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28 July 2016

Charis Penfold  
Nominated individual  
Gifford House  
67c St Helier Avenue  
Morden  
SM4 6HY

Dear Ms Penfold

### **Inspection of Leap Ahead Achieving for Children Childminder Agency**

Thank you for your cooperation during the inspection on 19 and 20 July 2016. 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.

**Leap Ahead Achieving for Children 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**

The childminder agency is coming to the end of its first year of operating with childminders. Leaders and managers understand the role of the agency as a regulator and ensure that childminders who register with the agency are suitable. Staff apply the agency's registration processes rigorously and are uncompromising in the decisions they make. For example, staff let an applicant know if they do not meet the agency's expectations for registration and make it clear what the applicant needs to do to meet the requirements of the early years foundation stage in order to be ready to start childminding.

The agency has consulted Achieving for Children's legal team to ensure that it is fully prepared to take legal action against any childminder it has registered if they become

unsuitable. It visits childminders, within eight months of registration, to check quality and compliance with the early years foundation stage requirements. These visits help to identify what childminders need to do to improve their practice as well as ensuring the safety and welfare of the children.

Agency staff follow its procedures well when it receives information that raises a safeguarding concern. Staff work with the local authority safeguarding officer to make sure that children are safe. However, these procedures are less clear about how the agency deals with other information of concern. This includes, for example, information that suggests that a childminder may be breaching a requirement of the early years foundation stage but not at a level that triggers a safeguarding concern.

During the year, leaders and managers recognised the need to sharpen the processes for checking and overseeing the work of agency workers. Leaders have recently introduced an additional layer of management to support staff and hold them to account for the work they do. The full extent of these responsibilities for the head of early years is still being established.

Childminders value the support they receive from the agency and explain how this helps them to improve their practice. The agency collects the views of childminders, parents and children before quality-assurance visits to inform the assessment process. However, the agency is not making the best use of this information to inform its wider self-evaluation to help identify how it can support the childminders to improve through the services it offers.

## **Recommendations**

- Sharpen the new management role for the head of early years.
- Ensure that the agency's procedures for dealing with information that suggests a breach of non-safeguarding requirements are clear.
- Ensure that all available information is analysed and evaluated to identify areas for development, including the views of parents, children and childminders as well as information from partners involved in delivering training.

## **The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the childminder agency**

- The agency's new processes to check the quality of its work are effective. Six-weekly supervisions of staff and quarterly reporting mean that leaders and managers have good oversight of any safeguarding concerns.
- Leaders and managers use their quality-assurance checks of reports from visits to childminders to identify training needs and areas that can be improved. For example, the agency has identified that childminders need more support when completing assessments of children's learning.

- The head of early years holds agency staff to account for their work through supervision meetings. Staff share concerns about individual childminders, discuss information received through suitability checks and consider how processes work in practice. This is a recent change and, because the responsibilities of this role are not clearly defined in the staffing structure for the agency, it is difficult to evaluate the impact.
- Staff check that the agency is meeting its legal requirements. They monitor to ensure that the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks for members of a childminder's household who turn 16 years of age are completed promptly. They ensure that unannounced monitoring visits take place in the required timescales.
- Staff have a clear knowledge and understanding of safeguarding issues and attend regular training and local safeguarding children's board (LSCB) conferences to keep up to date with current issues. They use this knowledge effectively to check that childminders meet the safeguarding and welfare requirements of the early years foundation stage.
- Staff have tested how effective the agency's complaint procedures are. Following an initial complaint against a registered childminder, the agency acted appropriately in its role as the regulator to refer the matter to the local authority safeguarding officer. The agency has well-founded plans to liaise with other local authorities where they have registered or are registering childminders to ensure that the childminders understand their local safeguarding procedures.
- Leaders and managers at the agency recognise that its procedures do not clearly show how it deals with different types of information it receives about the practice of its registered childminders.

### **The quality of the agency's services**

- Managers ensure that childminders meet safeguarding and welfare requirements. Staff are quick to recognise where practice can be improved and signpost childminders to training and a range of helpful information. For example, childminders receive regular information from the LSCB, the local authority early years team and the agency to help them keep up to date with current safeguarding developments and issues. This includes information on female genital mutilation, child neglect and 'safer sleep' for babies.
- The agency has completed 10 quality assessment visits. Agency staff initially carried out visits in pairs to ensure consistency of judgements. Following the initial visits, they continue to review how they assess the quality of a childminder's practice.
- Inspectors looked closely at a sample of childminders to check and evaluate the accuracy of quality-assessment visits. The large majority of assessments are accurate. The agency has supported weaker childminders effectively to improve their practice. Staff are not afraid to make unpopular judgements and stand by them.
- The agency provides two different training packages for childminders to support flexible working arrangements. It works in partnership with the local authority's workforce development team to enable agency childminders to have access to a range of training throughout the year. This includes sessions on 'understanding

schemas', 'fun with sounds' and 'early mark-making' to support children's literacy skills. There is also a strong focus on statutory training and training in finance to support childminders in running their business.

- Staff hold regular informal discussions about training needs with childminders. Childminders respond to formal questions in preparation for their quality-assurance visit at eight months. This helps agency staff to have a secure understanding of the individual training needs of childminders. Nonetheless, some training is not well attended. For example, in March 2016, only 29% of childminders attended a session on improving observation and assessment. The agency and partners check who attends which events. However, the agency has not evaluated this information to help them identify what works well and find out why some events are less popular.
- The agency surveys parents and children before quality-assurance visits to seek their views of the childminders they use. This information is used to inform the quality-assurance visits. However, it is not used to inform the agency's self-evaluation process so that it can identify how it can improve its services to childminders.

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

- Childminders value the support and guidance they receive from agency staff. New childminders say that they chose the agency to get the support and training they needed to start their childminding business. For example, the agency has devised a toolkit for childminders that includes a range of helpful forms and guidance, such as information about working with assistants and contracts to use with parents.
- Childminders say that the support they receive is helping them to improve their practice. For example, one childminder has improved her observations and learning records of children following individual support from the agency. Another childminder is focusing on helping boys to improve their skills for drawing and writing. This is because agency staff know the childminders well and tailor support to their individual needs.
- Newly registered childminders demonstrate a clear understanding of how to promote British values when working with very young children. Children are familiar with routines and learn the importance of sharing and how to respect and consider the feelings of others.
- Childminders build strong links with the children in their setting. Children choose to play and act out different roles due to well-planned environments. They are confident to share their views and develop a clear understanding of what makes them unique.
- Involvement in a recent project to improve children's oral health is proving popular. Parents say that their children understand the importance of brushing their teeth and do it more readily.

I am copying this letter to the Department for Education. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

**Wendy Ratcliff**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

This inspection was conducted by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors. They undertook visits to four childminders. This included accompanying an agency officer to an interview to register a new childminder. They spoke with childminders to seek their views on the quality of services provided by the agency. Inspectors took account of the views of parents gathered by the agency. They looked at childminder case records and completed case studies for two childminders to check the robustness of registration processes and to find out how the agency deals with complaints. Inspectors had discussions with the nominated individual and the head of early years to discuss their roles as leaders and managers. They had a discussion with agency workers and sampled a range of documentation, including quality assessments and policies and procedures.

### **Information about the agency**

Leap Ahead Achieving for Children Childminder Agency registered in May 2015. Achieving for Children (AfC) is a social enterprise company created by the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames and the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames to provide children's services. The agency's office is in Twickenham. The agency serves Richmond, Kingston, Merton and Croydon. In time, it plans to offer services to childminders in other neighbouring authorities. The agency currently has 24 childminders registered, which is below the target set to register up to 30 childminders in the first year. The agency registers childminders on both the Early Years and Childcare Register. The agency employs two childminder agency officers. The officers also undertake roles across both local authorities to support all childminders.