collection service, but it could easily be built into their daily routine.

Visiting childcare providers

Once you've chosen the childcare providers you're most interested in, make an appointment to visit them. This will give you a feel for their abilities and how they'll get on with your child.



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Visiting a childcare provider for the first time can be an exciting experience. During your visit it is important to gather the information you require, through observation and by asking questions. If you forget to ask a question – ring back later for clarification.

The best childcare settings expect questions and should be happy to answer any you have. Below we have listed some questions you may want to ask while you're there, but don't be frightened to add more to this list:

1. How long have you been childminding? How long have your staff been working here?

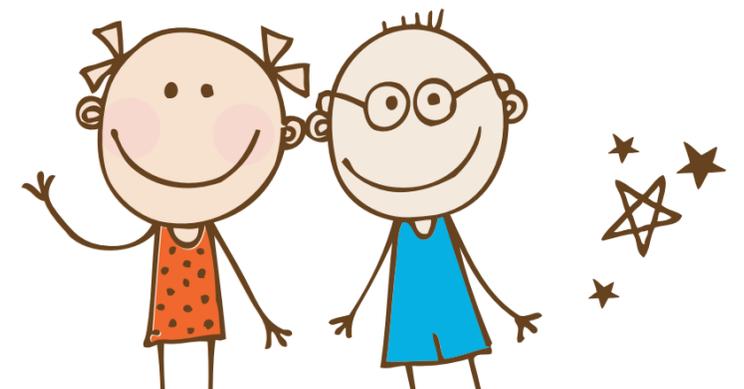
Children need to develop stable relationships with the adults caring for them. This is more likely to happen if staff turnover is low. Try to ask as many different staff members as possible.

2. What training have you or your staff completed? What qualifications do you or your staff have?

Childminders need to have completed a training course approved by their local authority. They should also have an up to date paediatric first aid and safeguarding qualification. Some childminders also take more advanced childcare qualifications such as an NVQ level 3 in Childcare as part of their professional development.

Well-trained staff should provide high-quality care and education for young children. Ask how many staff have childcare qualifications and at what levels.

For childcare settings, The Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage outlines the minimum qualification requirements but staff training is often extended beyond the minimum requirements. Further information about the Statutory Framework can be found at www.lancashire.gov.uk/childcare.





3. Do you enjoy being with children? Why?

It's important that adults providing childcare and early education enjoy their work. They have the job of supporting parents in providing young children with a variety of stimulating and exciting opportunities to learn and develop to the best of their abilities.

Plan ahead, think about possible changes in your circumstances and childcare needs, and plan to ensure stability and continuity for your child.

4. Can I look around the building to see the rooms and outside play space? If there is no outside play space, how will you make sure my child gets the chance to play outside?

Childcare needs to be safe, clean, welcoming and stimulating. Look for:

- a variety of toys and materials - stored so that children can get to them easily; and
- enough space so children can move around freely.

Children should have access to an outdoor play area, or there should be arrangements in place to regularly take them somewhere they can play safely outside.

5. How will you help my child to settle?

Every child is different and your child may struggle to settle into a particular childcare setting. Try and allow plenty of time for both you and your child to settle in to your new childcare arrangement.

Ask what procedures the staff or the childminder have in place to welcome new children. Most will offer you flexible settling in sessions in which you may be able to accompany your own child, for an agreed limited time, then your child will gradually attend on their own until they are settled fully.

You should always visit a childcare provider, when they are in full flow, and take your child with you to see what they think.



6. Where will my child rest?

Some young children need to rest during the day, so there should be a suitable place for this. Rest areas should be quiet, dimly lit and have soft furnishings.

7. What kind of food and drink will you give?

Look for evidence that children get some fresh fruit and vegetables and have plenty to drink. Ask how the childcare provider caters for special dietary and cultural requirements.

Try not to let cost prevent you from exploring an option. Remember that quality and flexibility are important. There may be help with childcare costs through a range of entitlements and benefits. Check out our paying for childcare guide for more information.

8. What will my child do all day?

Daily activities should be varied, flexible and provide children with opportunities to choose what they want to do.

9. How do you encourage positive behaviour?

Challenging behaviour needs to be dealt with sensitively, and childcare providers should try to understand rather than reprimand. They should have a written policy on how they deal with difficult behaviour – ask to see it!

10. Will my child be with a regular group of children? How old are they?

Being part of a regular group is important for children. However, they can also benefit from the opportunity to be with children of a different age. Routines need to be flexible enough to meet the needs of the whole group.

Try to give yourself plenty of time to think about arranging your childcare. It may take time to get what is right for your family or there may be waiting lists.



11. How will you make sure I know how my child is getting on?

You should expect regular meetings with your child's carer. In group settings like nurseries, you should be in regular contact with your child's key person – the member of staff responsible for collecting and coordinating information on their development.

You should also expect to get information about your child's development at any time and there are two stages (at age 2, and again at age 5) when the professionals caring for your child must give you written information about how he or she is doing. This is known as the progress check at age 2 and the EYFS profile (aged 5).

12. I have a complaint about my child's childcare. Who do I need to speak to?

It's best to speak first to a member of staff, the manager of the childcare setting or with the childminder. If you're still not happy with the care provided, you should contact Ofsted by phoning **0300 123 4666**.

Trust your own judgement and instincts. You understand your child's needs best and know what will suit your family

13. How will you provide feedback on my child's daily activities, progress and development?

Every Ofsted registered childcare provider will have systems in place to communicate with you effectively. This is usually through a daily diary or learning journey that:

- records your child's progress;
- helps plan their future progress; and
- supports them to meet their learning goals.



14. Can you give me references or contact details for other parents who've used your services?

Most Ofsted registered childcare providers will have references from families that have used their services. Follow up these references as it will give you the opportunity to ask questions and gain another parent's point of view on the service.

Don't be rushed into something you are not happy with. Try to be clear about what you need and look at all the options.

15. What if my child has a specific need?

If your child has specific needs (for example, a special diet or cultural requirements), discuss them with the childminder or manager of the childcare provider. They will be able to tell you the type of support they can offer. All Ofsted registered childcare providers must make reasonable allowances to support the needs of your child.

16. Do you provide free childcare places for 2, 3 & 4 year old children through the council's Free Early Entitlement scheme?

Some 2 year olds and all 3 & 4 year olds are entitled to claim up to 15 hours free childcare per week for 38 weeks per year.

To check if your child is eligible for 2 year old funding visit lancashire.gov.uk/childcare and complete the online checker or give us a call on **0800 195 0137**.

Not all childcare providers are eligible to provide this service, so it's best to check first!

17. Do you work with any schools in the local area to help prepare my child for the future?

The transition from using childcare to going to school can be a difficult time for both parents and children.

Ofsted inspections and other quality marks should compliment your own judgement. You know your child better than anyone else and it's important that you do your own research, visit a variety of childcare types and providers, speak with staff, ask lots of questions and trust your instincts.





Contracts

Once you've chosen your childcare provider or combination of providers, you should be asked to sign a contract. A contract is important and you should make sure you understand what you're agreeing to before you sign it. Remember that it's a legally binding document and if your childcare arrangement breaks down in the future it will be used to show what has been agreed.

The contract should cover things like:

- Charges - hourly, daily, weekly or monthly, if you are using the Free Early Entitlement and paying on top for extra hours is there a clear breakdown that you have received your free entitlement fully?
- What will happen and whether there will be charges if you, your child or the childminder are ill or on holiday (including public holidays)
- Extra costs – for example, for meals, drinks, snacks, nappies or outings
- Extra availability and related charges – for example, for dropping your child off earlier or later than usual or for overnight care.
- What will happen if you are late picking up your child and who can pick up them up in your place?
- How much notice you and the childcare provider must give to cancel or change the terms of the contract.

Contracts should be renewed every 6 to 12 months. This gives you a chance to discuss your child's needs and progress.

Settling in period

Every child is different and your child may struggle to settle into a particular childcare setting. Try and allow plenty of time for both you and your child to settle in to your new childcare arrangement.

Ask what procedures the staff or the childminder have in place to welcome new children. Most will offer you flexible settling in sessions in which you may be able to accompany your own child, for an agreed limited time, then your child will gradually attend on their own until they are settled fully.



What you do at home really counts

Finally please remember that, whichever childcare option you choose, what you do at home can also make a real difference to your child's development.

Here are a few ideas on how you can help in your child's development (most likely you will be doing some or all of these already):

- Play is children's work! You may feel you cannot face another go at your child's favourite jigsaw but, if they still want to do it, it means they are still learning. And play does not need to involve lots of expensive toys – lots of things around the house can be used for games.
- Talk as much as you can. Chatting together, asking questions and singing rhymes as a normal part of daily life will all help your child's language development, as well as helping them learn about the world around them.
- Children learn through doing. They need to be physically active and have a go. In the same way, they will learn how to get on with other people by mixing with other children.
- Be realistic about what children can do. Children learn at different rates – if you expect children to be able to do things before they are ready, you are likely to end up feeling frustrated and your child may lose confidence.
- Studies have shown that boys spend less time playing with their parents and doing things like singing and looking at books together. You may need to make more of an effort to involve boys in these activities to make sure they do not lose out.

If you would like more information on your childcare options, please contact us on **0800 195 0137** or visit our website at www.lancashire.gov.uk/education/childcare.





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