



All Party Parliamentary Group on Nursery Schools, Nursery and Reception Classes

Summary of meeting held on Wednesday 21 November 2018

MPs in attendance:

<i>Lucy Powell (Chair)</i>	<i>Labour</i>	<i>Manchester Central</i>
<i>Jack Dromey (Secretary)</i>	<i>Labour</i>	<i>Erdington</i>
<i>Tracy Brabin (Shadow Minister)</i>	<i>Labour</i>	<i>Batley & Spen</i>
<i>Julie Cooper</i>	<i>Labour</i>	<i>Burnley</i>
<i>Richard Benyon</i>	<i>Conservative</i>	<i>Newbury</i>
<i>Karin Smyth</i>	<i>Labour</i>	<i>Bristol South</i>
<i>Emma Reynolds</i>	<i>Labour</i>	<i>Wolverhampton North East</i>
<i>Theresa Villiers</i>	<i>Conservative</i>	<i>Chipping Barnet</i>
<i>Daniel Zeichner</i>	<i>Labour</i>	<i>Cambridge</i>
<i>Graham Jones</i>	<i>Labour</i>	<i>Hyndburn</i>
<i>Grant Shapps</i>	<i>Conservative</i>	<i>Welwyn Hatfield</i>

Introductions

The Chair reported that 75 MPs had signed a letter to Liz Truss and Nadhim Zahawi regarding funding for maintained nursery schools. The reply had reflected the minister's personal commitment to the issue but that the case to the Treasury still needed to be made. It was therefore important to keep up the pressure. The issue had been raised on multiple occasions in parliament. She, Robert Halfon and William Wragg had applied for a backbench business debate on the maintained nursery school funding and were awaiting the allocation of a slot. Members of the APPG would be notified so that MPs could be encouraged to speak in that debate.

The Frontier Economics study on value for money of nursery schools was expected to be published sometime around January. DfE would be using this as one of the main pieces of evidence to go to the Treasury. The Education Select Committee's report on Life Chances would be coming out soon and could be expected to refer to the role of maintained nursery schools. The first three speakers at the meeting were all presenting research reports which examined the important contributions made by maintained nursery schools, and provided further evidence for government to take into account.

Cllr Peter John, Leader of Southwark Council and Chair of London Councils

Cllr John spoke about the London Councils' report [*Hidden Value: A report exploring the role and future of maintained nursery schools in London*](#). London Councils was a cross-party body bringing together all 32 London boroughs and the Corporation of London. He commented that the word "hidden" was a theme of all these reports, and the importance of making clear the added value and distinct role of maintained nursery schools. The report included valuable case studies and quotes about how maintained nursery schools went "above and beyond" in supporting children and families. Key shared themes included 1) SEND – a strong emphasis on identification and support, and a high

proportion of SEND children and complex needs, with concentrations of expertise to support parents and children. 2) Supporting the most disadvantaged and promoting social mobility. In line with the prime minister's commitment to ensuring everyone can fulfil their potential, maintained nursery schools' admissions policies encouraged access for the most disadvantaged children, including funded 2-year-olds. They also ensured children were supported to catch up with their peers, despite low starting points. Children were nurtured outside the classroom and exposed to wider opportunities. Schools also worked with families to support children through training, drop-in sessions, mentoring, coffee mornings and joint activities.

The report explored the different financial circumstances of maintained nursery schools and found that funding didn't currently cover costs. SEND support costs were frequently raised as an issue. The end of supplementary funding for nursery schools would potentially mean closure or reducing the number of children with SEND which they could support. Headteachers needed to make decisions about next school year, so a decision couldn't wait. In the view of London Councils maintained nursery schools were unique, important and much needed, and a solution on their funding must be found.

Cllr Gillian Ford, Deputy Chair of the Local Government Association Children and Young People Board

Cllr Ford reported on the the LGA's recent [survey of council heads of early years](#) in which 61% of responding councils with maintained nursery schools (MNS) said it was "very" or "fairly" likely that MNS would close if funding was not protected after 2019/20. 62% of these councils said that funding should be protected at the current level, or at a higher level than other settings. This was largely due to the additional burden of statutory costs, offering more places to disadvantaged 2-year-olds or children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), and their support for other settings. 52% of these councils said that if funding was not protected, there would be less support available for disadvantaged 2-year-olds or children with SEND.

The LGA were calling on the Government to extend the additional funding to 2020/21 to provide some certainty to councils and providers, and for a sustainable funding solution to be found as part of the spending review next year.

Councils were already struggling to cope with rising demand for SEND services. The introduction of the 30 hours free childcare scheme had made the issue more difficult; as children might wish to access more hours at nursery, but funding had not simultaneously increased to pay for support in those additional hours on top of the hours they were already accessing.

Maintained nursery schools played a significant role in providing care and support for more than 5,000 children with SEND, with qualified teachers designated as co-ordinators – something not required in other nursery provision. There were currently 397 maintained nurseries in England with more than 40,980 children enrolled, of which 13.8 per cent had SEND, compared to only 6.3 per cent of 3 and 4-year-olds in the general population. Maintained nurseries were more highly rated by Ofsted than other

types of provision, and concentrated in areas of deprivation, which otherwise tend to experience lower-quality provision.

Councils were already struggling to manage the rising demand in support from children with SEND in schools and this issue presented an additional pressure. The LGA was calling on the Government to address the underfunding of SEND provision in the local government finance settlement in December, otherwise councils might not be able to meet their statutory duties and children with high needs or disabilities could miss out on a mainstream education.

Claire White and Helen Hussey, on behalf of Yorkshire, Hull and North Lincolnshire Nursery Schools

For over a year the governors and staff of the seven nursery schools had been meeting to create a strong support network and a united voice. The APPG's request for evidence of impact and distinctiveness became a focus of work for the network, using simple templates and collecting case studies and parent questionnaires, resulting in the report, [*The 'hidden' benefits and true value of our local authority maintained nursery schools.*](#)

The seven nursery schools supported 896 children and over 1200 families. 42% of children at the school have some type of additional needs: 28% were funded 2-year-olds, 60% were vulnerable and disadvantaged. Many require intensive specialist support, raising the question of what would happen to them if the nursery schools were not there. In addition 304 children were receiving their 30 hours entitlement through the nursery schools, who would otherwise need places to be created elsewhere. On paper nursery schools appeared more expensive, but the report evidenced savings of around £1million a year. Without the seven maintained nursery schools there would be a gaping void in local social care provision; the needs of children with life-limiting and life-threatening conditions would be putting greater pressure on specialist services; the work done to support families with food and nutrition would have to be done by other services; there would be challenges finding suitable places for children with SEND; pressure on 30 hours places would increase; and there would be loss of expertise to support PVI and schools. This hidden work was approximately a third of the budget of the maintained nursery schools, and was good value for money.

Tracy Brabin thanked all those who had produced the three reports for helping provide evidence. She stressed that the early years would be at the heart of Labour's policy under the National Education Service. She noted that the APPG on Early Education and Childcare had been hearing about the impact of funding cuts on children with SEND and noted that maintained nursery schools were often having to pick up the slack. She was asking Nadhim Zahawi when the sector would have an answer about funding. She invited nursery schools to contact her for support for any regional activities.

Lucy reiterated that Nadhim Zahawi was very supportive and that the focus was on ensuring funding was secured in time, and that the amount was sufficient.

The LGA speaker was asked which councils responded to the survey. Cllr Ford confirmed that this data had not been published, but might be available from the LGA. She also commented on the importance of early years to the prevention agenda.

Cllr John noted that as well as the in-year costs that were now becoming apparent from cuts, longer-term costs were now emerging. For instance, the cuts to youth services may now be showing up in the increases in youth violence. These things were hard to cost, and the impacts were often only apparent once services were gone. Tracy Brabin noted that cuts in early years budgets might also be impacting on behaviour in schools and measures needed to address that. The headteacher of a nursery school in Lewisham noted that she had been flagging the relevance of early years to her MP, Vicky Foxcroft, who was working with the Youth Violence Commission, and the link was being recognised.

Helen Hussey agreed to share the template used by the seven nursery schools so that others could undertake similar costing exercises. They were based on the costs the school could evidence, and were not necessarily showing all the true costs.

Lucy Powell noted that the common public policy issue that those making the savings further down the line were not always the same as those holding the budgets and making decisions about cuts, so departments other than DfE might lose out from cuts to nursery school funding.

A headteacher from Sefton noted that councillors were making hard decisions, and that on schools forum only the Schools Block was protected, while funds could be moved from the Early Years and High Needs blocks. It was suggested that funding in these blocks needed better protection. The Chair undertook to take this up with the Council in question. It was reaffirmed that nursery schools needed to be recognised as schools.

Theresa Villiers agreed about the importance of the early years, and paid tribute to her local nursery schools in Barnet. She had found DfE to be very much engaged in finding a solution, and that maintained nursery schools as beacons and centres of excellence for research and training and were all part of their future role.

Parent perspectives

Three parents whose children had attended, or were attending, maintained nursery schools spoke about the impact for their children and families.

Amanda Dean's son had attended Fairfield Nursery School in Lancashire. He has congenital hyper-insulism and caring for him was a 24-hour role which meant Amanda had had to give up work. She struggled with the idea of sending him to nursery and trusting that someone else would keep him safe. When she found Fairfield, the teachers' expertise reassured her, and gave her the confidence to start work again. Her son then also was diagnosed with autism; he was very developmentally delayed and non-verbal. Thanks to the nursery school's support, he now makes eye contact, uses

PEC, Makaton and some words. The teachers tailor provision to his needs, for instance he is allowed to spend all day in forest school, not just a 2-hour session, because he thrives in that environment. As a result of the support from Fairfield family time has improved and Amanda feels she has her family life back. As a trustee of a hyper-insulism charity, Amanda constantly hears about other children getting turned down for nursery provision because of their medical conditions and parents not knowing that this doesn't have to be the case.

Lucy Moffatt's daughter attended Kingswood Nursery School in Hertfordshire. Her account was as follows:

Good afternoon, I have 2 daughters, one of whom is now 4 and has been diagnosed with verbal dyspraxia. Before we moved house I sent my then 2.5 yr old to a private nursery for a few hours a week, I thought it may help her speech, which I'd noticed after years of working in childcare, was quite delayed.

Unfortunately, I often used to pick her up and spend the drive home silently sobbing about how negative they'd been about my daughter but never offered any further advice or support and honestly made me regret ever sending her there. Luckily, we moved house and sent E, on recommendation from close friends, to Kingswood Nursery School when she was 3. All I knew was that our friends spoke so highly about the Headteacher & loved it after sending their 2 children there, one who was really well-supported with her own speech issues.

So we started at Kingswood and it was the best decision we've ever made for our daughter. From the moment the staff did a home visit we knew our daughter was in the safest hands. Without sounding clichéd, it was like a warm hug being reassured constantly that she would be looked after and supported by staff with her language difficulties. I made it quite clear that we'd had a bad experience before and that sending a non verbal child into the hands of people you don't know is terrifying. At this point we didn't have a formal diagnosis and the unknown was scary. A couple of weeks into the first term we got the official diagnosis from our private speech therapist. Developmental verbal dyspraxia with expressive language disorder. Cue my world falling apart as I obsessively googled stories about children who didn't speak clearly or at all until age 10 or older! I remember telling E's key worker the same day that we'd had this diagnosis and she basically told me it was a positive thing to have some answers and that we could research and do all we could for E. The support brought huge relief. Kingswood isn't a daycare nursery, it's a school environment and they want to teach children and give them the best start.

Within a very short time we had a link speech therapist coming to Nursery and working with E and she was joining in other programs for children with speech and language needs. The SENCO had applied for any grants available to help support E and all the staff started using a makaton signs to help ease her frustrations. They never made me feel that she was different or behind. They made me feel that she is E and we will celebrate everything that she is! The high numbers of extremely experienced staff meant that E could be supported/shadowed when interacting with her peers, or trying new activities or during things that she would find a struggle because of the dyspraxia. Every day going into the nursery school I felt so supported and reassured and knew they

were going above and beyond to help my daughter to thrive. They thought of things to help her feel confident, made her comfortable when not necessarily in her comfort zone, they even used to walk us to the car when she had epic meltdowns about not wanting to leave. They would welcome me into any sessions so I could watch and see that she truly was happy and content. I was welcomed to every speech therapy session and given resources to continue this work at home. I attended all of the school's wonderful workshops to help parents support their children the best we could. They do a lot to prepare both parents and children for their future in education.

E was treated wonderfully by every staff member, always greeted by name at the school gate, I never once felt like her additional needs were a burden for them, more like a chance for the staff to gain more experience and to learn the best ways to help E to thrive in their setting. We had tools such as a communication book so that I would know what E was up to everyday and if there were any issues that I needed to address or any new words she'd attempted that day.

Once I decided with support that a local speech and language base within a primary school would be the best place for her, we pulled together as a team to make this happen. Mrs Jackson personally helped me with applying for an EHCP and kept me updated constantly about the progress of the EHCP application. She knew all the people involved in the process and reassured me everyone was on the same side. We got the EHCP and E's chosen reception place that has a speech and language unit. I don't believe I'd have been able to do this without the Kingswood staff as I wouldn't have known where to begin. I wouldn't have even known about the language base if it wasn't for the staff and the school speech therapist.

Now my daughter is thriving in her reception place, although she often makes me drive by her old school because she misses the teachers there! I know completely that Kingswood has shaped my daughter's future in a positive and wonderful way that would not have happened had she not been in such a wonderful maintained nursery school.

Kelly Berry's son attends Castle Vale Nursery School in Birmingham. He is 4 years old, autistic and non-verbal. Kelly explained that he should now be in Reception, but they are still waiting for a place at a special school and fighting for a diagnosis. Castle Vale accepted him straightaway and arranged a speech and language therapist. The family were still waiting on NHS reports and the educational psychologist. They could not get an Education Health and Care (EHC) plan in place for September, but Castle Vale agreed to keep him for another year, even though he did not qualify for the 30 hours. He was happier at nursery than at home because of the routine. Their doctor initially said he wouldn't have a diagnosis for 18 months, but based on the reports from the Castle Vale, has now been able to provide a diagnosis.

Lucy thanked all three parents for sharing their very moving and powerful accounts of the value of maintained nursery schools.

Next steps for the campaign

Jack Dromey reminded the meeting that the supplementary funding had been secured by getting strong cross-party support, based on parent power influencing MPs, and strong school leadership to mobilise that parent power. Time was now running out for a

full and fair funding solution. He reported that Birmingham Headteachers had met with Nadhim Zahawi the previous week, and that it was important to hold him to the commitment to publish the value for money study in January and make a decision quickly after that, otherwise there would be closures of nursery schools across England. It could not wait until the Comprehensive Spending Review, and at the very least supplementary funding needed to be extended to 2021.

He outlined the following practical steps:

Schools should use Christmas/seasonal activities as an opportunity to invite MPs and local councillors to come and visit their nursery schools, and get parents to talk to them about the difference the nursery school has made to their family, the things which nursery schools do that other providers do not. If a visit cannot be arranged, heads, governors and parents should go to their surgeries to talk to them about why maintained nursery schools matter. Heads should ask MPs to take up nursery school funding with Treasury ministers, not just DfE ministers, who acknowledge the arguments but need help persuading the Treasury to agree the funding.

The APPG would coordinate public petitions to Parliament calling on the House of Commons to urge the government to take action to ensure maintained nursery schools were financially sustainable for the future. He explained that a public petition was a mechanism for a Member of Parliament to present the grievances or requests of an individual or group to the House of Commons. These petitions could then be formally presented to Parliament by the MP. This was a good way to engage and mobilise parents to lobby MPs to protect the future of our nursery schools, and show MPs that there was a lot of support for nursery schools in their area. Copies were circulated on the day and would be put on the website. Schools should gather signatures by 11 January, and then contact Anthony McCaul in Lucy Powell's office who would co-ordinate the presentation of the petitions in parliament (see instructions in the link above).

Schools should come together regionally, with the support of MPs where possible, to seek meetings with ministers and put together a package with local media involving headteachers and parents. Jack cited the excellent BBC piece on the Birmingham Nursery Schools meeting with Nadhim Zahawi. .

He also urged nursery schools to build support with local schools, employers, councils, and so on. Encourage councillors to put motions of support to local councils in support of sustainable funding for nursery schools – Liverpool City Council has already passed a motion, and another is going to Hertfordshire County Council shortly.

Centrally, the APPG officers would centrally support the campaign through opportunities such as PMQs, Education Questions, the Education Select Committee. The strong attendance of MPs at the APPG should that MPs felt passionate about the cause because they had seen the impact of maintained nursery schools.

The Chair of Governors of the Barnet federation of nursery schools thanked Theresa Villiers for having taken the time to listen and learn about the issue of maintained nursery schools.

Grant Shapps endorsed the importance of keeping MPs informed, and the importance for MPs of having constituents provide them with the details to understand the issues.

Julie Cooper said she was inspired by the high turnout at every APPG meeting and the progress made so far. She paid tribute to the parents in particular for sharing their stories.

Graham Jones highlighted the Lancashire County Council report which had showed nursery schools were in crisis. He was trying to get dialogue going to make councilors aware of the issue, and there was a role for all in raising awareness in this way.

Lucy Powell noted that the role of councilors and cabinet members was key as they were making vital decisions now, and that it could not be assumed that all councilors understood the difference between nursery schools and PVI's.

The headteacher of a Hertfordshire nursery school noted that a motion was going to Hertfordshire County Council the following week.

The meeting closed at 4.00pm.