



House of Commons  
Education Committee

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# Tackling disadvantage in the early years

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**Ninth Report of Session 2017–19**

*Report, together with formal minutes relating  
to the report*

*Ordered by the House of Commons  
to be printed 29 January 2019*

## The Education Committee

The Education Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Department for Education and its associated public bodies.

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### Committee staff

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## Summary

There seems to be little strategic direction to Government policy on early years—the life chances strategy was never published, the Government’s social mobility action plan did not fully address the role played by the early years, and the Government’s flagship 30 hours childcare policy appears to be entrenching disadvantage.

This report addresses what we consider to be the two key areas affecting children’s life chances: quality early years education and a strong home learning environment.

### **Quality early years education**

Early years education for children below the age of four has a positive impact on the life chances of disadvantaged children, yet disadvantaged children spend significantly less time in pre-school than children from more affluent backgrounds.

The quality of teaching in the early years is just as important to outcomes as it is in other stages of education. Quality is key to pre-schools that have the biggest impact on children’s life chances. Pre-schools should have low staffing ratios and well-trained professionals. The Government must remove barriers to progression for early years teachers in order to encourage the recruitment and retention of a skilled early years workforce. It should also ensure clear and viable entry routes to careers in childcare, including apprenticeships.

The DfE’s decision not to fulfil its commitment to conducting the early years workforce feasibility study is disappointing. We urge the Government to justify that decision and either reconsider or provide a suitable alternative. We call upon the Government to develop a workforce strategy for the early years at the earliest opportunity.

Maintained nursery schools are extremely successful at ensuring excellent outcomes for disadvantaged children. Maintained nursery schools cannot wait until the Spending Review. Funding decisions regarding staff and places for the next academic year are being made now, and the transitional funding already provided is running out. We recommend that the Government should set out plans for, and commit to, fully funding maintained nursery schools by the end of the financial year.

We were told that the Government’s 30 hours childcare policy is a “car crash”. It is entrenching inequality rather than closing the gap, by leading to financial pressure on nurseries, providing more advantaged children with more quality childcare, and putting stress on the availability of places for disadvantaged two-year-olds. We recommend that the Government review its 30 hours childcare policy to address the perverse consequences for disadvantaged children. The Government should reduce the earnings cap for the 30 hours childcare and use the extra funding to provide early education for disadvantaged children.

### **Supporting a strong home learning environment**

Parental support and the home learning environment have a major effect on children's life chances. It is particularly important for children's oracy and language development which, although not the only important skill to be developed, is vital for children's life chances.

The Government should build upon the evidence in Greater Manchester where every child is assessed eight times between 0–5 years old, including for speech and language development, with interventions following as necessary. This model should be followed across the country.

The lack of evidence about interventions to support parents and families in creating a positive home learning environment is concerning. The Government should commission research on such interventions, so that they can be based on solid evidence and rigorous evaluation, to ensure that activity and funding is not being wasted on efforts that may not be effective.

We heard a huge amount about the positive effects of children's centres on children's life chances. The DfE should develop a wider, comprehensive strategy for provision of high quality and effective early years services. In doing so, the DfE should explore promoting family hubs as a wider model for provision of integrated services.

# Introduction

Effective teaching and effective parenting are absolutely vital in terms of how young children are going to develop through their lives. When it is at its best, it really does have a strong impact on helping children from more disadvantaged backgrounds to achieve more.<sup>1</sup>

*Professor Dominic Wyse, UCL Institute of Education and the Helen Hamlyn Centre for Pedagogy*

1. When the then Prime Minister, Rt Hon David Cameron, set out the key areas that would be covered in the Government's life chances strategy in January 2016, he spoke of the crucial early years and their role in determining children's future life chances.<sup>2</sup> Families and the early years was a key pillar of his approach, as well as education.

2. Our predecessor Committee, along with the previous Work and Pensions Committee, held a joint one-off evidence session in December 2015 on the Government's life chances strategy and the role that early or foundation years intervention plays in shaping children's lives.<sup>3</sup> In December 2016, Damian Hinds MP, then Minister of State in the Department for Work and Pensions, made it unclear in response to a written parliamentary question whether or not the Government's life chances strategy would be pursued, referring only to other work that the Government was engaged in:

*To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether he plans to publish the delayed Life Chances Strategy or a replacement in 2016.*

The Prime Minister is clear that tackling poverty and disadvantage, and delivering real social reform, is a priority for this Government. We intend to bring forward a social justice green paper in the new year.<sup>4</sup>

3. Since then, the strategic direction of Government policy in this area has been lacking. We were concerned about the apparent absence of strategy in this important area. Reports suggested that one of the Government's flagship policies was entrenching disadvantage were also alarming.<sup>5</sup> The Education Policy Institute wrote that

Offering additional childcare, which presumably holds some educational value, to all but the neediest, at significant cost to the tax-payer, isn't the worst of this policy. The hourly costs paid by government may well be too low to support an expansion of places, resulting in pushing disadvantaged children to the back of the queue, and/or damaging the quality of the 15 hours they are entitled to.<sup>6</sup>

1 [Q2](#)

2 "[Prime Minister's speech on life chances](#)", HMG, 11 January 2016

3 Work and Pensions and Education Select Committees, '[Foundation years and life chances strategy: joint inquiry launched](#)', 17 December 2015

4 [PQ 56144 \[on Social Mobility\]](#), 8 December 2016

5 Nursery World, '[30 hours saves poorest parents least](#)', 17 September 2017; Education Policy Institute, '[How not to close the disadvantage gap—5 red herrings to avoid](#)', 12 September 2016

6 Education Policy Institute, '[How not to close the disadvantage gap—5 red herrings to avoid](#)', 12 September 2016

The publication of the Government's social mobility action plan in December 2017 brought renewed focus to early years policy but did not fully address the role played by the early years.

4. Our report covers what we consider to be the two key areas that influence life chances: quality early years education and supporting a strong home learning environment. However, we are also concerned about the effect that income poverty during the early years has on children's life chances. Witnesses to our inquiry identified income poverty as one of the biggest influences on life chances. Dr Kitty Stewart, Associate Professor of Social Policy at the London School of Economics and Political Science, explained:

I think income poverty is crucial. Somehow in all the discussions that we have, thinking about how we can improve it, we focus on lots of important, smaller issues. It is very difficult for those to have an effect when families are really struggling. We have robust causal evidence that if you improve income for families who are living in poverty, it improves children's outcomes.<sup>7</sup>

5. We were told that financial disadvantage particularly affects preschool children. Steven McIntosh, Director of UK Poverty Policy at Save the Children, explained that

When you look at overall figures of financial disadvantage, it is preschool children who are in households most likely to experience financial disadvantage. The fastest risers, and the highest levels of poverty and financial disadvantage, are among those households with a child under five, where it is a rate of around 35%, as opposed to a lower rate for children of school age. Given all the evidence that we have heard about the critical importance of the early years, this adds to the importance of taking action at that time.<sup>8</sup>

6. However there are other equally significant drivers of disadvantage. For example, single parents can face substantial additional burdens. The Department for Work and Pensions published information stating that

47 per cent of children in lone parent families are living below the official poverty line, compared to 24 per cent of children in families with two parents.<sup>9</sup>

7. Social justice has been the central thread running through our inquiry and is integral to our exploration of issues relating to life chances. We launched our inquiry into the impact of the early years of a child's life on determining their life chances on 4 May 2018. We invited written evidence on:

- The role of quality early years education in determining life chances and promoting social justice;
- The importance of support for parents and families, and integration with other services, in prevention and early intervention; and

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7 [Q110](#)

8 [Q53](#)

9 Gov.uk, National Statistics: [Households below average income: 1994/95 to 2016/17](#)

- The importance of communication skills and language development.

8. We received over 60 written submissions during our inquiry and held four sessions of oral evidence. Our witnesses included academics, representatives from charities, and a professional association. In our final session, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families, Nadhim Zahawi MP, gave evidence alongside Michelle Dyson, Director of Early Years and Childcare at the Department for Education.

9. We visited Manchester in September, as part of both this inquiry and our work on education in the north. We held a roundtable with early years practitioners, charities and stakeholders to discuss the work taking place in Greater Manchester. We visited Martenscroft Nursery School and Children's Centre in Hulme and attended the launch of a SHINE project at Corrie Primary School in Denton. SHINE is an education charity aiming to raise attainment of children from low income homes across the Northern Powerhouse area. We are grateful to our hosts, all the stakeholders and practitioners we met, and the Northern Powerhouse Project for facilitating our visit.

## Quality early years education

“It is a false economy to invest in early education to a level insufficient to improve child outcomes and reduce inequalities.”

*Social Mobility Commission, State of the Nation 2016*

10. Children born into different socio-economic backgrounds are likely to have significantly different life chances, and these socio-economic differences take hold early.<sup>10</sup> Educational attainment is a significant factor affecting life chances. Disadvantaged children start school behind their peers when they begin school, and that attainment gap widens, unless tackled, as children progress through school, particularly during secondary school.<sup>11</sup> In 2016, disadvantaged pupils were on average 19.3 months behind their peers by the time they took their GCSEs. The EPI estimates that “at the current rate of progress, it would take a full 50 years to reach an equitable education system where disadvantaged pupils did not fall behind their peers during formal education to age 16”.<sup>12</sup>

11. The evidence is clear that early years education for children below the age of four has a positive impact on the life chances of disadvantaged children.<sup>13</sup> Disadvantaged children receive particular benefit from attending pre-school, especially when they are learning alongside children from different social backgrounds. The Sutton Trust told us in written evidence that

The attainment gap between disadvantaged children and their more advantaged counterparts is already evident when children begin school aged 5, with a gap between them the equivalent of 4.3 months of learning. This gap more than doubles to 9.5 months at the end of primary school, and then more than doubles again to 19.3 months at the end of secondary school.<sup>14</sup>

Yet overall, disadvantaged children spend significantly less time in pre-school than children from more affluent backgrounds.<sup>15</sup>

### Quality

12. Not all pre-schools have an equal impact on children’s life chances—quality is key. One key study by the Institute of Education found that the characteristics prevalent in high-quality pre-school settings included highly qualified staff as managers and teachers; parity between educational and social development; warm, interactive relationships between staff and children; and formal teaching provided to children.<sup>16</sup> The Government-

10 Education Policy Institute, [Closing the Gap? Trends in Educational Attainment and Disadvantage](#), August 2017

11 Education Policy Institute ([LIF0050](#))

12 Education Policy Institute, [Closing the Gap? Trends in Educational Attainment and Disadvantage](#), August 2017

13 Early Education, [‘Early Years Literature Review’](#)

14 Sutton Trust ([LIF0040](#))

15 Education Policy Institute, [Closing the Gap? Trends in Educational Attainment and Disadvantage](#), August 2017

16 Institute of Education, [‘The effective provision of pre-school education \(EPPE\) project: findings from pre-school to end of Key Stage 1’](#)

commissioned review “Foundations for quality: The independent review of early education and childcare qualifications”, led by Professor Cathy Nutbrown (the Nutbrown Review) concluded similarly that

- Quality early years provision has a lasting positive impact on child outcomes;
- High quality early years provision narrows the gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged children;
- Perception of quality is a key factor for parents when choosing a childcare provider;
- The qualification level of staff in the setting improves quality;
- The introduction of a graduate leader improves the quality of provision in settings; and
- Having a qualified teacher in an early years setting has the greatest impact on quality.<sup>17</sup>

13. The Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years (PACEY) wrote that

High quality early education supports a child’s full development, including creativity, curiosity and self-confidence, which is essential not just for school but later life. It has been found to improve children’s cognitive and social development outcomes and narrow the gaps between the most and least disadvantaged children.<sup>18</sup>

14. Research by academics for the Department of Education found that children who attended high quality pre-school for 2–3 years were almost eight months ahead in their literacy development compared to children who had not attended pre-school.<sup>19</sup>

15. We also heard about the importance of ensuring low staffing ratios for quality education. While low staffing ratios are expensive, Sara Bonetti, Associate Director of Early Years at the Education Policy Institute, told us that:

The problem is, if we look at, for example, optimal ratios in the classroom, international evidence again is clear about this: that they apply to children zero to five, zero to six. When we look at five-year-olds in England,<sup>20</sup> they are way out of that ratio. Even just looking at the structural, simple key point of how many children are in a reception class and what the ratio is, is it one to 30 or one to 15? Do they have a teaching assistant? Include in that children with English as a second language, SEN, or any other issue—and that could just be a bad day, because a five year-old has a wide variation of

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17 Professor Cathy Nutbrown, [Foundations for quality: The independent review of early education and childcare qualifications: final report](#), June 2012

18 Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years, [Submission to the Education Committee inquiry on life chances](#)

19 Department for Education, [Effective pre-school, primary and secondary education project \(EPPSE 3–16+\)](#), June 2015

20 [Q31](#)

competencies. [ ... ] Again, I would go back to the area of, yes, reception teachers know more about early years, but even the simple ratio and class size is off in England.

16. The quality of early years provision is a particular issue in disadvantaged areas. PACEY, the Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years, wrote that

The quality of early years provision is notably lower in disadvantaged areas, with 18% of settings in the most deprived areas rated less than 'good' compared with 8% in the least deprived. Less than half of the poorest four-year-olds in England are ready for school, compared to almost two-thirds of other children. By the end of reception year, there is gap of 18 per cent between the attainment of disadvantaged children and their better-off counterparts, which persists for years. All the evidence suggests that high quality early education would go some way in narrowing this gap.<sup>21</sup>

## Workforce

17. The clear and consistent message we heard throughout our inquiry was that well-trained and high-quality professionals are the key to providing high quality childcare and early education. PACEY noted that

A number of studies have found quality to be closely associated with qualifications, leading many experts to assert that the key to high quality is upskilling the workforce.

Early Education agreed:

Graduate leadership and higher qualified staff make the greatest difference to outcomes for children, and to the most disadvantaged in particular. The Government's own longitudinal study is unequivocal (EPPSE). The poorest children have the best outcomes in nurseries led by graduate teachers.<sup>22</sup>

18. Sara Bonetti argued that while the ultimate goal should be to have every early years professional highly qualified, pragmatism was required. She told us that

We are so far behind from that ideal that we really need to look at funding. [ ... ] We do not know much about training providers. We do not want these providers to just be a label. We want it to be high quality. Then we need to look at all different levels of staffing. Level 3<sup>23</sup> is very important for ratios and is key in every setting, yet we know that training for level 3 professionals has become more and more expensive over the years. We know that many providers are struggling to have trainees going from level 2 to level 3.<sup>24</sup>

21 Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years, [Submission to the Education Committee inquiry on life chances](#)

22 Early Education ([LIF0006](#))

23 Early years level 2 qualification is appropriate for assistant nursery nurses, assistant early years practitioner or a childminder. Level 3 (A-level equivalent) is appropriate for learners aiming to become Early Years Educators. People holding a level 3 early years qualification can be counted towards level 3 in the EYFS staff:child ratios if they also hold suitable level 2 literacy and numeracy qualifications.

24 [Q12](#)

19. Witnesses explained that there was an issue with recruiting high-quality staff in the private and voluntary sector due to graduates not being paid graduate rates. Liz Bayram, PACEY’s Chief Executive, elaborated on the difficulties in attracting staff:

The reason basically is that if you are a level 3 practitioner, to move into a graduate role, first, there are very few of them unless they are in schools and, secondly, you do not get much. I think our research showed there was only about a 10% increase in wages as a result of that. What we are finding is that practitioners are leaving the sector. Graduates who are keen to stay in early years are keen to do so in a school-based environment because they can achieve a better balance of work and salary and all of the things that matter as well. Those that are not are moving out of the sector.<sup>25</sup>

20. While not all early years specialists want or need to be highly qualified, progression is a key factor in recruiting quality early years specialists. Liz Bayram said:

You will not be surprised to hear that that main barrier for progression for most early years teachers is it is not equivalent to a QTS. They cannot teach in reception classes. They cannot lead nurseries because early years professionals and early years teachers are not the same as a qualified teacher.<sup>26</sup>

21. When asked about the place for apprenticeships, Liz Bayram said “I believe that what the early years workforce needs is a clear progression route from apprenticeship right through.” We agree. We were told that there is a “raging debate” about how well current apprenticeships in childcare produce quality practitioners.<sup>27</sup> Sara Bonetti told us that “the picture is complex”, adding that:

We need to understand what happens at the previous level. We do not know much about the quality of training providers. We also do not have an established system of induction, continuing mentoring and coaching and professional development.<sup>28</sup>

**22. *Barriers to progression for early years teachers must be removed in order to encourage the recruitment and retention of a skilled, high-quality early years workforce. We recommend that early years teachers should be able to access Qualified Teacher Status via a specialist route.***

**23. *We agree with witnesses that there is a lack of clarity on progression routes and quality of apprenticeships in childcare. The Government should commission quality research on training provision, induction and coaching for apprenticeships in childcare, as well as professional development for those already in the profession seeking to progress. The Government must act on that research to ensure clear and viable entry routes and development.***

24. In the Department for Education’s early years workforce strategy, published in March 2017, the Government said that it would

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25 [Q9](#)

26 [Q23](#)

27 [Q28](#)

28 [Q29](#)

conduct a feasibility study by March 2018 into developing a programme that specifically seeks to grow the graduate workforce in disadvantaged areas, to narrow the quality gap between settings in disadvantaged and more affluent areas. We will engage the sector in exploring ways to target support where it is most needed.<sup>29</sup>

However, in a letter to us in July 2018, the Minister of State for Children and Families confirmed that “after careful consideration we have decided not to proceed with the graduate feasibility study”.<sup>30</sup> He said that instead, the Government would be investing £20 million in professional development activity focused on disadvantaged areas. He also said that the Government remained committed to ensuring there are routes to graduate level qualifications in the early years sector.

***25. We are disappointed that the DfE has chosen not to fulfil its commitment to conducting the early years workforce feasibility study. We urge the Government to recognise the difference that a highly skilled workforce makes to narrowing the quality gap between disadvantaged and more affluent areas. We further urge the Government to justify its failure to conduct the early years workforce feasibility study and to either reconsider its decision not to go ahead with the study or provide a suitable alternative.***

***26. The Government does not appear to have an early years workforce strategy, encompassing recruitment, quality and retention. We call upon the Government to develop one at the earliest opportunity.***

## Types of nursery schools

27. Research by the Institute of Education identified that the best early years education in terms of tackling disadvantage is delivered by maintained nursery schools. This is largely because they are better integrated with the community and other family services, and have highly qualified teachers and leadership.<sup>31</sup> Maintained nursery schools are likely to have a more than averagely deprived intake; the Department for Education’s operational guidance for maintained nursery schools states that “any involvement in the delivery of the 30 hours entitlement should preserve maintained nursery schools’ overall focus on the most disadvantaged”.<sup>32</sup> As of 2015, 64% of maintained nursery schools were in the 30% most deprived areas of England.<sup>33</sup>

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29 Department for Education, [Early years workforce strategy](#), 3 March 2017

30 [Correspondence from the Minister of State for Children and Families to the Chair of the Education Committee relating to the life chances inquiry](#), 18 July 2018

31 Institute of Education, [‘The effective provision of pre-school education \(EPPE\) project: findings from pre-school to end of Key Stage 1’](#)

32 Department for Education, [Early years entitlements: operational guidance](#), June 2018

33 Early Education, [Maintained nursery schools: the state of play report](#), March 2015

### ***Martenscroft Nursery School & Sure Start Children's Centre<sup>34</sup>***

In September 2018, we visited Martenscroft Nursery School and Sure Start Children's Centre in Hulme, Manchester. Martenscroft is a Manchester Local Authority maintained provision led by a Governing Body and Headteacher. It is a fully integrated school and Sure Start Children's Centre Group with a large multi-disciplinary team and working with a wide range of partner agencies and professionals.

#### **Nursery class provision**

- 60 full time places for children aged 3–5 years
- Before and after school care and holidays care

#### **Sure Start Children's Centres services**

- Lead school for early years in Martenscroft, Moss Side, Claremont and St Peter's, responsible for leading the delivery of all aspects of the Early Years Delivery Model and Sure Start Core purpose
- Utilises community assets such as community centres, leisure centres, churches, school buildings and cultural venues
- Works with key community partners including early years providers, early years outreach workers, midwifery, health visitor teams, early help hubs, social workers, schools, voluntary sector, faith groups, childcare providers, speech and language therapy, parenting services, adult education services, job centre plus, troubled families services and housing

#### **Childcare**

- Flexible childcare families for young children from 4 months to 5 years of age, available 49 weeks a year
- Currently 48 eligible 2 year olds accessing the 15 hours free entitlement

Martenscroft is a designated national teaching school, working with others to offer continuous professional development to other settings, schools and early years practitioners covering the EYFS. This offers opportunities for sharing effective practice and practice based on research findings developed with partners.

Staff at Martenscroft told us that only 4% of children entered nursery in line or above their age-related expectations in communication and language, but an average of 91% of children made accelerated progress between baseline and end of year assessment across all areas of learning.

28. In January 2018, all but one maintained nursery schools were rated either outstanding or good by Ofsted. These schools must have a headteacher and governing body and must

34 <http://www.martenscroftnurseryschool.co.uk/>; Education Committee visit, 4 September 2018

employ at least one qualified teacher. A study by the Nuffield Foundation identified that maintained nursery schools located in disadvantaged areas had been found to offer quality for three and four-year olds that is comparable, and in some cases higher, than schools serving areas of lower levels of deprivation.<sup>35</sup> Beatrice Merrick, Chief Executive of Early Education, explained to us what makes maintained nursery schools such a good model:

They are extraordinarily successful at the outcomes they get for those children. They have closed the gap. They are mostly located in the most disadvantaged areas and they close the gap for those children. They may be coming in below age-related expectations and going out above them. They are incredibly successful.<sup>36</sup>

29. She told us that maintained nursery schools were influential in sharing expertise beyond their own catchment:

They [maintained nursery schools] also act as system leaders spreading their expertise across the rest of their sectors locally. [ ... ] They can be very effective not just for the children in their catchment area but for raising the standard of provision across their local area.<sup>37</sup>

30. Beatrice Merrick also told us that maintained nursery schools are “particularly in danger at the moment because there is not yet a funding settlement in place that guarantees that they can survive”.<sup>38</sup> She went on to explain that in part, that is because it is more expensive to pay for qualified teachers and a qualified head teacher than to pay for level 3 staff.

31. In 2017, the Government committed to maintaining funding for maintained nursery schools until 2019–20 through a block of supplementary funding of around £60 million.<sup>39</sup> In July 2018, Early Education published research carried out for the All Party Parliamentary Group on Nursery Schools which found that 29% of England’s maintained nursery schools are unsure about their immediate future. 64% of respondents expected to be in deficit by 2020.<sup>40</sup> Early Education explained in a briefing document that loss of the £60million supplementary funding would represent a 31% cut in funding.<sup>41</sup> A separate survey carried out for the APPG found that 67 per cent of nursery schools believe they will be unsustainable if the transitional funding comes to an end.<sup>42</sup>

32. One option for finding additional funding which we consider could be used for maintained nurseries was offered by the Centre for Social Justice in their report on childcare. They suggest that reducing the upper eligibility thresholds for tax-free childcare and 30 hours’ free childcare would be a plausible option for providing savings that could be otherwise spent on funding maintained nurseries. The CSJ argues that

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35 Nuffield Foundation, [Quality and inequality: Do three- and four-year-olds in deprived areas experience lower quality early years provision?](#)

36 [Q10](#)

37 [Q10](#)

38 [Q10](#)

39 Early Education, All Party Parliamentary Group on Nursery Schools, Nursery and Reception Classes, [Briefing on funding for Maintained Nursery Schools](#), 29 June 2018

40 Early Education, All Party Parliamentary Group on Nursery Schools, Nursery and Reception Classes, [Survey of Maintained Nursery Schools’ current and future financial position](#), July 2018

41 Early Education, All Party Parliamentary Group on Nursery Schools, Nursery and Reception Classes, [Briefing on funding for Maintained Nursery Schools](#), 29 June 2018

42 Nursery World, [DfE to assess the value of nursery schools](#), 19 January 2018

The current funding spread for childcare now tilts towards better-off families and funds should be placed where they are most transformative.<sup>43</sup>

33. The introduction of tax-free childcare and 30 hours of free childcare has tilted public childcare spending towards better-off families; while in 2016 a two-parent family on the national living wage with annual earnings of £19,000 received 6 per cent more in childcare support than a two-parent family earning £100,000 a year, the former now receives 20 per cent less in childcare support than the latter.<sup>44</sup>

34. **Maintained nursery schools (like the one we visited in Manchester) are extremely successful at ensuring excellent outcomes for disadvantaged children. Their success is not limited to their catchment area but can have positive outcomes for provision across the local area. They must be supported to ensure that disadvantaged children are given the best possible start to life. Given their importance we are concerned that funding for maintained nursery schools is set to decrease substantially in 2020 unless the Government commits to additional funding.**

35. *Maintained nursery schools cannot wait until the Spending Review. Funding decisions regarding staff and places for the next academic year are being made now, and the transitional funding already provided is running out. We recommend that the Government should set out plans for, and commit to, fully funding maintained nursery schools by the end of the financial year.*

36. *Given the ability of maintained nurseries to spread expertise, we recommend that local authorities should encourage cooperation between maintained nursery schools and nurseries in the private and voluntary sector. We call upon local authorities to broker relationships between maintained nurseries and nurseries in the private and voluntary sector to enable them to “buy in” support, particularly for children with special educational needs and disabilities, or those who require extra support.*

### 30 hours funded childcare

37. The Government’s ‘30 hours of free childcare’ policy, commonly known as the ‘extended entitlement’, amounts to a total of 1,140 hours of free childcare a year. The extended entitlement is only available to those eligible 3 and 4-year olds of qualifying parents or carers. Eligibility is determined by a means-test based on minimum and maximum income level.<sup>45</sup> Under the extended entitlement, eligible children of qualifying parents are provided with a further 570 hours of funded childcare, on top of the universal 570 hours a year of Government-funded childcare for all three- and four-year olds.

38. The overwhelming message we heard from our witnesses was a concern that the extended entitlement was widening the gap between disadvantaged children, and those from more advantaged backgrounds.<sup>46</sup> The Sutton Trust told us in their written submission that:

43 Centre for Social Justice, [A Bright Start: Improving childcare for disadvantaged families through Universal Credit](#), November 2018

44 Education Policy Institute, [Widening the gap? The impact of the 30-hour entitlement on early years education and childcare](#), May 2016

45 House of Commons Library, [Childcare: “30 hours” of free childcare—eligibility, access codes and charges \(England\)](#)

46 [Q38](#); [Q46](#); [Q49](#); [Q53](#); [Q55](#); [Q85](#); [Q129](#)

While investments in affordability are welcome, neither the tax-free childcare scheme nor the 30-hour entitlement are well-designed to promote social mobility.<sup>47</sup>

Beatrice Merrick agreed:

Now that we are seeing children who are not eligible for 30 hours having just 15 hours, we are seeing the gap increasing, anecdotally. We will get data on this in due course, but we have to be aware that, if children in working families are getting 30 hours and children in non-working families are getting 15 hours, we will see, probably, an increase in the gap.<sup>48</sup>

39. Sir Kevan Collins, Chief Executive of the Education Endowment Foundation, referred to the policy as a “car crash”:

One of the perverse, and I think unintended, consequences of policy, you are seeing children who were disadvantaged who are getting more than 15 hours, having it reduced so other children, who are getting support for their 30 hours, have a place. That has to be a problem for all of us in the long run if you are trying to narrow the gap.<sup>49</sup>

40. It has been reported that the increase in take up of the 30 hours childcare has led to financial pressure on nurseries, because the funding from the Government for places is not sufficient to meet their costs. This pressure puts stress on the availability of places for eligible two-year-olds, who are more likely to be disadvantaged.<sup>50</sup> Research from the DfE’s Children’s Services Omnibus Survey found that local authorities are struggling to ensure take up of funded childcare places for disadvantaged two-year-olds, as well as the universal entitlement of 15 hours for three- and four-year-olds.<sup>51</sup> Neil Leitch, the Chief Executive of the Pre-school Learning Alliance, said in 2016 that

There is no doubt that the introduction of 30 hours of free childcare for three- and four-year-olds will have an impact on the availability of places for one- and two-year-olds. Two-year-olds from the most disadvantaged backgrounds are already struggling to access places in many areas.<sup>52</sup>

41. The evidence we heard suggests that the policy is also making it financially difficult for nurseries to take on disadvantaged two year olds, while simultaneously offering more childcare to more affluent parents.<sup>53</sup> Sara Bonetti told us that the entitlement has put an “even more serious financial burden” on providers.<sup>54</sup> We heard that providers are incentivised to take on fewer two year olds:

At the moment, if you are [an early years] setting, and you can either take more children on the 30 hours or more disadvantaged two-year-olds, very often people will look at the funding for the two-year-olds and say, “Because

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47 Sutton Trust ([LIF0040](#))

48 [Q38](#)

49 [Q55](#)

50 Nursery World, ‘[Councils warn disadvantaged children missing out on funded places](#)’, 19 December 2018

51 Nursery World, ‘[Councils warn disadvantaged children missing out on funded places](#)’, 19 December 2018

52 The Guardian, ‘[Free childcare policy may leave nurseries struggling to cope](#)’, 3 September 2016

53 [Q49](#)

54 [Q12](#)

the ratios are higher that is more expensive, the funding does not cover it, we will have fewer two-year-olds, we will have more families, we will have more 30-hour children.” That is going to work against the mission to improve life chances.<sup>55</sup>

**42. The Government’s 30 hours funded childcare policy is entrenching inequality rather than closing the gap.**

***43. We recommend that the Government review its 30 hours childcare policy to address the perverse consequences for disadvantaged children. The Government should reduce the earnings cap for the 30 hours childcare and use the extra funding to provide early education for disadvantaged children.***

## Supporting a strong home learning environment

“It is unarguable now after decades of evidence that parental engagement makes a difference.”<sup>56</sup>

*Sir Kevan Collins*

44. Although early years education is an important element of improving life chances, evidence suggests that parenting is one of the most important drivers of social inequalities in a child’s cognitive development before school.<sup>57</sup> A study by the Sutton Trust identified that children without secure parental bonds are more likely to have behavioural and literacy problems, and that boys in particular growing up in poverty are two and a half times less likely to display behaviour problems at school if they have secure attachments with parents in the early years. The Sutton Trust also found that those without strong bonds may also be more likely to be not in education, employment or training and less likely to be socially mobile.<sup>58</sup>

45. Research by Action for Children found that parenting impacts both cognitive and socio-economic development, each of which plays an important role in determining children’s life chances. It also discovered that nurturing and sensitive parenting styles are related to positive developmental outcomes, including good behaviour and academic success, and that infants who develop a strong attachment to their parents because of warm and consistent care are more likely to develop feelings of empathy and trust, and have a positive sense about themselves and others.<sup>59</sup>

### Support before and after birth

46. Although early education has a huge impact on children’s life chances, ensuring positive life chances for children starts before birth.<sup>60</sup> The Association of Directors of Public Health wrote that

Poor perinatal mental health, being overweight, and engaging in harmful behaviours such as smoking and alcohol consumption during pregnancy can affect bonding and have significant consequences for child development and health.<sup>61</sup>

56 [Q70](#)

57 The Sutton Trust, [Baby Bonds: parenting, attachment and a secure base for children](#), March 2014

58 The Sutton Trust, [Baby Bonds: parenting, attachment and a secure base for children](#), March 2014

59 Action for Children, [What role does parenting style play in supporting child development?](#)

60 Association of Directors of Public Health, [Education Committee inquiry into the impact of early years on life chances](#)

61 Association of Directors of Public Health, [Education Committee inquiry into the impact of early years on life chances](#)

47. Support after birth is also crucial. A report from the Early Intervention Foundation indicated that parental education levels and maternal mental health are important factors for explaining the higher prevalence of behavioural and emotional problems amongst disadvantaged children.<sup>62</sup>

48. The role of health visitors is significant for supporting parents in the period after birth. Health visitors are the most common source of guidance for parents, and they play a wider role in prevention and early intervention.<sup>63</sup> In his written evidence, Rt Hon Frank Field MP noted that “Home visits are a vital source of support for new parents and their children, who are currently meant to receive five mandatory home visits for each newborn.”<sup>64</sup> He shared the results of a programme in the US:

Much evidence shows that increasing the number of home visits improves outcomes. For instance, the Parent Child Home Programme (PCHP) established by Family Lives is a US-based 15 month structured programme which includes up to 92 home visits over their first five years of a child’s life. PCHP children are 50% more likely to measure ready for school than their socio-economic peers; outperformed the statewide average on third grade state maths achievement test; scored 2.5 times higher on social-emotional measures; have a 30% higher graduation rate than their socio-economic peers; and enter school performing 10 months above their chronological age.

49. However, there is a lack of data on the number of health visitors, how many parents are receiving the minimum number of mandatory home visits, or the effectiveness of practice. Frank Field explained it clearly:

In 2015 public health services for children aged 0 to 5 were transferred from the NHS to local authorities. There is therefore little or no centralised understanding of the number of health visitors, nor the effectiveness of home visiting practices across the UK.

50. The Science and Technology Committee’s inquiry into evidence-based early-years intervention found that only around 80% of children were receiving the home visits required. Professor Viv Bennett, Chief Nurse at Public Health England (PHE), told the Committee that PHE did not currently have the data necessary to be able to characterise those who did not receive the checks.<sup>65</sup>

***51. Support for parents before and after birth is a key starting point for ensuring good life chances for children. Home visits from health visitors is a crucial part of this support. We recommend that the Government should ensure that local authorities are collecting full and complete data on the number of home visitors and home visits conducted in their area, providing additional funding if necessary.***

62 Early Intervention Foundation, [‘Disadvantage, behaviour and cognitive outcomes: longitudinal analysis from age 5–16’](#) (2017)

63 Association of Directors of Public Health, [Education Committee inquiry into the impact of early years on life chances](#)

64 Rt Hon Frank Field MP ([LIF0045](#))

65 Science and Technology Committee, Eleventh Report of Session 2017–19, [Evidence-based early-years intervention](#), HC 506, para 51

52. *We recommend that the Department for Education work with the Department of Health and Social Care to develop a health in maternity strategy covering the first 1,001 critical days from conception to the age of two.*

53. *We also encourage the Government to make more comprehensive and needs- and evidence-led use of children's centres including utilising contact time with registrars and signposting parents to relevant support services.*

## The home learning environment

54. Parental support and the home learning environment have a major effect on children's life chances. Research shows that the effect of home learning activities during the preschool period continues to be evident in children's developmental profiles at the end of Key Stage 1.<sup>66</sup> Dr Shirley Woods-Gallagher, Strategic Lead, Reform and Innovation at Manchester City Council, told us about the Greater Manchester emphasis on the home learning environment:

A big part of the GM [Greater Manchester] approach [ ... ] was a real, strong emphasis on the importance of the home learning environment. Although families may come from areas of disadvantage, we know the enriched home learning environment is the big thing that can make a difference.<sup>67</sup>

## Communication and language development

55. The home learning environment is particularly important for children's oracy and language development, which, although not the only important skill to be developed, is vital for children's life chances. There is a correlation between the rate at which children develop language and the input that they receive from parents and carers. The Association of School and College Leaders explained that:

These interactions give children a stronger grasp of language by the time they start school, an advantage which stays with them throughout their education. If it is not dealt with in the early years, the word gap is shown to widen as the child gets older. Children who start school with low levels of vocabulary are disproportionately from lower socio-economic backgrounds.<sup>68</sup>

The cause of the early years word gap has been identified as both the quality and quantity of parent-child interactions.<sup>69</sup>

56. The importance of the home learning environment for language development is evidenced in a recent study by Oxford University Press, which identified that teachers have found the word gap to be a major barrier to children's learning throughout their schooling. It found that teachers report 49% of Year 1 pupils have a vocabulary limited to the extent that it affects their learning, and 43% of Year 7 pupils are affected by the same

66 Institute of Education, ['The effective provision of pre-school education \(EPPE\) project: findings from pre-school to end of Key Stage 1'](#)

67 [Q93](#)

68 Association of School and College Leaders, [Life chances inquiry](#)

69 Oxford University Press, [Why closing the word gap matters: Oxford language report](#)

problem.<sup>70</sup> Research by Save the Children has found that children who are behind in their early language skills at age five are six times more likely to be behind in English, and 11 times more likely to be behind in maths at the end of primary school.<sup>71</sup>

57. Bob Reitemeier, Chief Executive of I CAN (a children’s communication charity), told us that “85% of a child’s language—vocabulary, comprehension—is a result of their language environment, which you can call the family in most cases”. He contended that since that is the case, “you have to look at ways in which you can help the family develop a language-rich environment, which makes a huge impact on the child later on”.<sup>72</sup> Dr Shirley Woods-Gallagher argued for public health campaigns to support the home learning environment:

People know about not smoking in pregnancy and not drinking in pregnancy. Does everyone know that it is really important that you talk to your baby even when they do not talk back? Do people know that when you play with building blocks with your child, it is not just building blocks? That also helps with the formation of language and sentence structure. Unless you know that and you work in an early years setting, it is not common knowledge. There is an awful lot more we can do.<sup>73</sup>

She added: “We have it for fruit and vegetables. Why not for speech and language?”<sup>74</sup>

58. We asked witnesses about the best way of getting messages about the home learning environment, and in particular the importance of oracy and speech and language communication, through to parents. They suggested that methods could include health visitors and midwives providing information to parents. Bob Reitemeier told us:

The health visitor is one channel, where they are in the home. We are trying to look at how you train up health visitors so that they are able to first have a knowledge themselves about the importance of speech and language communication, but then also point out and identify when there may be a difficulty.<sup>75</sup>

Dr Woods-Gallagher added:

You could do predictive modelling with families at the booking in [of midwifery care], so not just asking questions around potential medical need in a pregnancy or current safeguarding. You could talk about potential speech, language and communication perceptions parents have around talking to babies, some key messages at that point in time, flagging any concerns. At that point, you do not have to wait for the baby to arrive to access your children’s centre to come and start talking about Hanen principles and treasure baskets and things you can get involved with as soon as baby is born.<sup>76</sup>

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70 Oxford University Press, [Why closing the word gap matters: Oxford language report](#)

71 Save the Children, [Early language development and children’s primary school attainment in English and Maths: new research findings](#)

72 [Q112](#)

73 [Q118](#)

74 [Q126](#)

75 [Q121](#)

76 [Q123](#)

59. **Developing communication and language ability in the early years is crucial for children’s outcomes. The home learning environment has a huge part to play in supporting children to develop those skills. Interventions to support the home learning environment should have a particular focus on communication and language.**

60. *The Government should build upon the evidence in Greater Manchester where every child is assessed eight times between 0–5 years old, including for speech and language development, with interventions following as necessary. This model should be followed across the country.*

### Evidence

61. We asked witnesses whether they could think of particular interventions that would best support parents to improve children’s chances in the home. They found it difficult to respond, because of a lack of evidence on interventions in the home learning environment. Sir Kevan Collins suggested which interventions seem to make the biggest difference:

The characteristics of the interventions that seem to be the ones that have the highest promise—we said this earlier and it sounds like I am repeating myself—are certainly ones that promote the language and communication between parents and their children. [ ... ] You have to create a culture where you demonstrate the value and importance of it, as a value to a family, and that picks up in certain communities. It is the interventions that build relationships between parents and early learning settings.<sup>77</sup>

62. Sir Kevan told us that there is a huge problem with activity and projects to support the home learning environment without the evidence to base it on:

The final thing I would say is that it is almost a crime when we have activity without a legacy of knowledge. There has been a large number of things funded, lots of things going on in England in early education, without any legacy of rigorous knowledge, which I think is almost criminal. We run randomised control trials and they are painful but at the end of it you do get this legacy of hard knowledge about what worked and, critically, what did not work because quite a lot of what we do, I don’t think works, although other people imagine it does.<sup>78</sup>

63. **We are concerned to hear of the lack of evidence about interventions that will support parents and families in creating a positive home learning environment. Interventions must be based on solid evidence and rigorous evaluation, to ensure that activity and funding is not being wasted on efforts that may not be effective.**

64. *We recommend that the Government commission research on interventions to support effective home learning environments. This work should be published and used as the evidence base from which to decide which projects to support.*

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77 [Q76](#)

78 [Q78](#)

### ***Interventions***

65. While there is not yet enough evidence of the efficacy of interventions across the board, we heard some examples of interventions supporting parents to create a positive home learning environment. The case studies below set out three such projects.

### EasyPeasy<sup>79</sup>

What is EasyPeasy?



- An edtech start-up aiming to improve children’s life chances, aiming to encourage more parents to play with their children and to use play as a way of nurturing children’s early development.
- A digital service that sends game ideas, tips, and advice to parents through short video clips over a 20-week period
- Aimed at parents of children aged 3–5 years (typically in nursery or reception classes); designed as “a digital outreach service that schools and early years settings can offer to their parents”

### How does it work?

- A nominated member of staff becomes a trained Pod Leader responsible for co-ordinating and encouraging parents using the service
- Practitioners share information and advice about home learning and play directly with parents via a dashboard
- Practitioners receive data on parents’ engagement and can then use it to more effectively target services, as well as for reporting and accountability
- The content has been designed to address the Early Learning Goals of the Early Years Foundation Stage to support learning and development at home

### Does it have an impact?

The written submission from EasyPeasy said that:

EasyPeasy has been tested robustly and found to have a significant positive impact. The EasyPeasy evidence base includes two published efficacy trials from the Sutton Trust, as well as an ongoing national trial funded by the Education Endowment Foundation.

*SHINE Trust projects<sup>80</sup>*

SHINE is an education charity “that gives children the opportunity to acquire the skills and confidence they need to turn their potential into school and beyond”.<sup>81</sup> In autumn 2018, SHINE launched its ‘Ready for School’ fund to help close the communication and language gap for 4–5 year olds from disadvantaged backgrounds across the North of England.



On 4 September, we visited Corrie Primary School, where the first ‘Ready for School’ programme was launched. The school has a high proportion of children from disadvantaged backgrounds, and many of those children struggle with communication, language and maths skills.

The project that was launched in Corrie Primary School was to develop core maths skills in the early years, through daily maths work in small groups, and whole-class sessions based around maths stories and songs. The project also helps parents to develop and practise maths at home, complementing the learning which takes place during school time. Each family is provided with a ‘playbag’ which includes props, stories and activities to be completed outside of school time.

*BBC Early Years Language and Literacy Initiative<sup>82</sup>*

During our early years roundtable in Manchester in September, we met a representative from BBC Early Years Language and Literacy Initiative. The objective of the initiative is a 50% reduction in the number of children starting primary school without the expected levels of communication and language. It aims for national impact, reaching all children in the UK, with a particular focus on disadvantaged families.

It is based on four key elements:

**1. Broadcasting, marketing and messaging**

- Awareness-raising and inspirational content across all BBC platforms (TV, radio, online)
- Focused on ‘selling’ the benefits of new habits rather than simply trying to educate
- Will draw in partners from all areas of society to help spread the messages

80 SHINE Trust, ‘[SHINE launches early years fund in the North](#)’; Education Committee visit, 4 September 2018

81 [SHINE Trust](#)

82 BBC Early Years Language and Literacy Initiative ([LIF0069](#)); Education Committee visit, 4 September 2018

**2. Digital proposition**

- Digital proposition / application for new parents; providing practical advice and tips to help parents lead their child's language development
- Will provide short-term incentives for parents to motivate users into action

**3. Frontline training**

- Convening a partnership to agree training principles & deliver consistent programmes, including content and delivery of key messages around language & communication
- Used to guide hard-to-reach families towards relevant campaign resources
- Delivered to frontline teams, e.g. health visitors, social workers, GPs, nursery workers

**4. Community activation**

- Activating communities to change the culture around parenting in some of the UKs most deprived communities and supporting communities to support each other
- Building on a wide range of existing initiatives across the UK, to amplify and extend the reach of what is already being achieved

66. As part of our inquiry into the impact of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, we have heard about how technology can be used to support the home learning environment. Vinous Ali from techUK told us that:

There are so many courses, tools, and games [ ... ] parents at home can utilise [ ... ] to engage with their children at home.<sup>83</sup>

Priya Lakhani, CEO of CENTURY Tech, added:

We can use [ ... ] technology where schools provide parents with their own support and it is personalised to them. They can see how to engage with their child, how to help their child and it gives them all of that relevant data insight. [ ... ]

I think we can use technology. Parents are on applications. They are buying on Amazon, they are shopping, they are buying accommodation with Airbnb; we can create something there.<sup>84</sup>

**Parental engagement**

67. Parental involvement in the home learning environment is crucial. Sir Kevan Collins told us that, despite the fact that it is unknown in rigorous evidence which *types* of involvement are particularly effective, “it is unarguable now after decades of evidence that parental engagement makes a difference”.

83 [Q154](#) (Fourth Industrial Revolution, HC 1007)

84 [Qq154–155](#) (Fourth Industrial Revolution, HC 1007)

68. There are very few well-evidenced, properly evaluated ways to support parental engagement. Steven McIntosh said:

I fully agree on the critical importance of the home learning environment but also that we do not yet have clear evidence on the specific interventions that work and critically how to scale them and get wider access, not just within local areas. We very much welcome the work the EEF and the Lottery Fund are doing investing in that kind of innovation to understand what works.<sup>85</sup>

69. Professor Ted Melhuish told us that “parenting is essentially a learned skill.” He explained:

You learn it from how your parents treat you, from how your neighbours treat their children and how your sister treats her child and so on.<sup>86</sup>

He went on to explain why this causes particular problems for disadvantaged groups:

One of the things that happens with disadvantaged groups is we have great clustering of disadvantaged groups in disadvantaged areas where they learn often dysfunctional behaviours from each other. If disadvantaged families were distributed more evenly around the country, you would get more models of good parenting available for disadvantaged groups and things will improve as a whole.<sup>87</sup>

70. Professor Melhuish made one suggestion about how parents could learn good parenting behaviours:

Another idea is to take “EastEnders”, put a young mother on “EastEnders” with a young baby, have her demonstrate good parenting behaviours on the screen. I think that would be a very powerful learning technique because people learn a lot of their skills from what they see their heroes doing.<sup>88</sup>

71. Steven McIntosh told us why the message itself had to be carefully constructed:

Also on the message: it is less around, “Your child’s future depends on this educational technique” than it is around the messages that we know disadvantaged families are much more likely to respond to, about family time, sharing, fun, positivity—it is much less around giving your child the skills they need to do well at school.

**72. *Parental engagement and involvement in the home learning environment is crucial to children’s development. We recommend that the Government commission research on interventions that will support parents in providing a strong home learning environment for their children.***

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85 [Q74](#)

86 [Q73](#)

87 [Q73](#)

88 [Q74](#)

## Coordination with other services

73. The impact of high quality early years education on children’s life chances is key, but it should not be considered in isolation. Sara Bonetti told us of the need for a comprehensive set of services:

Connecting to these early years is one big important piece, but it cannot be considered the only one in tackling disadvantage. Disadvantage comes in many forms. We need a comprehensive set of services. In the same way, early years providers, for how outstanding they are, cannot do everything on their own. They need co-ordination with other social services.<sup>89</sup>

Steven McIntosh outlined work that Save the Children is doing on coordination:

Save the Children is also doing work in a variety of local areas around children’s communities on what a blueprint for when agencies need to work effectively together—nursery schools, children’s centres, health workers, and others—looks like.<sup>90</sup>

## Children’s centres

74. Witnesses told us that children’s centres have a key role to play in coordination. Laura McFarlane, Director of the LEAP programme, National Children’s Bureau, explained that they “[enabled] education, health and social care to work more closely”.<sup>91</sup> Professor Melhuish said that “the children’s centre model is certainly demonstrably effective with the most disadvantaged groups when it is implemented properly”.<sup>92</sup> Dr Kitty Stewart said:

Sure Start was providing—and still is trying to provide in the areas where it is hanging on—that sort of joined-up thinking and being a hub for all the different types of interventions that are happening in an area, addressing some of the problems of outreach, because families are there from birth, from pre-birth even. They are able to do their outreach over several years.

75. Sir Kevan Collins explained why children’s centres could be so effective:

It is the interventions that build relationships between parents and early learning settings [that have the highest promise]. That is why I like children’s centres so much. Parents were welcome; they were involved. Stay and play is a great way to begin the relationship between parent and child. Targeting is a problem, of course, because that in a sense stigmatises rather than being a universal thing we all do. That is something that was raised earlier. It is anything that bridges the gap without really saying to the parent, “We are trying to point at you as somehow having a deficit or failure”. They are the interventions that seem to make the biggest difference.<sup>93</sup>

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89 [Q12](#)

90 [Q82](#)

91 [Q69](#)

92 [Q73](#)

93 [Q76](#)

76. The Department for Education’s ‘Evaluation of children’s centres in England’ report identified positive findings on the effects of children’s centres.<sup>94</sup> The Sutton Trust wrote that

These included a better home learning environment (this is linked to better child outcomes at school age) and a less chaotic home life; improved mothers’ mental health, and better relationships between parents and children. Children whose families had used children’s centres services when they were toddlers showed lower levels of behaviour problems when they were three years old compared to families who used fewer services. Although these changes were small, they were statistically significant and consistent across many outcomes. They demonstrate that centres helped to narrow some of the gaps linked to poverty and disadvantage.<sup>95</sup>

77. The Sutton Trust also raised concerns about the shift in focus in children’s centres away from the 0–5 age range:

Many children’s centres are being integrated into a wider package of ‘early help’ as part of local teams with a much wider age range (0–19), with more than 40% of authorities extending the age range to include school age children. Merging children’s centres into these preventative teams working with a much wider age group serves a very different function and requires very different skills with many centres no longer fitting under the label of a local ‘children’s centre’.<sup>96</sup>

The Trust recommended that “the central purpose of children’s centres to promote positive child and family development for the 0–5 age group should be stressed”.<sup>97</sup>

78. Action for Children told us in written evidence about reduced spending by councils over the past few years on a range of early intervention services including children’s centres. Their submission noted that local authorities have reduced spending on children’s centres from £1.4 billion in 2010/11 to £688 million in 2016/17.<sup>98</sup>

79. The Government had planned to hold and publish a consultation on the children’s centre programme. However, the Department for Education stated in summer 2018 that the consultation would not take place, choosing instead to focus on implementing its social mobility action plan. Stakeholders, including the Sutton Trust and Action for Children, told us in written submissions that they wanted to see the completion of the “long-promised review” of the children’s centres programmes.<sup>99</sup>

80. The Children’s Commissioner produced a discussion paper on family hubs, highlighting the potential for family hubs “to co-ordinate and prioritise support” for children in need.<sup>100</sup> Some stakeholders have recommended that the future of children’s centres lies in a reassignment of funding and redevelopment of services to a family hub model. They argue that family hubs provide a more integrated, preventative approach

94 Department for Education, [Evaluation of children’s centres in England](#)

95 Sutton Trust ([LIF0040](#))

96 Sutton Trust ([LIF0040](#))

97 Sutton Trust ([LIF0040](#))

98 Action for Children ([LIF0046](#))

99 Sutton Trust ([LIF0040](#)); Action for Children ([LIF0046](#))

100 Office of the Children’s Commissioner, [Family Hubs: A discussion paper](#), October 2016

to support vulnerable families. These hubs would provide a range of services in order to prioritise access to existing or developing government programmes for families (including addiction support, mental health services and domestic violence support) as well as offering children specialist health and education support, including communication skills and mentoring.<sup>101</sup>

81. In August 2015, Ofsted released a key findings document outlining the future of children's centre inspections:

The Department for Education (DfE) will be launching a consultation later in 2015 on the Sure Start children's centre programme which will include considerations about new accountability arrangements. The Secretary of State does not consider it appropriate to start a new inspection cycle under a framework which is likely to change. Therefore, inspection of children's centres has been suspended pending the outcome of the consultation.<sup>102</sup>

However, when the Department confirmed that the review would not take place, inspections of children's centres were not reinstated.<sup>103</sup>

**82. *We have heard a huge amount about the positive effects of children's centres on children's life chances. We recommend that the Department for Education should resurrect their review of children's centres and develop a wider, comprehensive strategy for provision of high quality and effective early years services. In order to create this wider strategy, the DfE should explore promoting family hubs as a wider model for provision of integrated services.***

**83. *We recommend that Ofsted inspections of children's centres should be reinstated.***

**84. *We are pleased that the Leader of the House of Commons is chairing a cross-government working group reviewing how to improve the support available to families in the period around childbirth to the age of 2. We urge the Leader and her working group to be ambitious and radical with their recommendations. We look forward to the findings of the review and urge the Prime Minister to listen carefully to, and act upon, the findings of the Leader's review.***

101 Office of the Children's Commissioner, [Family Hubs: A discussion paper](#), October 2016

102 Ofsted, [Children's centre inspection outcomes as at 31 August 2015: key findings](#)

103 [PQ 124199 \[on Children's Centres: Inspections\]](#), 25 January 2018

## Conclusions and recommendations

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### Quality early years education

1. *Barriers to progression for early years teachers must be removed in order to encourage the recruitment and retention of a skilled, high-quality early years workforce. We recommend that early years teachers should be able to access Qualified Teacher Status via a specialist route. (Paragraph 22)*
2. *We agree with witnesses that there is a lack of clarity on progression routes and quality of apprenticeships in childcare. The Government should commission quality research on training provision, induction and coaching for apprenticeships in childcare, as well as professional development for those already in the profession seeking to progress. The Government must act on that research to ensure clear and viable entry routes and development. (Paragraph 23)*
3. *We are disappointed that the DfE has chosen not to fulfil its commitment to conducting the early years workforce feasibility study. We urge the Government to recognise the difference that a highly skilled workforce makes to narrowing the quality gap between disadvantaged and more affluent areas. We further urge the Government to justify its failure to conduct the early years workforce feasibility study and to either reconsider its decision not to go ahead with the study or provide a suitable alternative. (Paragraph 25)*
4. *The Government does not appear to have an early years workforce strategy, encompassing recruitment, quality and retention. We call upon the Government to develop one at the earliest opportunity. (Paragraph 26)*
5. *Maintained nursery schools (like the one we visited in Manchester) are extremely successful at ensuring excellent outcomes for disadvantaged children. Their success is not limited to their catchment area but can have positive outcomes for provision across the local area. They must be supported to ensure that disadvantaged children are given the best possible start to life. Given their importance we are concerned that funding for maintained nursery schools is set to decrease substantially in 2020 unless the Government commits to additional funding. (Paragraph 34)*
6. *Maintained nursery schools cannot wait until the Spending Review. Funding decisions regarding staff and places for the next academic year are being made now, and the transitional funding already provided is running out. We recommend that the Government should set out plans for, and commit to, fully funding maintained nursery schools by the end of the financial year. (Paragraph 35)*
7. *Given the ability of maintained nurseries to spread expertise, we recommend that local authorities should encourage cooperation between maintained nursery schools and nurseries in the private and voluntary sector. We call upon local authorities to broker relationships between maintained nurseries and nurseries in the private and voluntary sector to enable them to “buy in” support, particularly for children with special educational needs and disabilities, or those who require extra support. (Paragraph 36)*

8. The Government's 30 hours funded childcare policy is entrenching inequality rather than closing the gap. (Paragraph 42)
9. *We recommend that the Government review its 30 hours childcare policy to address the perverse consequences for disadvantaged children. The Government should reduce the earnings cap for the 30 hours childcare and use the extra funding to provide early education for disadvantaged children.* (Paragraph 43)

### Supporting a strong home learning environment

10. *Support for parents before and after birth is a key starting point for ensuring good life chances for children. Home visits from health visitors is a crucial part of this support. We recommend that the Government should ensure that local authorities are collecting full and complete data on the number of home visitors and home visits conducted in their area, providing additional funding if necessary.* (Paragraph 51)
11. *We recommend that the Department for Education work with the Department of Health and Social Care to develop a health in maternity strategy covering the first 1,001 critical days from conception to the age of two.* (Paragraph 52)
12. *We also encourage the Government to make more comprehensive and needs- and evidence-led use of children's centres including utilising contact time with registrars and signposting parents to relevant support services.* (Paragraph 53)
13. Developing communication and language ability in the early years is crucial for children's outcomes. The home learning environment has a huge part to play in supporting children to develop those skills. Interventions to support the home learning environment should have a particular focus on communication and language. (Paragraph 59)
14. *The Government should build upon the evidence in Greater Manchester where every child is assessed eight times between 0–5 years old, including for speech and language development, with interventions following as necessary. This model should be followed across the country.* (Paragraph 60)
15. We are concerned to hear of the lack of evidence about interventions that will support parents and families in creating a positive home learning environment. Interventions must be based on solid evidence and rigorous evaluation, to ensure that activity and funding is not being wasted on efforts that may not be effective. (Paragraph 63)
16. *We recommend that the Government commission research on interventions to support effective home learning environments. This work should be published and used as the evidence base from which to decide which projects to support.* (Paragraph 64)
17. *Parental engagement and involvement in the home learning environment is crucial to children's development. We recommend that the Government commission research on interventions that will support parents in providing a strong home learning environment for their children.* (Paragraph 72)

18. *We have heard a huge amount about the positive effects of children's centres on children's life chances. We recommend that the Department for Education should resurrect their review of children's centres and develop a wider, comprehensive strategy for provision of high quality and effective early years services. In order to create this wider strategy, the DfE should explore promoting family hubs as a wider model for provision of integrated services. (Paragraph 82)*
19. *We recommend that Ofsted inspections of children's centres should be reinstated. (Paragraph 83)*
20. *We are pleased that the Leader of the House of Commons is chairing a cross-government working group reviewing how to improve the support available to families in the period around childbirth to the age of 2. We urge the Leader and her working group to be ambitious and radical with their recommendations. We look forward to the findings of the review and urge the Prime Minister to listen carefully to, and act upon, the findings of the Leader's review. (Paragraph 84)*

## Formal minutes

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**Tuesday 29 January 2019**

Members present:

Robert Halfon, in the Chair

Lucy Allan	Ian Mearns
Ben Bradley	Lucy Powell
Emma Hardy	Thelma Walker
Trudy Harrison	William Wragg

Draft Report (*Tackling disadvantage in the early years*) proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

*Ordered*, That the Chair's draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 84 read and agreed to.

*Resolved*, That the Report be the Ninth Report of the Committee to the House.

*Ordered*, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

*Ordered*, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available (Standing Order No. 134).

[Adjourned till 5 February 2019 at 9.30 am

## Witnesses

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The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

### Tuesday 12 June 2018

**Liz Bayram**, Chief Executive, Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years, **Sara Bonetti**, Associate Director of Early Years, Education Policy Institute, **Beatrice Merrick**, Chief Executive, Early Education, **Professor Dominic Wyse**, Professor of Early Childhood and Primary Education, UCL Institute of Education

[Q1–49](#)

**Sir Kevan Collins**, Chief Executive, Education Endowment Foundation, **Laura McFarlane**, Director of the LEAP Programme, National Children's Bureau, **Steven McIntosh**, Director of UK Poverty Policy, Advocacy and Campaigns, Save the Children, **Professor Edward Melhuish**, Professor of Human Development, University of Oxford

[Q50–83](#)

### Tuesday 10 July 2018

**Bob Reitemeier**, Chief Executive, I CAN, **Dr Kitty Stewart**, Associate Professor of Social Policy, London School of Economics and Political Science, and **Dr Shirley Woods-Gallagher**, Strategic Lead, Reform and Innovation, Manchester City Council

[Q84–129](#)

**Nadhim Zahawi MP**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families, and **Michelle Dyson**, Director of Early Years and Childcare, Department for Education

[Q130–217](#)

## Published written evidence

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The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

LIF numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

- 1 Action for Children ([LIF0046](#))
- 2 Army Families Federation ([LIF0027](#))
- 3 Association of Educational Psychologists ([LIF0049](#))
- 4 Auditory Verbal UK ([LIF0009](#))
- 5 BBC Early Years Language and Literacy Initiative ([LIF0069](#))
- 6 The Bell Foundation ([LIF0031](#))
- 7 Big Lottery Fund ([LIF0014](#))
- 8 Bright Blue ([LIF0054](#))
- 9 Burkard, Professor Tom ([LIF0010](#))
- 10 CACHE ([LIF0005](#))
- 11 Catholic Education Service ([LIF0013](#))
- 12 Centre for Longitudinal Studies, UCL Institute of Education ([LIF0025](#))
- 13 Chartered College of Teaching ([LIF0052](#))
- 14 Children First ([LIF0066](#))
- 15 CLOSER ([LIF0053](#))
- 16 The Communication Trust ([LIF0042](#))
- 17 Department for Education ([LIF0058](#))
- 18 Early Childhood Studies Degrees Network ([LIF0061](#))
- 19 Early Education ([LIF0006](#))
- 20 Early Intervention Foundation ([LIF0017](#))
- 21 EasyPeasy ([LIF0018](#))
- 22 Education Policy Institute ([LIF0050](#))
- 23 ESRC International Centre for Lifecourse Studies ([LIF0034](#))
- 24 Family Links ([LIF0015](#))
- 25 Field MP, Rt Hon Frank ([LIF0045](#))
- 26 Foundation Years Trust ([LIF0003](#))
- 27 GMCA ([LIF0056](#))
- 28 Helen Hamlyn Centre for Pedagogy, UCL Institute of Education ([LIF0064](#))
- 29 I CAN ([LIF0022](#))
- 30 Kambouri-Danos, Dr Maria ([LIF0002](#))
- 31 Lloyd, Professor Eva ([LIF0039](#))
- 32 Local Government Association ([LIF0008](#))
- 33 London Councils ([LIF0019](#))

- 34 Luton Borough Council ([LIF0011](#))
- 35 Mander-O'Beirne, Mrs Emer ([LIF0047](#))
- 36 Moore, Mrs Michelle ([LIF0063](#))
- 37 NASUWT ([LIF0012](#))
- 38 National Children's Bureau ([LIF0029](#))
- 39 National Literacy Trust ([LIF0041](#))
- 40 NDNA ([LIF0055](#))
- 41 Northern Housing Consortium ([LIF0037](#))
- 42 Nottingham Centre for Children, Young People and Families, Nottingham Trent University ([LIF0004](#))
- 43 Nuffield Foundation ([LIF0023](#))
- 44 Ofsted ([LIF0057](#))
- 45 Pre-school Learning Alliance ([LIF0026](#))
- 46 Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists ([LIF0035](#))
- 47 Save the Children ([LIF0032](#))
- 48 Save the Children ([LIF0067](#))
- 49 Strong Start for All Children ([LIF0028](#))
- 50 Summer Born Campaign ([LIF0051](#))
- 51 Sutton Trust ([LIF0040](#))
- 52 TACTYC ([LIF0030](#))
- 53 Thomas, Mr Robin ([LIF0016](#))
- 54 Triple P ([LIF0059](#))
- 55 University of Essex ([LIF0024](#))
- 56 University of Essex ([LIF0036](#))
- 57 WAVE Trust ([LIF0043](#))
- 58 West Sussex County Council ([LIF0060](#))
- 59 Westover Little Stars ([LIF0001](#))

## List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website. The reference number of the Government's response to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

### Session 2017–19

First Report	Fostering	HC 340 (Cm 9662)
Second Report	The future of the Social Mobility Commission	HC 866 (Cm 9619)
Third Report	The Government's Green Paper on mental health: failing a generation: First Joint Report of the Education and Health and Social Care Committees of Session 2017–19	HC 642 (Cm9627)
Fourth Report	Appointment of the Chair of the Social Mobility Commission	HC 1048
Fifth Report	Forgotten children: alternative provision and the scandal of ever increasing exclusions	HC 342 (Cm9709)
Sixth Report	The apprenticeships ladder of opportunity: quality not quantity	HC 344 (HC 1814)
Seventh Report	Value for money in higher education	HC 343 (CP 1)
Eighth Report	Nursing degree apprenticeships: in poor health?	HC 1017
First Special Report	Children and young people's mental health—the role of education: Government Response to the First Joint Report of the Education and Health Committees of Session 2016–17	HC 451
Second Special Report	Apprenticeships: Government Response to the Second Joint Report of Session 2016–17	HC 450
Third Special Report	Multi-academy trusts: Government Response to the Committee's Seventh Report of Session 2016–17	HC 452
Fourth Special Report	Exiting the EU: challenges and opportunities for higher education: Government Response to the Committee's Ninth Report of Session 2016–17	HC 502
Fifth Special Report	Primary assessment: Government Response to the Committee's Eleventh Report of Session 2016–17	HC 501
Sixth Special Report	Evidence check: Grammar schools: Government Response to the Committee's Fourth Report of Session 2016–17	HC 623
Seventh Special Report	The apprenticeships ladder of opportunity: quality not quantity: Government Response to the Committee's Sixth Report of Session 2017–19	HC 1814