



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

Summary of the meeting on 24 April 2018

MPs in attendance:

<i>Lucy Powell (Chair)</i>	<i>Labour</i>	<i>Manchester Central</i>
<i>Gillian Keegan</i>	<i>Conservative</i>	<i>Chichester</i>
<i>Ian Mearns</i>	<i>Labour</i>	<i>Gateshead</i>
<i>Melanie Onn</i>	<i>Labour</i>	<i>Great Grimsby</i>

Future funding of nursery schools

Lucy Powell introduced the meeting by noting the urgency of government providing proposals for a long-term funding solution for maintained nursery schools, and about the potential impact if a decision were to be delayed by the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR). She would be writing to the minister to ask for a meeting about this. After the local elections, members of the APPG needed to be contacting their MPs and council leaders to explain the urgency of the matter and keep up the pressure prior to the CSR. She proposed that MPs would be invited to sign a joint letter to the minister on this issue.

The evidence of what works in the early years and the need for system leadership: Sir Kevan Collins

Sir Kevan noted that although 20 years ago England was ahead of the game on early years, it was now falling behind as the importance of early education, especially to the most disadvantaged children has become more widely recognised. He noted the need to affirm, but also to challenge what we do, and what we think we know. Evidence confirms the lasting impact of early learning, but shows that when done badly it can leave a lasting negative legacy. We need rigorous approaches to examining the differences that lead similar children in similar circumstances to achieve different outcomes.

The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) produced its toolkit based on 1500 rigorous international studies asking the questions:

- How good is the evidence?
- What difference does this make to children's progress?
- What's the relative cost of the intervention?

This has helped identify where there are gaps in the evidence.

In the case of the early years, three key factors emerged from the evidence:

- The importance of talk and sustained dialogue, and a focus on content and language. This leads to the question of what this should look like.
- Self-regulation and self-control, which are linked to meta-cognition, and are best developed through play.
- Building parental engagement – there is plenty of evidence of the importance of this, but a need to identify approaches which are effective in engaging the most hard to reach parents.

EEF are keen for more proposals on the early years, especially around leadership of settings and professional development and on maths. Sir Kevan invited practitioners to leave their ideology at the door and look for rigorous evidence of what works. He spoke about the importance of finding bridgeheads between evidence and practice.

Discussion

Melanie Onn MP noted that she had been at a meeting on oracy with the minister, Nadhim Zahawi, earlier in the day and had reminded him of the importance of maintained nursery schools.

Gillian Keegan MP reported that she had been blown away by a visit to her local maintained nursery school, and that in her view there was a clear business case for them on the basis of the progress they can show that children make, which other MPs should readily understand.

Comments from the floor included that rigorous evidence was the bedrock for practice in maintained nursery schools, including when working to empower parents. Schools were finding it increasingly hard to release staff to work with parents because of budget cuts. The impact on parents of wider cuts to LA budgets, such as for EAL classes which enable them to support their children's learning, was also noted. One nursery school reported on stark evidence of the growing gap between children with 30 hours places compared to vulnerable children who had previously been getting a full-time place in Birmingham, and the next cohort of vulnerable children who were only getting 15 hours. Another commented on growing differences between children with EAL, whose progress could vary dramatically. Sir Kevan was asked if the EEF could help nursery schools to identify and evidence what aspects of their practice were specifically responsible for their excellent outcomes.

Sir Kevan commented that schools make less use of evidence in deciding what to stop doing, than in whether to introduce something new. He noted that the SEED report has clear evidence that extending the number of hours has potential to increase the impact on closing the gap, but that the 30 hours policy works in a contrary direction to this. On EAL, he noted the importance of deep transferable knowledge, not just surface level knowledge such as the number of words. He noted the problems in Ofsted-style reports on what has been observed on a visit to a setting, that these often see what the researchers want to see, and do not help pick out what it is that really works, as education is complex and interactive.

He said that we should no longer need to be making the case for early education, but be making the case for consistent, great early education, and to be aiming for England to have the best early education system in the world.

The Early Years Workforce: current issues and challenges, Professor Jane Payler, Open University

See separate paper.

The early years workforce in schools, Nansi Ellis, Assistant General Secretary Policy, ATL Section of the NEU

Nansi reported that the NEU was hearing from its leadership members about difficulties recruiting people qualified to teach in Reception. The reasons for this were:

- Isolation, as reception teachers are often the early years teacher in a school. and while some headteachers may be strong supporters of their foundation stage colleagues, primary headteachers who have themselves trained in the early years are extremely rare. The focus of training is often about how the Reception year can prepare children for the National Curriculum, not about good early years practice.
- Reception teachers will bear the brunt of the introduction of baseline assessment. Although less public at present, the review of the Early Learning Goals will equally impact on teaching in the EYFS and Reception teachers' workloads.
- Perceptions of Reception as the easy option are a thing of the past, but it is often now seen as the Reception teacher's job to build the foundations for everything else – early phonics, maths, reading, etc. Reception teachers are often asked to do this in ways which are not compatible with sound early years practice, and are seen as pushing Y1 practice down into the early years.

Nansi suggested that steps were needed to end the isolation of Reception teachers and make them part of the early years workforce community, creating a continuum of practice and professionalism. There should be support for Reception and Y1 teachers and leaders to engage in discussion about early years pedagogy as part of initial teacher training and as part of ongoing CPD, for example the Early Years Teaching Schools could have a crucial role in engaging with Reception teachers.

There is a need for a broad and balanced curriculum in Reception. Politicians and government need to understand that teachers in the early years need both strong subject knowledge and early years pedagogy. The assessment system needs to be based on what children can do, not measuring progress.

NEU as well as campaigning on school funding needs to look at what SEND funding, early years funding in general and the funding for maintained nursery schools in particular. There is a case for needs-led funding, recognising that the Reception year is resource intensive. There also needs to be acknowledgement that the workload in Reception is different. Teaching in the early years is also about professional judgement, and Reception teachers need to be part of a community of practice in the early years, as well as in schools.

The impact of the 30 hours on early years in schools, James Bowen, Director of NAHT Edge, NAHT

James gave a preview of the forthcoming NAHT report on the impact of the 30 hours on schools (a link will be added when this is published). Key issues were that most schools were cross-subsidising their 30 hours provision. This meant an impact on quality eg staff training. There were issues with delayed payments and the online system and codes for parents. There was some concern about the impact of the policy on disadvantaged children, with some displacement of children eligible only for the universal entitlement.

Discussion

Issues raised from the floor about the 30 hours included the anglocentric nature of the questions on the HMRC website, and the arbitrary cut off dates which meant parents arriving at the start of term asking to enrol their children either had to be turned away or settings had to take the children without funding. Also that children who had been funded for two terms under the 30 hours were having to be turned away if their parents didn't produce codes for the third term.

In relation to the workforce there was agreement that it was confusing and unfair that Early Years Teachers did not have the same pay and conditions as other teachers.

It was noted that the Select Committee for Science and Technology were holding an enquiry on the evidence around early intervention. There was also a question as to why further evidence was needed beyond the extensive evidence of the EPPE and EPPSE reports. Sir Kevan suggested that projects such as "Born in Bradford" were starting to look at integrating broader data sets, for example including health data rather than just the EYFS Profile.

Sir Kevan was asked why government policy wasn't consistent with the EEF's evidence base. He pointed out that the EEF was independent of government.

Nansi suggested there was a need for a single integrated system including health, education and social care, and asked whether this might be included in thinking in relation to Labour's National Education Service. Lucy noted that the work in Greater Manchester would aim to show this in action.

Jane called for a levelling up of the system to the standards of maintained nursery schools, not a levelling down, and an integrated system – the demise of children's centres was beyond sad. She noted that Early Years Teachers had not been respected or treated fairly, and that the need for QTS 0-7 was vital because the current QTS 3-7 misses out the crucial 0-3 age range.

The meeting closed at 3.50pm.