

ENGLAND | OFSTED

Ofsted Registration Guide and Checklist 2026

For children's homes, supported accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds, and nurseries. What Ofsted asks for, and the checks to run before you apply.

Inside this guide

- Which register your service belongs on
- The documents each type of service needs
- Tick-box checklists for people, documents and premises
- The mistakes that stall applications, and the steps in order

Updated September 2026. Free to download, print and share.

How to use this guide

Ofsted registers children's homes and supported accommodation under the children's social care rules, and nurseries under the early years rules. The two routes use different forms and ask for different evidence, so the first job is to be sure which one you are on.

Use the table on the next page to see what your service needs. Then work through the checklists. Tick a box only when the item is finished, not when it is planned. Ofsted can refuse an application, and a refusal has to be declared on later applications, so it pays to be ready before you apply.

This guide is based on Ofsted's published guidance and on our own registration work up to September 2026. Check the current guidance on GOV.UK on the day you apply.

At a glance

Regulator	Ofsted. England only.
Main law	Care Standards Act 2000; Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015; Supported Accommodation (England) Regulations 2023; Childcare Act 2006 and the early years foundation stage (EYFS) framework.
Forms	Children's homes and supported accommodation: an SC1 from the provider and an SC2 from each person linked to the application. Nurseries: an online application through a Government Gateway account.
People you need	Children's homes and supported accommodation: a Responsible Individual and a Registered Manager. Nurseries: a nominated person for the organisation and a manager with at least a level 3 qualification.
Cost	Ofsted charges a registration fee and an annual fee. Check the current amounts on GOV.UK before you apply.
Before registration	You cannot open or look after a child in a children's home or supported accommodation until registration is granted. Doing so is an offence.

Which documents does your service need?

Yes means Ofsted asks for it or checks it. Check means you need it only in some cases, explained in the row. No means it does not apply to this type of service.

Document	Children's home	Supported accommodation	Nursery or pre-school
Application			
SC1 application from the provider	Yes	Yes	No
SC2 from each person linked to the application (Responsible Individual, Registered Manager, directors)	Yes	Yes	No
Online early years application through a Government Gateway account	No	No	Yes
Documents			
Statement of Purpose, unique to this home or service	Yes	Yes	No
Children's guide (Check: supported accommodation, a guide for young people is good practice)	Yes	Check	No
Location assessment, or for supported accommodation a statement that it has been done	Yes	Yes	No
Safeguarding and child protection policy	Yes	Yes	Yes
Procedure for a child who goes missing	Yes	Yes	Yes
Behaviour management or behaviour support policy (Check: where your framework asks for one)	Yes	Check	Check
Complaints procedure	Yes	Yes	Yes
Equality policy	Yes	Yes	Yes
Evidence the business can pay its way: business plan, cash-flow forecast (Check: nurseries, if asked)	Yes	Yes	Check
Planning permission, certificate of lawfulness, or evidence none is needed (Check: depends on the property)	Yes	Check	Check
Insurance certificate, or written confirmation that cover will be in place	Yes	Yes	Yes
People and checks			
Enhanced DBS check with the children's barred list, through Ofsted's route or the DBS Update Service	Yes	Yes	Yes
Health declaration (Check: if Ofsted asks for one on the SC2)	Check	Check	Yes
Certificate of good conduct (Check: anyone who lived abroad in the last 5 years)	Check	Check	Check
Manager qualification (see the checklists)	Yes	Check	Yes
Paediatric first aid certificate	No	No	Yes
Registration visit to the premises	Yes	Yes	Yes
Interview with the Responsible Individual and manager (Check: nurseries, a discussion at the visit)	Yes	Yes	Check

Checklist 1: the right registration

A children's home gives care and accommodation to children. Supported accommodation gives accommodation with support, but not care, to looked-after children and care leavers aged 16 and 17. If a young person needs care, they need a children's home. A nursery or pre-school that looks after children under 5 on non-domestic premises registers on the Early Years Register.

- ☐ I know which register my service belongs on, and every document describes that service only.
- ☐ Supported accommodation: I know which categories I will offer (single occupancy, shared accommodation or host accommodation) and have described each one.
- ☐ If I also look after children aged 5 and over, I have asked Ofsted whether I need the Childcare Register as well.
- ☐ My plan does not include opening, or taking a child, before registration is granted.
- ☐ Children's homes: I have spoken to the local authorities I expect to place with, and kept a record. Ofsted expects applicants to have engaged with them, and since September 2025 it fast-tracks only a few types of home, so most applications are not prioritised.
- ☐ If I plan to care for children with the most complex needs, I have considered Ofsted's pre-registration advice form, available since February 2025.

Checklist 2: your people

For children's homes and supported accommodation.

- ☐ A Responsible Individual is appointed: a senior person with the authority and the time to oversee the service.
- ☐ A Registered Manager is appointed before the application goes in, if at all possible. Applications often stall at the interview stage when there is no manager.
- ☐ Children's homes: the manager holds the Level 5 Diploma in Leadership and Management for Residential Childcare, or an equivalent, or will gain it within three years of starting in the role.
- ☐ Every person linked to the application has completed an SC2, with a full employment history and every gap explained.
- ☐ Each of them has an enhanced DBS check with the children's barred list, done through Ofsted's route or linked to the DBS Update Service.

Checklist 3: Statement of Purpose and guide

- ☐ There is one Statement of Purpose for each home or service, written for that home. It is not copied from another service.
- ☐ Children's homes: it covers everything in Regulation 16 and Schedule 1 of the Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015.
- ☐ Supported accommodation: it describes each accommodation category and how it meets the accommodation standard.
- ☐ The number of places, the age range and the needs of the children are the same in every document.
- ☐ The children's guide is written in words the children who will live there can understand.

Checklist 4: location assessment

- ☐ Children's homes: the location assessment required by Regulation 46 is complete. It covers crime, risks of exploitation, and access to schools, health services and activities.
- ☐ It analyses what you found and says what the home will do about it. A description of the area is not enough.
- ☐ It includes what local police and the local authority told you, where you were able to ask them.
- ☐ Supported accommodation: a statement confirms that the location assessment has been done, as the 2023 Regulations require.
- ☐ The assessment was done before you committed to the property, so its findings could still change your choice.

Checklist 5: policies and quality standards

- ☐ Children's homes: policies, training and records are mapped to the nine Quality Standards in the 2015 Regulations.
- ☐ Supported accommodation: they are mapped to the four quality standards in the 2023 Regulations: leadership and management, protection, support and accommodation.
- ☐ Safeguarding covers child exploitation, children who go missing, allegations against staff, and working with the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO).
- ☐ Policies are written for children. Adult care policies with the word children added will be spotted.
- ☐ Every policy matches the Statement of Purpose and the needs of the children you plan to look after.

Checklist 6: premises, money and interviews

- ☐ Planning permission, a certificate of lawfulness, or evidence that none is needed.
- ☐ An insurance certificate, or written confirmation from the insurer that cover will be in place.
- ☐ Fire risk assessment and safety checks are done before the registration visit.
- ☐ On the day of the visit the premises are ready: rooms furnished, records systems set up, and staff recruited.
- ☐ The business plan and cash-flow forecast show the service can keep full staffing even when few places are filled.
- ☐ The Responsible Individual and the manager have practised the interview out loud, including safeguarding scenarios, and know the regulations and their own Statement of Purpose well.

Checklist 7: nurseries and early years

For childcare on non-domestic premises on the Early Years Register. Ofsted says early years applications take about 12 weeks on average. A new DBS check can add around 6 weeks, so start it first.

- ☐ A Government Gateway account is set up to apply online.
- ☐ Everyone who will work with the children has an enhanced DBS check with the children's barred list, for the childcare workforce.
- ☐ A health declaration is completed.
- ☐ Anyone who lived abroad in the last 5 years has a certificate of good conduct from each country.
- ☐ The manager holds at least a level 3 childcare qualification.
- ☐ At least one person on site at all times holds a paediatric first aid certificate.
- ☐ The policies the EYFS framework asks for are written, including safeguarding, complaints and a missing child procedure.
- ☐ The policies meet the revised EYFS in force from 1 September 2026: safer sleep, safer eating and weaning, and screen use.
- ☐ Since September 2025: a Designated Safeguarding Lead, safeguarding training at least every two years, references before anyone starts, and a whistleblowing procedure.
- ☐ Insurance is in place before you open, and the premises are ready for the registration visit.

Eight mistakes that stall Ofsted applications

- 1 Buying or leasing the property before finding the manager.**
A strong manager can shape a good application around most properties. A good property cannot make up for a weak or missing manager, and every month before registration costs money.
- 2 A Statement of Purpose copied from another service.**
Ofsted expects each one to describe this home and these children.
- 3 A location assessment that only describes the area.**
It has to analyse the risks and say what the home will do about them.
- 4 Adult care policies adapted for children.**
Inspectors notice straight away, and it weakens the whole application.
- 5 Numbers, ages or needs that differ between documents.**
The address, the number of children, the age range and the needs must match everywhere.
- 6 DBS checks done through the wrong route.**
Use Ofsted's route or the Update Service, with the children's barred list.
- 7 Supported accommodation that plans to give care.**
Only a children's home can provide care. Describe support only.
- 8 Interviews that were not practised.**
The Responsible Individual and the manager must explain, with examples, how the home will keep children safe.

The registration process, step by step

For children's homes and supported accommodation.

- 1 Plan the service**
Decide which children you will care for and where. Talk to the local authorities about demand for places and keep the evidence, because Ofsted expects applicants to have engaged with them.
- 2 Appoint your people**
Responsible Individual and Registered Manager. Start their DBS checks early.
- 3 Choose the property**
Complete the location assessment before you sign, if you can.
- 4 Write the Statement of Purpose first**
Then write the policies, the children's guide and the business plan to match it.
- 5 Apply**
Submit the SC1, an SC2 for each linked person, and all documents, and pay the fee.
- 6 Ofsted's checks**
Ofsted checks DBS, references and health information, and asks questions about the documents.
- 7 Visit and interviews**
An inspector visits the premises and interviews the Responsible Individual and the manager.
- 8 Decision**
If Ofsted is satisfied, it registers the service with conditions, usually on the number and age range of children. If not, it tells you in writing that it plans to refuse, and you can object before it decides. A refusal must be declared on later applications, so a weak application is often better withdrawn and strengthened.

How long does it take?

Since 18 September 2025 Ofsted fast-tracks only certain children's homes: homes with Department for Education capital funding, homes opened only for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children under the national transfer scheme, homes where a child on a deprivation of liberty order is already living in unregistered provision, and homes needed in exceptional circumstances in an emergency, for example where sufficiency data shows extremely high demand, or for highly specialist care such as children leaving secure children's homes or hospital. It aims to decide those in 3 to 6 months. Ofsted says other applications are likely to take 6 to 18 months, so plan on that. Missing documents and repeated interviews add to it.

Want a second pair of eyes on your application?

Cura Compliance UK has helped more than 100 care providers register and pass inspection. For Ofsted services we write the Statement of Purpose and location assessment, complete the SC1 and SC2 forms, map policies to the quality standards, and prepare the Responsible Individual and manager for interview.

Book a free 30-minute consultation: curacompliance.co.uk/cqc-registration-free-consultation

Ofsted registration support:

curacompliance.co.uk/expert-ofsted-registration-support-for-childrens-services

CuraFlow Registration: your whole application in one place: curaflow.net/registration

Sources

Ofsted: Register a children's home, guidance for applicants (gov.uk), checked September 2026

Ofsted: Register a children's social care service (SC1) and Register a supported accommodation service (SC1) (gov.uk), checked September 2026

Ofsted: Childminders and childcare providers, register with Ofsted (gov.uk), checked September 2026

The Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015 and the Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations including the quality standards

The Supported Accommodation (England) Regulations 2023 and the Guide to the Supported Accommodation Regulations
Early years foundation stage statutory framework (gov.uk)

This guide is general information based on published guidance as at September 2026. It is not legal advice. Requirements depend on your service, and Ofsted can change them. Always check the current requirements with Ofsted before you apply. Copyright 2026 Cura Compliance UK. You may share this guide as long as you do not change it.