

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

Campaign pack: Secure the Future of Maintained Nursery Schools

The current situation

The current government has recognised the crucial role of the maintained nursery schools as system leaders for the early years, and that the Early Years National Funding Formula introduced in 2017 does not adequately provide for their costs. It has committed supplementary funding of around £60m per year until 2019-20 because:

“Maintained nursery schools are of course schools and as such, bear costs over and above other providers because of their structure. We want to minimise disruption and reassure maintained nursery schools on their position”. (DfE Consultation on Early Years Fairer Funding August 2016)

Maintained nursery schools are struggling to remain viable. The supplementary funding provided by government with the aim of maintaining 2016-17 levels of funding has failed to achieve that, with 67% of nursery schools having a lower budget in 2018-19 than in 2016-17. The result of this is that in 2018-19, 39% are expecting to be in deficit, and by 2019-20, 64% expect to have a deficit. This is clearly not sustainable. **A long term funding solution needs to be put in place now that recognises the true costs they face.**

Over the summer of 2018, government has commissioned researchers Frontier Economics to study the costs faced by maintained nursery schools, and how they differ from other early years providers in the services they provide to children and to the rest of the early years sector. We understand the results of this research should be available in autumn 2018 to inform government proposals for a future funding proposal.

The action needed now

We have made huge progress, with a succession of Early Years Ministers stating their support for the outstanding work done by maintained nursery schools, and strong cross-party support for a solution. We welcome the government’s commitment to take action. However, time is running out for maintained nursery schools, many of which urgently need a funding solution to enable governors and local authorities to make crucial decisions about the appointment of headteachers and other staff, and even whether the school has a viable future. A failure to act now by ministers could have disastrous consequences, leading to many schools closing in the absence of a clear position on future funding.

The government requires all schools to have three year budgets in place, so Maintained Nursery Schools now need to be able to make reasonable assumptions about their budgets from 2020 onwards. While we acknowledge that detailed funding settlements must await the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review, **we call on government to make an in principle commitment by autumn 2018 to fund maintained nursery schools on the same basis as all other schools, namely school-based funding (including a lump sum and premises factors) in addition to funding per child in line with any additional costs identified by the Frontier Economics study.** This would be in line with the amount of supplementary funding currently provided, but would distribute it on a fair, equitable and predictable basis.

Key messages

The following are the key messages the campaign wants to put across:

1. **Maintained nursery schools need a guarantee now that they will have viable funding after 2020, otherwise many more will close over the next few years.** Ministers have acknowledged that they need funding at a higher rate than other parts of the early years sector and have provided interim funding of £60m a year until 2019-20. A long-term solution must include a commitment to fund maintained nursery schools on the same basis as all other schools, including a lump sum to cover the statutory requirements which private and voluntary sector nurseries are not required to meet.
2. **Maintained nursery schools are held to higher standards than private and voluntary sector nurseries** – they have to pay qualified teachers, have a headteacher, have admissions policies which prioritise the children in greatest need, and undergo more stringent Ofsted inspections. A funding formula which offers the same funding for different standards of provision is unfair, as well as unviable. The additional costs of maintained nursery schools are proportionate to their added value.
3. **Maintained nursery schools transform lives**, especially for some of our most disadvantaged children, because of the quality of education they offer. No other part of the early years sector has the same track record at helping disadvantaged children to catch up with their more advantaged peers. They contribute to government's social mobility objectives by doing so.
4. **The whole early years sector benefits from the expertise of maintained nursery schools** acting as catalysts to raise standards in their locality through supporting schools and early years settings to work together to improve their quality. As a national network, which includes 36 Early Years Teaching Schools, these hubs of expertise are a vital resource to draw on, especially as local authority early years services have been hugely cut back and are no longer able to provide the same level of training and support.
5. **They have a unique pool of expertise in supporting children with SEND** in the early years and helping those children access their entitlement to early years education, often taking children whom other settings do not have the resources or expertise to support.

What you can do

Galvanise your governors

Make sure your governors understand how your school's funding situation fits into the national picture, and how they can support the school's future by helping make the case to local and national politicians. You and they can co-ordinate activity, for example:

- Engaging with your MP(s) either via a petition asking him or her to take the issue up with the minister (this will be far more effective than a national petition) or meetings between groups of parents and their MP(s) either at the nursery school or MP's surgery or preferably both. In addition, letter writing sessions to MPs with parents telling their stories about why nursery schools matter should be encouraged.
- "Fun days": invite the parents, grandparents and carers of current, future and past nursery school children to come and celebrate how the nursery school supports local families and to show their support for the nursery school as a vital local institution.

Engage your parents

Many parents will be aware of the recent campaigns around school funding. Working with your governors, let families know what the funding challenges are for the nursery school and how they can help by writing to their local councillors and MP.

Lobby your MP and councillors

Invite your MP to visit your nursery school, to understand about your impact on local children and families, how you support other settings locally, and what financial challenges you face under the current formula. Ask your MP to sign the cross-party letter to the minister which the APPG is co-ordinating, to table questions or sponsor a Westminster Hall debate.

Keep your councillors informed about the national campaign for nursery school funding, and how they can help by lobbying their parties at national level to support the campaign. Local authorities can help provide evidence of the value of maintained nursery schools within their locality, and how they complement and support the work of local authority early years teams.

Local media and social media

Invite in your local press, and send them stories about the unique role of maintained nursery schools, their exceptional quality of education, and how the current system of funding is putting that quality at risk. Use social media to spread the word too. Local Facebook groups of parents, current and past, can be very powerful.

Evidence of transforming lives

Aim to produce 3-4 case studies (with the permission of children and families) of how your nursery school has transformed children's lives. Use these as part of your campaigning and (with permission) share them with the national campaign.

Key facts

1. Fewer than 400 maintained nursery schools now remain open in England, providing around 30,000 places for children. One in three has closed over the last 30 years due to a long-term failure to address funding issues at national level.
2. 64% are in the 30% most deprived areas of England, and they have a particular strength in supporting the most vulnerable children and families (see 5 below).
2. 62% of them are graded Outstanding by Ofsted, and 36% as Good – despite being inspected more rigorously than the rest of the early years sector - (under the Section 5 schools inspection) – and more frequently (every 3 years, rather than on a 4-year cycle).
3. They provide system leadership – 36 are designated as National Teaching Schools, and virtually all undertake related activities working with their local teaching school alliances, delivering SCITTs and being commissioned by their local authorities to deliver school to school (and setting) support, quality improvement and CPD.
4. Maintained nursery schools have all the obligations of schools – they must have a headteacher, qualified teachers and a SENCO, must fulfil the same requirements as primary and secondary schools for governance, admissions procedures, attendance monitoring, etc – but do not have the same funding entitlements. They are usually the provider of first choice for professionals referring vulnerable children, and are also the provider of last resort taking children who are turned away by private and voluntary providers. Their running costs are higher than PVI's, but they are better value for money: their quality leads to better outcomes for children, and they provide support and system leadership for the whole sector.
5. As an indication of the role of maintained nursery schools in supporting the most vulnerable children, the Pen Green Centre found that in 2016 maintained nursery schools across England were working with:
 - 6654 children with SEND
 - 796 children with Education and Health plans
 - 1593 children with CAF/Early Help Assessments
 - 883 Children in Need
 - 724 Children with Child Protection Plans
 - 417 Looked After Children

Key dates

4 July 2018	Launch of the campaign at the APPG meeting – strong attendance of MPs needed
July 2018	MPs asked to sign a joint letter to the minister
July & Sept 2018	Local activity eg fun days to launch the campaign at local level
Sept 2018	Next APPG meeting – date tbc