

From the Leader of the Council

Our Ref: **Leader/2019-10/028**

Your Ref:

The Rt.Hon. Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State for Education
Department for Education
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Wednesday, 16 October 2019

Secure Future for Local Authority Maintained Nursery Schools

Dear Secretary of State,

We are writing to you as the Leader, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, and Deputy Cabinet Member for Schools, for the London Borough of Lambeth. We are appealing to you as Secretary of State for Education to provide the funding needed to ensure a secure future for our local authority maintained nursery schools.

Within Lambeth there are five council-maintained nursery schools, four out of five are rated outstanding by Ofsted and one good. They are all located in, or close to, areas of high deprivation, taking in many children who face multiple disadvantages in life.

However, despite the success of these fantastic nurseries their funding is becoming increasingly under-pressure and unsustainable. Currently, Lambeth Council is having to top-up the budget annually for these five excellent schools, which serve our most deprived communities, to enable them to stay open. In addition, they face great uncertainty around the loss of the Maintained Nursery Schools Supplementary Funding (MNSS) which, as things stand, runs out at the end of the current academic year in August 2020.

Their funding has been effectively frozen for the past eight years, while costs, particularly staff salaries, have gone up. The council has worked with the schools to make savings where possible, most recently forming the schools into a federation with a single head with the loss of two valued head teachers. Further savings are becoming increasingly difficult to identify, with the potential of closing some schools altogether becoming a real possibility. We are becoming seriously concerned about their future.

The schools take a larger proportion of children from vulnerable families than is normal in the private, voluntary and independent (PVI) sector. They also take many children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). The staff are more qualified than is normal in the

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PVI sector and include qualified teachers and SEND coordinators. This leads to higher costs than found in the PVI sector.

In our conversations with fellow councillors, the schools' head and governors and school staff, there is agreement that the Government needs to rethink and re-evaluate its approach to early years funding and recognise the huge contribution these schools make to giving children a good start in life, which helps to level the playing field for those facing multiple disadvantages.

Without this help, many more children would struggle when they start primary school, leading to long-term negativity about schooling, dropping out, joining gangs and getting into trouble. As we should all be focused on a public health approach to youth violence, we believe the importance of early years should be recognised.

We want to see funding to nurseries that is both long-term and sufficient without recourse to top-ups from councils whose services are stretched to the limit. We ask that as Secretary of State you please prioritise this issue and provide the level of long-term funding that these schools need to ensure our most deprived children have the best start in life that they can be given.

We would also like to offer an invitation to visit one of our excellent nurseries, we would be delighted to host you so that you have the opportunity to see first-hand the work that they do for some of the most vulnerable in our community.

Yours sincerely



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