

Orange Moon Childcare Community Interest Company t/a @Home Childcare Childminder Agency

Inspection dates:

16 to 18 January 2023

Overall inspection judgement

Effective

Leadership and management

Effective

The quality of the agency's services

Effective

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

Effective

Previous overall inspection judgement

Effective

Summary findings

Childminders registered with @Home Childcare Childminder Agency are known as 'educators', which reflects the agency's recognition of the vital role early education has for young children. The chief executive officer (CEO) of the agency, who is supported closely by the quality manager, strives to uphold the agency's shared vision to deliver high-quality home-based early education and care for children, and professional support, training and regulatory services for their educators.

The members of the leadership team are highly respected by educators and other stakeholders working with the agency. They demonstrate an acute awareness of the various challenges which impact on the wider early years sector. They offer timely support through guidance, training and sharing good practice, which helps educators to navigate through these difficulties and consequently promotes positive outcomes for children.

Leaders consistently develop the agency's operating model to ensure that it is viable and sustainable. They swiftly address any areas of practice they identify could be improved on. They are proactive in their approach to self-evaluation and development. Plans for continuous improvement of the agency are aspirational in a challenging sector. The agency explains its focus on 'getting it right for children' above rapidly increasing the numbers of educators. Leaders are tenacious and conscientious in their approach.

The agency gives appropriate support and challenge to educators through training and regular visits for quality support and quality assurance. This ensures that children are safe and make good progress. Overall, the agency uses its regulatory powers proportionately and effectively to drive improvement and promote children's welfare. However, the rationale for issuing educators with warning letters when breaches of the 'Statutory framework for the early years foundation stage (EYFS)' are identified is not always clear or fully embedded.

Employed and freelance inspectors carry out annual quality appraisals for all educators. They measure the quality of the educators' provision against the agency's own quality appraisal criteria and award a judgement. The judgement is based on the evidence gathered at the time of inspection, alongside the existing knowledge the agency has about an educator through the ongoing support and mentoring provided. The agency states that this gives a more accurate depiction of what is typical practice for any of its educators.

Overall, the quality inspection appraisals are accurate and highlight what it is like for a child to attend the setting. However, a lack of regular moderation can, in some instances, mean that judgements made and the text written in a report are not supported robustly. The evidence can occasionally be overly descriptive and lack an evaluative rationale to demonstrate what impact is being made for children.

Recommendations

- Improve understanding throughout the agency, both for educators and agency staff, of the rationale used when it is deemed necessary to address a breach of the EYFS by sending a warning letter to an educator. This includes an acceptable timescale for receipt of a warning letter.
- Develop a process for regular review and moderation of how inspectors capture evidence, and what they record, during an annual quality appraisal to promote more consistency in quality appraisal practice and make accurate judgements that will stand up to scrutiny.

The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the childminder agency

- Future plans to ensure viability, growth and sustainability of the agency are well thought out and consider the benefit to children from accessing high-quality early education. These plans also offer direct support for the business side of becoming an educator, which the agency recognises as a barrier for some potential applicants. This includes the recent employment of agency staff whose primary roles are in business support both for applicants and for registered educators.
- The agency has recently revisited development plans which were originally drawn up in 2020, before the COVID-19 pandemic. As the full impact of the pandemic became apparent, the agency worked tirelessly to translate government restrictions to its registered educators, which ensured that guidance was fully understood and implemented. Support was available to educators throughout the pandemic and leaders implemented a response plan, followed by a recovery plan, as restrictions began to lift. Some effective aspects of practice developed since the pandemic remain in place now. This includes live streaming of training events and the use of some virtual meetings as part of the registration process.
- The recruitment, vetting and induction process for employing agency staff is thorough and robust. This ensures that only those who are suitable to fulfil roles in the agency are offered these positions. Employees describe feeling fully supported from the start of their employment through bespoke induction plans which allow them to learn and progress at their own pace. Staff describe how effectively the CEO promotes their well-being and say that being employed by the agency is like being part of a community.
- Regular support and guidance are given to agency staff by the CEO and the quality manager. Both are spoken of in the highest regard by agency staff and by others who work with, or alongside, the agency. They are described as 'inspirational', 'knowledgeable', 'approachable' and 'supportive'. Leaders take an appreciative approach to the evaluation of agency staff's practice. They share accountability for successes and development points. Areas for improvement identified during this inspection had already been reflected on by leaders.
- The registration process for applicants wishing to become educators is robust. Vetting checks are carried out to ensure that applicants and anyone else living or working with them are suitable and to explore the applicant's motivation for becoming an educator. Pre-registration training is provided. An inspector visits the applicant's home to check the appropriateness of the premises and to test their knowledge and understanding of the EYFS. The agency does not shy away from either delaying registration if applicants are not yet ready or refusing registration if they are not deemed suitable.
- Once registered, the agency insists on mandatory training in safeguarding children, and it conducts an audit of applicants' existing knowledge of the EYFS to

ensure that ongoing training and support are appropriate, bespoke and fill any knowledge gaps.

- There is shared knowledge among the agency staff relating to the use of their regulatory powers. This is part of ongoing training, and examples have been shared where these powers have been used appropriately to safeguard children and challenge poor-quality practice when it is identified. The agency has also used these powers effectively to drive improvement.
- The use of warning letters as a regulatory tool when breaches of the EYFS are identified is not yet fully embedded. The rationale for sending a warning letter is not clear, which creates some disparity for educators. Additionally, there can be a significant delay of up to six weeks in these letters being sent to educators. This minimises the seriousness of the matter addressed in the warning letter and could therefore compromise the appropriateness of this regulatory tool.
- The agency benefits from the close working relationship with their sister company which specialises in childcare and education training. Educators also have access to the agency's 'Childcare Academy' if they wish to pursue more formal training, such as apprenticeships or recognised childcare qualifications.
- Leaders are developing a 'grow your own' approach to contracting new inspectors. For example, an educator, who the agency deems to be fully competent in delivering a high-quality provision, has been deployed as a part-time inspector alongside her own educator role.
- The agency's statement of purpose is a comprehensive, informative and transparent document. It aids understanding about the agency's vision, mission, values, purpose and how it operates, while remaining child focused.
- Leaders work hard to develop and maintain professional relationships with other partners. The CEO keeps in regular contact with relevant staff in local authorities where the agency has registered educators living. This includes safeguarding teams and early years advisory and funding services. Leaders work with Ofsted and the Department for Education to consult, reflect and input to future childminding agency (CMA) policy developments. The CEO is an active member of a national group of CMAs which strives to promote the recognition of childminders' professionalism and the role of CMAs in both the early years sector and the wider education sector.

The quality of the agency's services

- Educators report feeling extremely well supported by the agency. They say that this starts from the initial enquiries they made as applicants through to the ongoing support they are offered. They describe how the agency puts action plans in place for them following annual visits and follows up on these.
- Support is easily accessible, valued and helps drive improvement. Educators speak very highly of agency staff, who they say go 'over and above' and are available when needed. They say that the reassurance they are offered from leaders is

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important to them. Educators praise the quality and range of training and the depth of knowledge of the trainers.

- Leaders expect that all educators engage with the training and support provided by the agency. They ensure that face-to-face training events are held at various times that are convenient to educators at the head office. These are also live streamed so that educators who may not otherwise attend can still access the training and take part in valuable group discussions. Leaders swiftly follow up any non-attendance at training by educators by way of a well-being call. Educators living furthest away from the head office describe how they still feel included and valued because they can access the same level of training and support as other educators. Geographical location is not a barrier to training.
- The impact of training undertaken by educators is assessed during quality support and quality appraisal visits and calls. The quality manager has recently completed qualifying training as an assessor, which was a goal agreed at a prior development meeting with the CEO. She describes how useful these skills are in exploring the impact of educators' training and how well embedded it is in educators' practice.
- Tiered levels of support mean the guidance and advice on offer is bespoke according to the quality of the educators' provision and their own identified needs. Educators report this ensures that a good value offer is available. Educators who have been registered for over three years and consistently been judged to deliver a good or outstanding provision are recognised as 'peak performing', meaning there is recognition that they no longer need the same level of support as offered to other educators accessing the standard or full support service.
- Despite the full support package on offer, the agency is aware and fully supportive of the status of all registered educators as self-employed professionals who make their own decisions about how they run their provision. The full support package acts as a 'helping hand' for educators daunted by the prospect of running their own business.
- The agency has a portfolio of 'off-the-shelf' policies and procedures to support educators. However, it is made very clear that these must be adapted to reflect the educator's own locality, practice and ethos. Leaders explain to educators that safeguarding policies must be populated with the appropriate arrangements from their own local safeguarding partnerships in order that the correct reporting and referral procedures can be followed if necessary. These templates, alongside the information about becoming an educator, are described by one applicant as 'a major selling point' of joining the agency.
- The annual quality appraisal visits result in accurate judgements of the quality of educators' provisions. The criteria developed to measure quality is based on well-recognised and respected models which elicit the impact of educators' teaching. The interactions inspectors observe between educators and children are of particular relevance, alongside the level of engagement children demonstrate within their environments. Any areas for improvement are addressed and reported on, alongside a detailed feedback discussion with the educator.

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- The quality assurance of educators' practice is based around the agency's own appraisal criteria. Leaders describe some flexibility to the criteria which allows for inspectors to use their professional judgement. This accounts for the professional relationships that have been developed through the ongoing support and training systems in place. The agency knows its educators well.
- Inspection reports are published on the agency's website. This means the judgement is transparent and available for parents and prospective parents to read in order to make an informed choice about their children's early education and childcare provision.
- The CEO reads all reports before they are issued to the educator, the relevant local authority, or published on the agency's website. However, there is no process in place for regular review and discussion about inspection practice, evidence recording or report writing between the agency leaders and staff. This lack of moderation, on occasion, leads to some inconsistencies between what evidence inspectors gather and how they use this to form their judgements. Consequently, in those cases, the judgements are not securely supported by the evidence.

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

- The rigorous registration process and effective quality support and quality appraisal visits and calls ensure that children attending educators' provisions are safe and making good progress.
- The agency carries out regular ongoing suitability checks for all educators and agency employed staff at the start of their relationship with the agency and on a regular basis.
- Educators demonstrate a sound understanding of how to help children who may be at risk of harm. They know when and how to make child protection referrals. They describe appropriate safeguarding practices, including how to manage allegations made against themselves or other adults in their home.
- Educators accurately and confidently describe the individual learning needs of children attending their settings and explain how they are helping them to make good progress.
- Where educators employ assistants, they follow safer recruitment procedures and include assistants in the regular training and support on offer from the agency.
- The agency meets its statutory duties to conduct quality assurance visits on an annual basis and conduct two visits in the first year of registration. This, alongside a 'month one' call and two additional progress calls, means that educators who may be struggling or require additional reassurance are supported at the earliest opportunity in that first year. Additionally, except for those educators accessing the 'peak performing' package, all educators receive two visits each year.

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- The accessible and effective ongoing support on offer to educators means that the agency does not let poor practice drift, or educators who are lacking confidence fail. Equally, the agency does not tolerate consistently poor practice, or continued failure to improve. The agency has terminated the registration of educators where this has been the case.
- The agency has facilitated networking opportunities between educators and continues to work to develop these further. This supports sharing of best-practice and solution-focused discussions to aid problem-solving. These are sometimes in person, but more often take place through virtual platforms and private social media applications.
- Parents report feeling very satisfied with the quality of their educator. They also say they are happy with the agency's support in accessing and claiming appropriate childcare benefits and early education funding. Parents like the feedback they receive from the educators and find it useful to know about their child's progress. They explain they know they can contact the agency if they have any concerns or need advice.

Childminder Agency details

Unique reference number	CA000017
Local authority	Nottingham
Type of provision	Childminder Agency
Registers	Early Years Register, Compulsory Childcare Register, Voluntary Childcare Register
Number of active childminders	59
Date of previous inspection	4 February 2020
Previous overall inspection judgement	Effective

Information about this childminding agency

Orange Moon Childcare Community Interest Company t/a @Home Childcare Childminder Agency registered with Ofsted in 2015. It registers childminders on the Early Years and the Childcare Registers. The agency's head office is based in Nottingham and offers services to childminders across many areas of the country, including Nottingham, Nottinghamshire, Leicester, Derby, Derbyshire, Sheffield, North Lincolnshire, Birmingham, Sandwell, Bristol, South Gloucestershire and North Somerset.

The agency has 59 educators registered, with approximately 10 more in the process of application and/or registration. The agency provides ongoing support, guidance and training for its educators. The agency employs a small administration team, a quality manager (who also provides support and monitoring for educators and carries out inspections), and two contracted part-time freelance inspectors. The agency also works closely with the training delivery team from the sister company with whom it also shares some additional business support staff.

Information about the inspection

The inspection was led by an Early Years Senior Officer, supported by a team of five Early Years Regulatory Inspectors and a Senior His Majesty's Inspector. Information and evidence were gathered during the inspection through a range of sample visits to educators; meetings and discussions with agency leaders, managers and staff; telephone calls to parents; discussions with applicants going

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through the registration process with the agency; an accompanied visit to observe the on-site registration process; and observation of a range of relevant documentation. Educators also provided their views in the pre-inspection 'childminder survey'.

This was the agency's third inspection and was carried out under the Childcare Act 2006, as amended by the Children and Families Act 2014.

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