CHOOSING SCHOOL-AGE CHILDCARE

A PARENT'S CHECKLIST

Cheaper childcare... but what are you getting for your money?

Choosing childcare is about more than finding somewhere for your child to go. It is about finding a place where they can feel safe, make friends, play, build confidence and thrive. Use this checklist when visiting a setting or talking to a provider.

01 SAFETY & SAFEGUARDING

- [ ] Is the setting registered with the relevant Health and Social Care Trust (HSCT)?
- [ ] Can the provider explain their safeguarding policies and procedures?
- [ ] Are staff appropriately vetted and trained in safeguarding and first aid?
- [ ] Are adult-to-child ratios appropriate, and how are children supervised?
- [ ] Are risks assessed and managed, including during outdoor play and outings?

02 PLAY, LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT

- [ ] Is there plenty of time for free, child-led play?
- [ ] Can children choose activities and follow their own interests?
- [ ] Are there varied opportunities for creative, imaginative, physical and outdoor play?
- [ ] Are resources and experiences suitable for different ages, interests and abilities?
- [ ] Are children encouraged to develop independence, confidence and problem-solving skills?

03 WELLBEING & EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

- [ ] Do staff build warm, trusting relationships with children?
- [ ] Are children given time to relax and unwind after school?
- [ ] Are children's opinions, feelings and choices respected?
- [ ] How does the setting support children who are upset or having friendship difficulties?
- [ ] Can my child be themselves and feel that they belong?

THE RIGHT CARE FOR YOUR CHILD

Keep asking questions. A good provider should be happy to talk about how they support children.

04 INCLUSION, FRIENDSHIPS & COMMUNITY

- [ ] Does the setting welcome children from different backgrounds and communities?
- [ ] How are children with additional needs or disabilities supported to participate?
- [ ] Are children encouraged to make friends, cooperate and learn from one another?
- [ ] Are activities adapted to suit children's individual needs and abilities?

05 STAFF, QUALITY & CONSISTENCY

- [ ] Do staff have appropriate childcare or playwork training and experience?
- [ ] Are there consistent, trusted adults who get to know my child?
- [ ] Can staff explain how they provide quality play experiences?
- [ ] Is the setting reviewed or inspected by the relevant regulatory body?
- [ ] Is suitable provision available during school holidays if my family needs it?

06 COST, PRACTICALITIES & VALUE

- [ ] What is included in the fee, and are there any additional costs?
- [ ] Are there sessions or options to suit my family's needs?
- [ ] What happens if my child is ill or the setting closes?
- [ ] Could I access any childcare support or financial assistance?
- [ ] Have I considered the quality of care and experiences alongside the price?

THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION

Will my child feel safe, happy, included and free to be themselves here?

Remember: The most expensive childcare is not automatically the best. Visit where possible, ask questions and look for evidence that your child will be safe, supported and given opportunities to play and thrive. Affordability matters, too.