

26 June 2020



Dear Prime Minister,

Maintained Nursery School Funding

We are writing on behalf of our members who work in the maintained nursery sector in England. We oppose the closure of any of the remaining 389 schools in England and ask that you take a long-term view to ensure we do not lose any more of our indispensable maintained nursery schools, which help and support some of the most deprived families in the country.

In this time of national crisis, as we face Covid-19, the essential value of maintained nursery schools has once again been clearly demonstrated. As large numbers of private nurseries have closed, maintained nursery schools have been asked by local authorities to become early years hubs to care for vulnerable children and those of key workers.

Maintained nursery schools have been able to offer a bespoke and crucial care package by using qualified staff, research focused routines, and by working with mental health professionals. This approach has allowed them to focus on children's wellbeing by unpicking and understanding their responses and behaviour in these anxious times and adapting provision to provide a safe, responsive and nurturing space. Their valuable expertise is also shared with their local authorities and other partners.

As you are aware, on 31 October 2019 the Government confirmed that supplementary funding for maintained nursery schools would be extended to cover the full 2020-21 financial year. This was welcome news. In the same statement, the Government also confirmed its commitment to fund maintained nursery schools in the longer term. It indicated that any reform to the way maintained nursery schools are funded in future would be accompanied with funding protections.

However, the commitment to find a long-term funding solution for maintained nursery schools within the early years funding system implemented in 2017 has still not been honoured, with no long-term agreement in sight. Instead we have a stop-gap system of supplementary funding, but because this remains cash-limited at 2016-17 levels, Maintained Nursery Schools have had their funding cut in real terms over this period, at a time when costs including salaries, pensions and business rates have significantly increased. In addition, the restrictions of the single funding formula guidance prevent LAs from finding local solutions and providing their own additional funding. Some maintained nursery schools receive no supplementary funding at all, the amount that others receive varies wildly, with no consistency as to whether it includes the cost of business rates, or any other salient factors.

A great body of research and evidence has shown the value, expertise and system leadership role of the maintained nursery schools since this time. Furthermore, 40 national teaching schools, led by nursery Schools, support a range of work right across

the early years sector in their local areas. Maintained nursery schools have been recognised for their vital role in areas of deprivation, closing educational gaps and providing support for children with additional needs. They remain the most successful schools' group for Ofsted ratings. Despite all of this, maintained nursery schools have been left in a vulnerable and perilous financial state for a prolonged period and in 2020 all of the remaining maintained nursery schools will have less money in real terms than in 2015; as the DfE's own statistics show, the percentage of maintained nursery schools in deficit has risen from 3.5% in 2009-10 to 17.7% in 2018-19.

In the Covid-19 crisis, maintained nursery schools cannot access a means of claiming funding for their additional costs incurred as they adapt their provision and provide essential keyworker places for children. They are unable to benefit from the business rate holiday the Government has offered private early years settings, despite also having to pay business rates.

Last week we also discovered that Maintained Nursery Schools, along with the rest of the Early Years sector had been excluded from the government's £1billion 'catch-up' funding. This decision seems illogical given that it is widely accepted that early intervention is one of the most effective strategies to address gaps in learning. We can be confident that children will be returning to early years settings now and in September needing extra support as a result of their experiences during the current crisis.

As soon as government is in a position to review the long-term funding formula, maintained nursery schools must be recognised as schools to adequately cover their statutory responsibilities and staff obligations and costs and must be entitled to receive funding equivalent to that received by a primary school with a nursery class such as a lump sum, premises factors (rates, PFI and split sites); additional needs funding based on deprivation, EAL and mobility; EYPP and any other relevant categories now and in the future. In addition, children attending MNS should be funded on an enhanced hourly rate under the EYNFF. The hourly rate for MNS needs to reflect the additional costs of having to employ a more highly qualified staff team, including qualified teachers. Hourly rates should be the same for the universal 15 hours and the additional 30 hours entitlement. Both these and the hourly rate for the 2-year-old offer should reflect actual costs for the staffing MNS are required to provide.

In the meantime, government must reassure local authorities that the supplementary funding will be continued in 2021-22, uprated for inflation. There is also a need for an emergency fund to ensure those nursery schools which have received little or no funding since 2017 are not forced into deficit by the government's slowness in tackling the funding inconsistencies.

Maintained nursery schools face threat of closure within a very short timeframe. This is a crisis which needs to be addressed urgently. The impact of Covid-19 has highlighted that the education system would struggle without maintained nursery schools; provision would be poorer and less responsive. If maintained nursery schools close, the cost of looking after children in great need will fall upon other services at a time when they are already under severe pressure.

At the last All Party Parliamentary Group for Nursery Schools, Nursery and Reception Classes, over 100 MPs supported the cross-party call for a resolution to the maintained nursery schools funding consultation in favour of recognising them as a school group

and providing adequate funding. This would make a vital difference. It would allow skilled teams to focus their attentions on making a difference in children's lives.

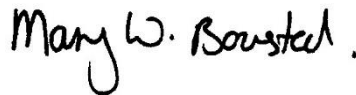

Please show your support for maintained nursery schools by:

- Immediately confirming supplementary funding for 2021-22 (and crucially summer term 2021) and ensure this funding is increased in line with inflation to bring the value back to the real terms value in 2016-17
- Providing additional resources and support with COVID-19 costs
- Committing to review the early years funding formula as soon as possible and by 2021 at the latest.

Yours sincerely,



Beatrice Merrick
Chief Executive
Early Education



Dr Mary Boustead & Kevin Courtney
Joint General Secretaries
NEU



Paul Whiteman
General Secretary
NAHT