

The best start for young Londoners:

Supporting London's early years education offer following the Covid-19 pandemic

February 2021

Background

London Councils undertook a survey of London borough Heads of Early Years in September and October 2020 to investigate the key issues relating to early years and childcare across the capital.

26 boroughs completed the survey and focus groups were held in November and December 2020.



London Councils Research Findings

London Councils published a report outlining borough concerns about children being left behind because they have missed out on the government's early years education entitlements during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The pandemic has the potential to widen entrenched disadvantage.

With the sector facing instability, any future gaps in access to early years provision can be damaging to children's life chances, holding back their attainment at school and beyond.

Gaps in early years provision

The decision to calculate entitlement funding for the 2021 Spring term on the basis of the January 2021 census while the sector faces a significant drop in attendance will be hugely disruptive.

This, on top of long-standing financial challenges, has caused serious concerns among London boroughs about the future of the early years sector and access to vital high-quality early years education in coming years.

Gaps in access to early years provision leave young Londoners at risk of losing crucial support for their development.

Concerns about a widening Disadvantage Gap

If fewer children access early years education, primary schools will have to provide more support to address gaps in school readiness.

Where early gaps in school readiness develop, they can follow children through their school years.

The gap in attainment between some children from disadvantaged backgrounds and their peers is evident when they are as young as 5 years old.

Maintained Nursery Schools

Valued for their quality, the places they provide for disadvantaged children and those with SEND, and the support they provide to other settings, Maintained Nursery Schools (MNS) are an integral part of London's early years sector.

Closure of these settings would lead to a significant drop in the number of high-quality places available locally.

Without sufficient supplementary funding that is responsive to local demand, many MNS face an uncertain future.

Recommendations to National Government

- **Ensure there is sufficient interim funding to protect the sector from the impact of Covid-19** – putting in place a Minimum Funding Guarantee based on the January 2020 headcount for 2021-22 allocations.
- **Devolve unspent allowances for the disadvantaged 2 year old entitlement to local authorities** – to be used to deliver localised targeted face to face outreach work required to encourage greater take up.
- **Guarantee long term funding for Maintained Nursery Schools (MNS)** – set at a sustainable level that covers costs and is responsive to demand.
- **Allocate unspent funding from the tax-free childcare allowances to local authorities** – to undertake activities to encourage and enable take up of early years places and home learning.



Thank you for listening.

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