



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

Summary of meeting held on Wednesday 4 July 2018, 12.45-2.45pm

MPs in attendance:

<i>Lucy Powell (Chair)</i>	<i>Labour</i>	<i>Manchester Central</i>
<i>Jack Dromey (Secretary)</i>	<i>Labour</i>	<i>Erdington</i>
<i>Robert Halfon</i>	<i>Conservative</i>	<i>Harlow</i>
<i>Richard Benyon</i>	<i>Conservative</i>	<i>Newbury</i>
<i>Tracy Brabin (Shadow Minister)</i>	<i>Labour</i>	<i>Batley & Spen</i>
<i>Dan Carden</i>	<i>Labour</i>	<i>Liverpool, Walton</i>
<i>Julie Cooper</i>	<i>Labour</i>	<i>Burnley</i>
<i>Tan Dhesi</i>	<i>Labour</i>	<i>Slough</i>
<i>Vicky Ford</i>	<i>Conservative</i>	<i>Chelmsford</i>
<i>Kelvin Hopkins</i>	<i>Labour</i>	<i>Luton North</i>
<i>Nigel Huddleston</i>	<i>Conservative</i>	<i>Mid Worcestershire</i>
<i>Gillian Keegan</i>	<i>Conservative</i>	<i>Chichester</i>
<i>Pat McFadden</i>	<i>Labour</i>	<i>Wolverhampton South East</i>
<i>Alok Sharma</i>	<i>Conservative</i>	<i>Reading West</i>

Apologies:

<i>Gavin Shuker</i>	<i>Labour</i>	<i>Luton South</i>
<i>Johnny Mercer</i>	<i>Conservative</i>	<i>Plymouth, Moor View</i>

Introductions

Lucy Powell opened the meeting noting that the campaign had got off to an excellent start with coverage in the press, including on Radio 4's Today programme, which ran a piece on 3 July with strong voices from Conservative MPs Rob Halfon, Craig Tracey, Gillian Keegan and William Wragg, as well as headteachers Carole Jacques and Amanda King, culminating with an interview with Nadhim Zahawi, who had spoken warmly about the value of maintained nursery schools and urged local authorities not to make over-hasty decisions in advance of the spending review. Lucy had appeared on the Today programme on 4 July, explaining that a decision could not wait until the CSR and urging the minister to commit urgently to funding maintained nursery schools on the same basis as other schools.

Many more MPs had spoken out at the Estimates Day debate on 3 July about the urgency and importance of resolving funding for maintained nursery schools including Robert Halfon, Craig Tracey, Julie Cooper, Preet Kaur Gill, Lucy Powell, Pat McFadden, Matt Rodda and Jack Dromey,

It was also noted that Julie Cooper had just asked a question at Prime Minister's Questions prior to the APPG meeting.

Those present at the APPG congratulated Pen Green on winning TES School of the Year. Angela Malcolm, co-headteacher at Pen Green, said she was delighted on behalf

of the sector and hoped it would reflect a shift in thinking about the role and status of nursery schools.

The work of the Education Select Committee: Robert Halfon

Robert Halfon spoke about the importance of social justice, not just to help people get up the ladder, but to ensure they could reach the ladder. This was why it was important to give our youngest children the best opportunities, and also their parents. The Education committee had been shocked in this context that looked after children and their carers did not qualify for the 30 hours, and they were delighted to have made a difference on this issue.

The early years of life were crucial with the gap opening before children have reached the age of 5, and the gap is as large in outstanding schools as in those which require improvement. Good quality early childhood education can compensate for this to some extent, hence the importance of early intervention. The Committee have also been looking at the issue of exclusions, another issue helped by meeting children's needs early. Nursery and Reception years are vital times to identify children's needs and help families. This is about more than just finance, but even from that narrow perspective it pays off later to intervene early.

The Committee's Life Chances Inquiry has highlighted quality issues: that private and voluntary settings in disadvantaged areas are less good than in advantaged areas, but maintained provision in disadvantaged areas is at least as good or better than in advantaged areas. Maintained nursery schools are the jewel in the crown.

The 30 hours has helped some parents, but even government acknowledges that it benefits the better off more. It is also creating problems for providers, potentially impacting on parents' access to high quality early provision. Rob Halfon called for the National Audit Office to do an Inquiry into the 30 hours, saying that it was wrong that MPs could qualify for the 30 hours, but the child of a single parent not in employment only qualified for 15 hours, when instead it should prioritise the needs of those less able to work. He proposed that a partial solution to this might be to reduce the threshold of eligibility for the 30 hours to £60,000, which would raise approximately £150m, which could be used to fund maintained nursery schools and support more disadvantaged families to access the 30 hours. He also raised concerns about the impact of the 30 hours on places for disadvantaged 2-year-olds, noting the National Audit Office's concerns about this.

He noted that government were undertaking research into costs to inform a future consultation about nursery schools, and that it was important that they were funded properly.

Noting that NFER had been chosen to deliver the baseline, the Committee would scrutinise this policy and was following it with interest.

The Committee would be looking at the government's £500m investment in T-levels, noting the importance of getting the design right for students and for the sector.

Finally, he noted research showing that children who would later be eligible for free school meals were less likely than their peers to take up their early education entitlement, though it was these children who most needed to have access to what early education could offer.

Discussion

The Chair of Governors of Lanterns Nursery School in Hampshire reported that Nadhim Zahawi had visited. He had been particularly struck by conversations with parents of a child with acute medical needs which private and voluntary sector providers couldn't have accepted. When councillors were challenged on where else such children could go if the nursery school were not there, they had no answers.

Headteachers from Lewisham, Liverpool and Birmingham reported on the impact of losing full-time funding, and the additional work involved in trying to ensure disadvantaged children were not losing out now they were only eligible for the 15 hours. They and other heads, eg in Lancashire, had data comparing the progress of vulnerable children eligible for full-time places under previous arrangements, those only eligible for the 15 hours, and of children of working families now eligible for the 30 hours, and the concern was the growing gap between vulnerable children and their more advantaged peers. It was suggested that the cost of the bureaucracy of termly eligibility checking for the 30 hours must be significant; would it be cheaper to make it a universal entitlement? Rob Halfon urged headteachers to send data to him or to the Select Committee.

Tracy Brabin congratulated all involved in the debate the day before, noting that this was a truly cross-party issue. She expressed concern that so many disadvantaged 2-year-olds were not accessing the early education which could benefit them.

Nigel Huddleston stressed the importance of lobbying Treasury ministers, not just education ministers, and ensuring MPs were raising the importance of education as well as health.

Lucy confirmed that the APPG's next action would be to co-ordinate a letter to ministers from MPs.

Campaign launch

Beatrice Merrick reported on the survey results (see attached paper) which gave a clear message that a funding solution for maintained nursery schools was urgent and could not wait until after the spending review.

Rob Whiteman restated the NAHT's commitment to the campaign. He endorsed the importance of high quality early education as one of the tools to increase social justice and social cohesion. He also noted the need to address now the productivity challenge expected post-Brexit. Noting the clear cross-party agreement on the funding of maintained nursery schools, this could and should not wait until after the spending review. Delays would lead to more schools being lost. He endorsed the view that education ministers had been supportive, and that the campaign should focus on winning the support of the Treasury. He cited the key statistic that over 1 in 3 of children in maintained nursery schools are at risk, and noted the success rate of nursery schools. Nursery schools bore the same costs as other schools so they should be funded the same as other schools – including pupil premium. A funding formula needed to be found to distribute funding evenly and fairly.

NAHT were delighted to be co-badging the campaign pack, and would be sending it to all their members, along with sample letters. Rob stressed the importance of galvanising governors to support their headteacher, as well as engaging parents. Headteachers should not be wary of talking to parents if all headteachers do this

together. When parents speak, politicians listen. He advocated that the campaign should involve schools telling stories both of success and of sadness – the latter in relation to what they can no longer achieve as a result of cuts. This is more powerful than talking about the money.

Jack Dromey giving a rousing start to the campaign, endorsing the fantastic work nursery schools do to transform the lives of children and parents, and as system leaders. He stressed the long-term consequences if the campaign were allowed to fail now. Two years ago the campaign had succeeded in turning the situation around, having been staring disaster in the face if no supplementary funding had been forthcoming. The aims now were clear: winning agreement in the autumn that maintained nursery schools should be funded as schools, not letting the issue be kicked into the long grass of the spending review. The key was the all-party basis of the campaign. Parent power was vital to that. Messages needed to include what nursery schools were and why they mattered. Case studies of success and of the consequences of closure or loss of funding, including the long-term impact on the public purse. There needed to be a coalition of support at local level – local petitions would have more impact than a national one. Heads should meet their MPs face to face, inviting them to their schools ideally or attending surgeries if necessary. Encourage letter writing from parents about their personal stories. The APPG would be brokering a letter and want as many MPs as possible to sign it. The campaign would also use other parliamentary mechanisms – MPs could be asked to attend and support special debates in the House of Commons or in Westminster Hall. Councils and councillors also had a role to play. Jack advocating being imaginative in engage parents – through fun days, etc. Local media can help with the messaging. He cautioned that the campaign would be competing against pressures for more funding for health, defence, police, etc and that it was important education spending didn't get squeezed out.

Sally Leese, headteacher of Castle Vale Nursery School in Birmingham spoke of the benefits of having such a supportive MP. The 27 nursery schools in Birmingham were working together, but also as smaller groups and she encouraged heads to join up with others within their local authority and across borders. They had started in their own community with a fun day and petition and got reams of signatures, not just from parents but wider family. Their online petition two years ago got thousands of signatures, and they had presented the petition to the minister. They had also organised a local summit to get support of councillors. She advocated to remind people that this was all about the children, and use photographs of them (with appropriate permissions). It was worth building contacts with local media as this could have a surprisingly large impact. Social media can also be persuasive eg Twitter. This time around Sally reported that it was too soon to do another petition, so the Birmingham nursery schools are all asking their parents "How has our maintained nursery school helped your child and family?". They have generations of parents engaging through Facebook and Twitter. She suggested that all maintained nursery schools could ask this same question, allowing parents to write as much or as little as they want, and offered to collate the statements to take to the minister. It was suggested that one of these per day could also be tweeted. They will also be doing case studies. They were holding a summit to try to get support right across the city. She also reminded colleagues not to forget the importance of getting the support of primary schools and collecting their comments about what the nursery schools do.

Discussion

Tan Dhesi spoke of how it impacts MPs to be in a room with headteachers who are passionate about making a difference, and who can show MPs how they can help. Getting in early with a new MP is also worthwhile.

Vicky Ford emphasised the importance of making clear what maintained nursery schools are doing for the wider PVI sector, especially in specialist areas such as speech and language.

Gillian Keegan confirmed that MPs across all parties were listening, that they appreciate what nursery schools do for social mobility, and she would continue to press for a response to address the difficulty faced by nursery school's uncertain financial future.

Julie Cooper reported on her PMQ, having pointed out that nursery schools have the same costs as other schools but not the same funding, asked the Prime Minister for a commitment that no maintained nursery schools would close, but did not get that commitment. Julie noted the fantastic work maintained nursery schools do in areas of high poverty, and that they must be funded as schools.

Lucy reported that she would be taking Damian Hinds to Martenscroft Nursery School the following day.

The headteacher of one nursery school reported that he had spent the first half of the previous Friday working with his amazing staff team, and the second half with the local authority discussing a funding decision which will mean making half his staff redundant. A Lancashire headteacher spoke emotionally about having to make redundancies, including three staff with 93 years' service between them, a year before one of them was due to retire. Another head spoke of having done seven restructures over recent years, and having to make 30 redundancies. A straw poll of those in the room suggested that around 1 in 4 were currently making redundancies in their schools.

Another head pointed out that not only is EYPP a third of school pupil premium, but in the early years there is no pupil premium plus which has now gone up to £2300 for primaries and secondaries. There is no EYPP for disadvantaged 2-year-olds.

It was suggested that data from Ofsted parent view might be helpful in supporting the campaign showing the high level of parent satisfaction with maintained nursery schools.

It was noted that many local authorities don't know what to do with the maintained nursery schools. They may advise nursery schools federate with each other or with local primaries, but federations were not designed to save money and may not help financially.

Several heads commented that local authorities need to be aware that nursery schools were hugely involved in social care, teaching school activity, etc; that many local authority staff did not understand the service which maintained nursery schools were providing for children looked after, children with additional needs and those excluded by schools. Local authorities need to be aware nursery schools would leave a huge gap if they go. A local authority early years adviser spoke up to say that some local authorities did really support their nursery schools, but felt their hands were increasingly tied. She endorsed the importance of having advocates within local authorities and making sure they were clear what nursery schools are, and what they do.

A headteacher raised the issue that their funding from DfE had reduced, but they had not been able to get a clear answer as to why, and nor had the local authority.

One headteacher noted that they had been effective at raising other income, including an SLA with their local authority, but they had no certainty as to whether this would continue and what income it would bring.

Another noted that they had so many children with special needs for the coming year they were on the verge of being a special school. If not properly funded, this would impact on quality for all children. She compared her situation with a local special school which had 5 members of staff for 8 children.

The issue was raised about funding for project work such as the EEF which was very hard for maintained nursery schools to bid for. They needed a level playing field to be able to share their expertise.

Lucy thanked all for the attendance and support and the meeting closed at 2.45pm.