

Newham Family Information Service (FIS)

Choosing childcare guide



This guide explains the different types of childcare available and helps you to think about which type will best suit your needs, what to look for and what questions to ask. The guide advises on high quality OFSTED registered childcare that is inspected and available for parents of pre-school (under fives) and school age children in Newham.

Tips to remember

Start early

It often takes a long time to find a place you feel happy with and meets your needs. You may also have to go on a waiting list for a vacancy.

Visit

Visit more than one setting and visit more than once if you still have questions. The way the provider responds will help you decide.

Ask questions

You are about to leave your child in someone else's care, probably for the first time, so you need to feel completely happy that the care will be right for you and right for your child.

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The different types of childcare available to you

Full or part time

Whatever your needs there are both full and part time childcare options available and ways in which to make it affordable. You may be working or studying full or part time; needing care for your child before or after school; wanting some time to yourself for a few hours each week or wanting to help your child prepare for school. There are various options available that will fulfil your needs.

Group care or childminder

Some children are cared for in a nursery/pre-school along with other children and a team of staff. These usually run between certain fixed hours. Other children are cared for in a childminder's home, with or without other children of different ages.

What you choose will depend on a number of things.

If you answer yes to some of the following bullet points then you may prefer a group care setting for your child:

- Is it important that your child socialises with lots of other children?
- Is it important that your child mixes with children of their own age?
- Is it important they have access to lots of different environments, toys and equipment?
- Do you want to be sure of lots of activities and stimulation for your child?
- Is it important to know that if one staff member is sick or unavailable others will be there to care for your child?

If you answer yes to some of these bullet points then you may prefer to use a childminder:

- Do you want your child to have just one carer who can get to know them well?
- Do you want your child to mix with children of different ages?
- Would you like them to be cared for in a family home?
- Do you need flexible care or someone to pick up and drop off your child to another childcare provision or school?
- Do you want to be sure your child's carer will speak the same language as your child?



Care options for pre-school children (for under five year olds)

- **Nursery**

Usually between 8am and 6pm, sometimes available beyond these hours; usually open all year round; some, but not all, nurseries provide places for babies and/or two year olds, and they all provide care for three to five year olds.

- **Pre-school playgroup or school based nursery**

Usually a morning and/or afternoon session of two and a half to three hours; usually open term time only; for children from two or three to five years old.

- **Childminder**

Looks after up to six children (under eight year olds, including up to three under fives and just one under one year old) in their own home; hours and facilities vary.

Care options for school age children

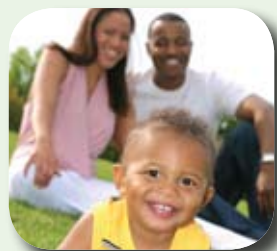
- **Before and/or after school clubs**

Often school based or having a walk round or transport service to and from your child's school; usually from 7am or 8am to the start of school and after school up to 6pm.

- **Holiday time provision**

Usually run between 8am and 6pm during school holidays; providers run varied activity programmes which may include outings to other venues.

“Can I choose days and hours to meet my needs?”



Things to think about

Is it affordable

The thought of paying for childcare can often put people off, but help is available.

- All parents of three and four year olds can claim up to 15 hours free childcare provision per week under the Nursery Education Grant (NEG 3+4).
- Working parents meeting certain criteria under the tax credits system can claim up to 80 per cent of childcare costs; some employers also offer reduced rate voucher schemes for childcare.
- Working parents of a child with a disability who are eligible under the disabled child element of the tax credits system can get additional childcare help.
- Non-working parents on training for employment courses who meet certain criteria under the Learner Support Programme or the New Deal for Lone Parents scheme can apply for free childcare.
- Full time student parents in higher education who meet certain criteria may be entitled to a Childcare Grant and/or Parents' Learning Allowance. Your college may also offer help via the Access to Learning fund.
- Student parents in further education who are aged over 20 years are eligible for assistance from the Sixth Form College Childcare Scheme, or for all ages from your college's Discretionary Support Fund.
- Young parents who want to study or train can get help with child care costs from the Care to Learn scheme; this is available for parents aged under 20 years.

- Families on benefits and with additional needs can claim up to 15 hours free provision for two year olds. This is available for those eligible and referred under the Nursery Education Grant (NEG 2).

To get further information about individual facilities and get a list of Sure Start Children's Centres, nurseries, pre-school playgroups, out of school providers and childminders for the area(s) of your choice contact the Family Information Service on 0800 074 1017.



Is it good quality

Nurseries, pre-school playgroups, childminders and out of school care providers, caring for children under eight years old, all have to be registered with OFSTED (the Government's Office for STandards in EDucation). This means they have to meet strict minimum standards in all aspects of care provided to children and are regularly inspected.

You can find out from the Family Information Service what level each provider has reached at their latest inspection, or for more detail you can view providers' inspection reports yourself at www.ofsted.gov.uk

Reports cover the following areas and you should check these when you contact and visit providers before making your decision.

- **Environment** – is there enough space, is it safe and of good quality? Is there outdoor space and do the children go outside every day? Is there enough of the correct equipment to meet children's needs for learning, care and play. Is it clean and looked after?
- **Care standards** – are the children happy and involved in what is going on? Are the staff talking and doing activities with them? Are there daily routines in place that allow children to play, rest, be quiet, be active and concentrate? Are the children safe? How good are the staff at caring for children with special needs? What kind of arrangements are made for meals and snacks?
- **Staff ratios** – this means the number of children that can be looked after by each adult. Maximum numbers for different age groups of children are set by the Government. All providers have to stay within these limits to make sure they can care properly for all ages of children, all the time and in all parts of the provision. There must also be enough staff (including the correct staff) to make sure the needs of every child (including children with special needs) are being met.



- **Staff qualifications, training and child protection checks** – minimum standards must be met and there is training available to all childcare staff in Newham to improve the way they look after children, including specialist training (for example, to meet particular special needs). All childminders and staff in childcare settings have to undergo a CRB (Criminal Records Bureau) check to make sure that no one with a previous child related conviction is able to work with children.
- **Policies including emergency procedures** – each provider has to have certain written policies (or guidance) in place to make sure their provision is safe, that everyone knows how to behave, what to do on a day-to-day basis and what to do in an emergency. These policies should cover all aspects of the childcare provision and you can ask to see them at any time.
- **Early education** – is there a plan in place, which is followed, to make sure all children are making progress towards the Early Learning Goals? How does the provider record and inform parents about their child's progress? How is the provider using the Early Years Foundation Stage Guidance to improve standards in care, learning and development for children from birth to five years?
- **Quality Assurance (QA)** – most providers in the borough take part voluntarily in QA programmes which aim to improve the standard of childcare even further. QA helps providers evaluate their work with children, parents and the community. QA programmes show what needs to be done to raise quality, records improvements already made and areas currently being developed.

You can get information about Quality Assurance schemes and levels achieved from the childcare provider or from the Family Information Service on 0800 074 1017.

Are extra services available from childcare providers

Health services, additional training, employment and parenting support are all available from Children's Centres.

For further information about childcare provided alongside other services in Children's Centres please contact the Family Information Service on 0800 074 1017.

Care for children with special needs

Each childcare setting has an identified special needs co-ordinator (SENCO), whose job is to talk with parents about their child's particular needs and to make sure those needs are met. The SENCO is trained and qualified to do this and to make sure children with special needs are fully included in the provision. In the first instance you should discuss your child's particular needs with the provider.

“I'd like my child to learn a language. Are there any pets? Is there a garden?”



Checklist for parents

- Plan ahead (at least six months) for your child's care – there is often a waiting list for more popular settings in certain parts of Newham.
- Get a list of childcare providers for the area you live or work in from the Family Information Service.
- Decide which type of provision will best meet your needs. If you're not sure you can contact the Family Information Service who may be able to help you consider your options.
- Contact several providers (so you can make a choice) and arrange to visit them with your child. Ask to stay for a whole session and don't be afraid to visit more than once if you are unsure.
- Childminders and anyone aged over 16 years in their household should have been checked by OFSTED for their suitability to work with children. You can ask to see the childminder's Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check certificate. **To investigate further or if the certificate is more than three years old you can contact OFSTED – telephone 0845 640 4040 or visit www.ofsted.gov.uk**
- You can read the provider's latest inspection report if you want more detailed information – ask the provider for a copy or check on the OFSTED website www.ofsted.gov.uk (this does not apply to childminders).
- Decide what you want from your childcare provider, go with a list of things to look for and questions to ask. Talk to staff about your child's particular needs.
- Look at the environment – is it light and warm? Clean and safe? Is there a safe outdoor play area? Make sure the equipment is good quality as well as clean and suitable for your child's needs.
- Make sure you are happy with the way the provider cares for the children and deals with parents. Watch and listen, taking note of the atmosphere – children and staff should be happy, relaxed and confident.
- Ask and observe what meals, snacks and drinks the children are given. Is there a healthy menu which is displayed?
- Discuss how the provider deals with different issues (such as settling your child in when they first start, first aid, dietary needs and behaviour issues) and ask to see their written policies. Make sure you are happy with them.
- You can ask about staff qualifications and what training they have completed.
- You can ask to see programmes of activities and evidence of children's learning and experiences.
- If you want to know more about Newham's approach to child protection ('safeguarding') you can ask the provider or speak to the Family Information Service.
- Try to speak to other parents about their experiences of the childcare provider.
- Before your child takes up a place with a childcare provider make sure you sign an agreement which states what you and the provider expect. Also find out how to raise any concerns or make a complaint if you need to.

Further information on choosing childcare is available from:

Newham Family Information Service (FIS)

Telephone: **0800 074 1017**

Email: **fis@newham.gov.uk**

Visit: **www.newham.gov.uk**

OFSTED

www.ofsted.gov.uk

Daycare Trust

www.daycaretrust.org.uk