

Exclusive: Nanny exemption from Vetting and Barring scheme is 'dangerous'

By Melanie Defries, Nursery World, 14 October 2009



Amanda Coxen of Tinies

The Government's controversial Vetting and Barring scheme has come under fire again after it emerged that nannies employed directly by parents will not be required to register.

Under the safeguarding scheme, which was launched on Monday (12 October) and will be phased in over the next five years, all those who work with children or with vulnerable adults, either on a paid or voluntary basis, will be required to join a register of suitability, operated by the Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA). Employers can check the register and from November 2010, it will be compulsory for anyone who is a new worker or who is moving jobs to join the register.

However, nannies are exempt from the scheme if their employment is deemed to be a 'private arrangement' with the family that they work for, raising fears that parents may unknowingly hire individuals that pose a threat to their children.

Nannies are not obliged to register with Ofsted and they are not required to have a Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check, unless they are employed via an agency. They can sign up to the voluntary part of Ofsted's childcare register as 'home childcarers', which differs from childminders in that they look after children in the child's own home.

A spokesperson from the Department for Children, Schools and Families told Nursery World, 'If the nanny is supplied by an agency, then it will be the agency's duty to check the nanny's ISA registration before supplying the individual to the parents. If, however, the nanny is employed directly by the parents, with no agency involved, then there is no duty on the parent to check ISA registration and there is no duty on the nanny to be ISA-registered. The Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act was deliberately crafted in this way, so as not to intrude on private arrangements made by parents.'

News of the exemption for privately employed nannies comes just weeks after Nursery World broke the story of how two mothers working part-time in a jobshare were banned by Ofsted from looking after each other's children because they were not registered childminders (News, 24 September).

Tricia Pritchard, senior professional officer (childcare) at the education and childcare union Voice, said, 'There seems to be a reluctance to have one scheme that requires the same registration for anyone who works with children. In my mind, children who are looked after by nannies are some of the most vulnerable - a nanny has sole, unsupervised contact with children. Parents often assume that nannies are registered and vetted, and many parents would be surprised to learn that they are not.'

Amanda Coxen, franchise director at Tinies childcare, and executive committee member of the Recruitment and Employment Confederation's childcare sector group, said, 'It is extremely dangerous that the ISA is differentiating between agency nannies and those employed directly by families. Many parents look for nannies on the internet, which is worrying.'

Lots of parents look for nannies who are Ofsted registered. However, one Ofsted registered nanny who came to sign up with Tinies had a fake visa and passport.'

She added, 'Parents often believe that nannies who are registered with Ofsted will have been inspected or checked. However, that is not the case.'

A spokesperson from Ofsted said, 'We carry out a CRB check on nannies who apply to register on the voluntary part of the Childcare Register. Ofsted does not routinely check the right to work in the UK, as it is the responsibility of the employer to confirm that the person they are proposing to employ is allowed to work in the UK.'

The Vetting and Barring scheme has been heavily criticised in recent months after reports suggested that even parents who regularly drive their friends' children to clubs or activities would have to join the register. Several high-profile children's authors, including Philip Pullman, Michael Morpurgo and Anne Fine, spoke out against Vetting and Barring in July and said that they will no longer visit schools if they have to sign up to the scheme.

Children's secretary Ed Balls has called for Roger Singleton, the chairman of the Independent Safeguarding Authority, to review the requirements of the vetting and barring system. The review will be concluded in December.

Further information: Referral Guidance for Employers is at www.isa.gov.org.uk

SECTOR VIEW

Catherine Rushforth, independent consultant and director of Catherine Rushforth and Associates, which offers training related to safeguarding, said, 'It appears to be a class issue - there seems to be an assumption that if you have the financial resources to be able to afford to bring childcare into your home, the childcare will be good quality. But that is not always the case. It is extremely short-sighted to think that certain sectors within childcare would not attract people that might abuse.'

Helen Kewley, owner of agency Nice Nannies Now, said, 'If I was a parent I wouldn't want my nanny not to be vetted just because I wasn't using an agency. I believe that all nannies, whether recruited privately or through an agency, should have to go through this procedure as part of their professional paperwork.'

Maggie Dyer, owner of the London Au Pair and Nanny Agency, said, 'It's ludicrous. All it's going to do is encourage more people to avoid using agencies, when agencies are making all the proper safeguarding checks. I can't see how the Government can claim to have the best interests of children at heart. It just looks like a money-making exercise and nothing to do with safeguarding children.'



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Nursery World, 14/10/2009