



Department
for Education

Government response to the Education Select Committee report on tackling disadvantage in the early years

April 2019



Government response to the Education Select Committee report on tackling disadvantage in the early years

Presented to Parliament
by the Secretary of State for Education
by Command of Her Majesty

April 2019



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ISBN 978-1-5286-1192-3

CCS0419951660

04/19

Printed on paper containing 75% recycled fibre content minimum

Printed in the UK by the APS Group on behalf of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office

Contents

Government response to the Education Select Committee report on tackling disadvantage in the early years	4
Introduction	5
Responses to individual recommendations	7
<i>Quality in the early years</i>	7
Recommendations 1-9	7
<i>Supporting a strong home learning environment</i>	12
Recommendations 10-15	12
Recommendations 16-18	17
Recommendations 19-20	18

Government response to the Education Select Committee report on tackling disadvantage in the early years

The Education Select Committee published the report of its inquiry on *tackling disadvantage in the early years*, *Ninth Report of Session 2017-19*, published on 7 February 2019. This document sets out the Government's response to the Committee's report.

Introduction

This Government's vision is for world-class education, training and care for everyone, whatever their background. This will help to build an economy that is more productive and fit for the future so that everyone has the chance to reach their potential and live a more fulfilled life.

The first few years of a child's life are fundamentally important in achieving this. The evidence is clear that the early years influence how well children do at school, their on-going health and wellbeing, and their achievements later in life. Early education has long lasting benefits for children, and helps to promote a child's physical, emotional, cognitive and social development.

This Government has prioritised investment in early education and plans to spend around £3.5 billion on our early years entitlements this year alone – more than any other government. This investment is already delivering results, for example:

- There is near universal take up (94%) of the universal 15 hours early education entitlement for all 3 and 4 year olds¹
- 72% of eligible 2 year olds now take up the 15 hour entitlement introduced in 2013 (up from 58% in 2015)²
- In 2018, 71.5% of children achieved a 'good level of development' in the early years foundation stage profile (up from 52% in 2013)³, and
- the gap between children in receipt of free school meals (FSM) and their peers has closed by 1.7 percentage points since 2013⁴.

Despite this progress, 28% of children finish their reception year still without the early communication, language and literacy skills they need to thrive. Disadvantaged children are disproportionately represented in this group. That is why, in July 2018, the Secretary of State set out his ambition to halve this figure by 2028. Achieving this ambition will mean supporting parents to help their child's early language development, by building a coalition across society; with government, businesses, the media, the voluntary and wider public sector, early years practitioners and our tech industry all playing their part.

This work builds on our wider early years social mobility programme, which is backed with over £100m of investment, and includes driving change in three key areas: the home, local services and early years settings, while building the evidence base for what works, across all three areas.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/education-provision-children-under-5-years-of-age-january-2018>

² ibid

³ https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/early-years-foundation-stage-profile-results-2017-to-2018?utm_campaign=789976_Foundation%20Years%20Newsletter%20October&utm_medium=email&utm_source=dotmailer&dm_i=3WYE,GXJS,4VYTUL,1TA9L,1

⁴ ibid

Like the Committee, the Government recognises the importance of high quality early education and a strong home learning environment (HLE). The evidence is clear. There is a broad consensus that high quality early years (pre-school) education provides significant and long-term effects on a child's development and gives them the best start in life. And evidence from the Study of Early Education and Development (SEED) shows that aside from maternal education, HLE is the single biggest influence on a child's vocabulary at age three when controlling for a wide range of background, family, educational and other factors.

The Government's overall approach to the early years follows the evidence and can be summarised as follows:

- enable all children to benefit from high quality early education and childcare, with additional support for disadvantaged children
- support children and families through effective and coherent local early years services, and
- focus all of our actions on achieving our ambition to ensure disadvantaged children enter school with the skills and language development they need to thrive, with a particular focus on improving children's home learning environment.

Responses to individual recommendations

Quality in the early years

Recommendations 1-9

- 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)**

Early Years Initial Teacher Training (EYITT) trains professionals to specialise in working with our youngest children from birth to five years. Since 2013, we have provided funding and bursaries to support those that wish to undertake EYITT, including financial support to employers to enable them to release employees to study. There is an existing assessment only route available for qualified teacher status (QTS) which allows teachers to demonstrate that they already meet all the QTS standards, without the need for any further training. Teachers need to present detailed evidence and their teaching must be assessed in a school by an accredited and approved provider.

We understand that some in the sector are calling for parity between early years teachers and school teachers with qualified teacher status (QTS). However, holding QTS would not automatically lead to parity of pay and conditions, as the PVI sector is not governed by school teachers' pay and conditions.

- 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)**

Progression Routes

As part of the early years workforce strategy, published in 2017, we worked collaboratively with the sector to develop a careers pathways map and supporting information to improve careers and progression advice. This was published last year and can be accessed via: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/early-years-qualifications-finder#early-years-career-progression-map>.

Apprenticeships

The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education has a statutory responsibility to regularly review apprenticeship standards to ensure they are high quality and meet the needs of employers.

We agree that apprenticeships are an important entry point and progression route for those wanting to pursue a rewarding career in early years. We also know they are popular with employers. From 1 April 2019, non-levy paying employers will only pay 5% towards the costs of training apprentices. We are working with the sector and the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education to expand availability and access to high quality apprenticeships.

There are existing level 2 and level 3 early years apprenticeship frameworks. Supported by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education, an employer-led trailblazer group has developed a new level 3 standard which will be available to the sector shortly. Another trailblazer group is also developing new standards at levels 5 and 6. We will continue to work with trailblazer groups to develop additional apprenticeship standards to ensure that there is a clear progression route from level 2 up to degree level apprenticeship in the early years sector.

Quality of training

Ofsted inspects further education and skills providers using the '*Common inspection framework: education, skills and early years*'. Ofsted is consulting on a new Education Inspection Framework and proposing that, to raise standards their quality of education judgement will look at how providers are deciding what to teach and why, how well they are doing it and whether it is leading to strong outcomes for young people. We welcome this focus on improving the quality of training offered by further education providers, including for early years.

- 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)**

We know that the quality of early years provision continues to improve. Ofsted reports that 95% of providers are now rated good and outstanding, up from 68% in 2010⁵. Ofsted's 2017-18 Annual Report highlighted that the gap in quality between the least and most deprived areas is narrowing. On 31 December 2018, the proportion of all types of early years providers on the Early Years Register (EYR) judged good or outstanding was highest for those in the least deprived areas (96%) and lowest in the most deprived areas (91%)⁶. For group-based provision, the gap has narrowed to 2 percentage points.

We acknowledge there are long standing challenges to recruiting and retaining graduates in the sector, which remain despite successive governments investing over £600m in related policy and programmes since 2006.

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/childcare-providers-and-inspections-as-at-31-december-2018>

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-annual-report-201718-education-childrens-services-and-skills>

Specialist early years graduates bring valuable skills and knowledge to the sector. However, we believe a focus on professional development across the wider early years workforce has an important role to play in improving and sustaining quality. To place a narrow emphasis on graduates as the main driver of workforce quality is potentially misleading and does not acknowledge the skills and contribution of the wider non-graduate workforce.

For this reason, as announced in Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential, our plan for improving social mobility through education, we are investing £20 million in professional development activity targeted at the existing early years workforce in disadvantaged areas. This money will fund over 100 professional development partnerships between early years settings in over 50 local authorities.

We are also working with the Education Endowment Foundation in a joint £5m investment to understand and inform best practice by evaluating and disseminating information on what works for practitioners to improve the learning and development of children from low income families, particularly in early language, literacy and mathematics.

We are funding expert organisations to pilot and test new and innovative approaches. This includes grants to: Action for Children and Oxford University to develop and pilot tablet-based mechanisms helping practitioners to assess children's needs and inform practice; Sheringham Nursery School and the Institute of Education for a new programme of training in speech and language development; and to Communicate SLT CIC, a Blackpool-based organisation piloting the Hanen Programme, a well-established and highly regarded early years intervention programme from Canada.

We anticipate this investment will help inform best practice and build the evidence base we need to continue strengthening the early years workforce. Alongside this, we remain committed to ensuring there are routes to graduate level qualifications in the early years sector.

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)

We published the Early Years Workforce Strategy in March 2017 because, like many sectors, early years has faced recruitment and retention challenges for some time. The strategy set out the government's plans to help employers attract, retain and develop early years staff. Working with sector stakeholders we have made good progress in delivering the workforce strategy commitments, such as agreeing criteria for a new and more robust level 2 qualification and developing a specification for a new level 3 early years SENCO (Special Educational Needs Coordinator) qualification.

In addition, the Professional Development Fund is a direct £20 million investment in training the early years workforce in disadvantaged areas, and will increase their skills to support young children's development in early language, literacy and numeracy. As already outlined, we are also working with employers in the sector and the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education to expand availability and access to high quality apprenticeships.

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)**

On 28 February, the government announced a further £24m of supplementary funding that will enable local authorities to fully-fund maintained nursery schools for the whole of the 2019/20 academic year. This enables local authorities to allocate places in maintained nursery schools for September 2019 with confidence.

The question of longer term funding for maintained nursery schools will be resolved during the next spending review, in the context of the wider early years issues that the spending review must consider. The announcement of further supplementary funding provides the sector with stability while the spending review process runs its course.

The Spending Review will be informed by new research on maintained nursery schools, which we also published on 28 February.

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)**

Many maintained nursery schools have specialised knowledge and skills in identifying and supporting children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Many of them already share their expertise with other providers.

We welcome this recommendation and agree that local authorities should be utilising the undoubted expertise that exists within that part of the sector, something we have already encouraged local authorities to do.

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)***

Early education and childcare has an important role to play in improving social mobility and this Government has invested significantly in early education and childcare entitlements. Since 2010 we have: expanded the universal entitlement for all three and four year olds from 12.5- to 15 hours; provided an additional 15 hours to three and four years olds of working parents; introduced the early years pupil premium for three and four years olds; and introduced a new entitlement of 15 hours of early education for disadvantaged 2 year olds.

Take-up of the 2 year old entitlement has risen to over 70% and over 700,000 disadvantaged children have benefitted since its introduction. The Government plans to spend £3.5bn on the entitlements this year alone - more than any other government.

The Government firmly believes that work is the best route out of poverty. The extended entitlement (30 hours) has a part to play in improving social mobility through supporting and incentivising work. Following use of 30 hours, over a quarter of mothers (26%) said they had increased their hours and more than one in ten (15%) stated they would not be working without the extended hours. This impact was higher for families on lower incomes – with 56% of mothers reporting that because of the extended hours they were working or working more hours. The proportion reporting an impact on mothers' work was higher for single mothers, for large families (three or more children under the age of 12), for mothers without a degree and for mothers whose child had additional needs⁷. This is significant - children growing up in workless families are almost twice as likely as children in working families to fail at all stages of their education.⁸

It is important to remember that the extended childcare entitlement helps a wide range of families. A lone parent only has to earn around £6,500 a year, and a couple just over £13,000, to be able to access 30 hours of free childcare. A parent is also eligible if they are self-employed or on a zero hour contract. In addition to impacts on work, beneficiaries of the policy also report a range of positive impacts, including on family finances and quality of family life.

We are supporting as many families as possible with access to high quality, affordable childcare. Parents using 30 hours can save up to £5,000 per year on their childcare costs. But the 30 hours policy is also just one element of the Government's early education and childcare offer and low income families also have access to significant support through Universal Credit, which can cover up to 85% of childcare costs. This represents an increase from Tax Credits, which covered around 75%.

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/30-hours-free-childcare-final-evaluation-of-the-national-rollout>

⁸ Department for Work and Pensions (2017) *Improving Lives: Helping Workless Families Analysis and Research Pack*. London: Department for Work and Pensions.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/improving-lives-helping-workless-families-evidence-base>

The Effective Pre-School, Primary and Secondary Education (EPPSE) study indicated that the duration of early education in years is a stronger driver of outcomes than intensity (hours per week), so starting children in early education and childcare younger is an important consideration, which we are supporting through the 2 year old entitlement. The Government's year one evaluation of 30 hours found that there was limited evidence of any adverse effects from the policy on other free entitlements, including the entitlement for disadvantaged 2 year olds. The take up of the 2-year-old entitlement is over 70% of all eligible children, and we remain committed to increasing this.

Supporting a strong home learning environment

Recommendations 10-15

- 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)**

Health visitor numbers

Health visitors are specialist community public health nurses who lead and deliver the Healthy Child Programme 0-5. Promoting healthy lifestyles and preventing illness, they work with families to give pre-school-age children the best possible start in life.

Since October 2015, Health visiting services have been commissioned by local authorities. Public Health England (PHE) has developed commissioning guidance to support local authorities. Local Authorities are mandated to provide 5 mandated universal reviews led by health visiting services. The mandate enables services to be delivered in the context of a national, standard format to ensure consistent delivery. The 5 reviews include; antenatal health visits, the new baby review, 6 to 8 week assessments, the one year assessment, and the 2 to 2½ year review.

The 5 mandated reviews are central to the 4-5-6 health visitor service delivery model, this includes 4 levels of service, 5 mandated health reviews and 6 high impact areas.

Health visitors in the main are employed by NHS providers, with more recently some being employed directly by local authorities

The numbers of health visitors in employment in the NHS and some non-NHS organisations are published by NHS Digital. <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/nhs-workforce-statistics/june-2018>

This collection does not give a complete picture for England and as the collection is by service provider (employer) it is not possible to allocate health visitor numbers to the local authorities who commission these services.

National collection of data from health visits

There are two separate data collection and national reporting systems for Universal Health Visitor Review data.

The current data collection is via PHE's interim process. This is a voluntary submission of aggregate data provided by local authorities, which covers universal health visitor service delivery metrics and outcomes.

The data from this interim collection is published on a quarterly and annual basis by PHE.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/child-and-maternal-health-statistics#health-visitor-service-delivery-metrics>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/breastfeeding-statistics>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/child-and-maternal-health-statistics#child-development-outcomes-at-2-to-2-and-a-half-years-metrics>

This interim method of data collection is due to be superseded by a record level collection from service providers, through the community services dataset, for which NHS Digital has published the information standards and established the technical infrastructure.

Some early experimental data on health visiting services and outcomes has been published from the Community Services Dataset by NHS Digital but this is not yet of sufficient coverage and data quality to become the primary source of information.

<https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/find-data-and-publications/supplementary-information/2019-supplementary-information-files/health-visiting-experimental-statistics-from-the-community-services-data-set-england>

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)

The Government recognises the importance of the first 1001 days as a key time for a child's development that underpin later life chances.

The Government already has a range of significant reforms and programmes underway which prioritise health in maternity and a child's early life. The NHS Long-Term Plan will make the NHS one of the best places in the world to give birth by offering mothers and babies better support. As part of the Maternity Transformation Programme, Public Health England is leading work to prevent poor outcomes through actions to improve women's health – before, during and after pregnancy to ensure that families get off to the best start possible. Priorities are to:

- Increase the number of women having a smokefree pregnancy
- Increase the number of babies breastfed at 6 months
- Reduce the burden of perinatal mental illness
- Embed public health and prevention across the maternity pathway
- Increase the number of women entering pregnancy a healthy weight
- Improve planning and preparation for pregnancy
- Improve the transition from midwifery to health visiting

This includes significant investment, for example, Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) has invested £365 million from 2015-2021 in perinatal mental health services to support mothers.

The Department for Education is also already contributing significantly; both with established programmes, such as the entitlement to 15 hours of early education for disadvantaged 2 year olds, and our new innovative work on the home learning environment (see response to recommendation 13).

Overall, these programmes are designed to support and complement the commissioning and delivery functions carried out by local areas, who are ultimately best placed to understand the needs of their local communities and put in place the support for children and families that is needed to support outcomes.

The Early Years Family Support Ministerial Group, which is composed of Ministers across government and Chaired by the Leader of the House of Commons, is currently reviewing how to improve the support available to families in the first two years of a child's life by identifying opportunities for co-ordination and improving cost-effectiveness. And the DHSC has set out its intention to publish a Prevention Green Paper, building on the vision to give children the best start in life set out in *Prevention is better than cure: our vision to help you live well for longer*. Government will therefore keep this approach under review.

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. 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)

Children's centres have an important role to play in achieving the Secretary of State for Education's social mobility ambition, but it is right for local authorities to decide how to use them as part of the wider system of local services.

The government's role is to engage with the sector, find out what works and support local areas to make the right decisions for their communities. That is why we are investing £8.5m in our local government programme, delivered in partnership with the Local Government Association and Early Intervention Foundation (EIF). This programme has three main components:

- The early years social mobility peer review programme – this builds on existing peer review models, and will be delivered in up to 30 local authorities. Local authorities such as Wigan, Bexley and Bristol have already received a review.
- The Early Outcomes Fund - this fund, worth £6.5m, will provide funding for partnerships of local authorities to improve how they deliver joined-up early years services locally, with a focus on early language outcomes. We plan to announce the successful bids shortly.

- The Early Years Transformation Academy – led by the EIF, the academy will work with a core group of local commissioners and service leaders at local level to support them to redesign their local maternity and early years systems. It will create resources and opportunities for sharing learning at local and national level.

We recognise the important role integrated early years services, such as those provided by children’s centres, can play in improving outcomes for disadvantaged children. In addition to the work outlined above, the Government will commission the EIF to identify tools and support for local areas to help them make informed decisions about different models to deliver early years integrated services, including children’s centres and family hubs. This will include:

- reviewing and understanding the research and practice evidence for different delivery model typologies of integrated early childhood services which respond to statutory requirements;
- developing and testing practical resources for local authorities and their local partners on applying new learning about current practice in delivering integrated early childhood services;
- delivering knowledge mobilisation activity targeted at leaders and commissioners of early childhood services.

We welcome the development of family hubs as a way to meet local need. We encourage local authorities to adopt the family hub approach, which aims to build stronger relationships and co-locate services, if they believe it would deliver improved outcomes for their areas. The new work led by the EIF will consider the role that family hubs can play as a model of service delivery so that local areas can make informed decisions.

Ultimately, it is not the role of central government to promote one specific way of delivering services to children and families. While some argue that government should be working to put in place a 0-19 model across the country, we know others advocate for a sharper focus on younger children, proposing that children’s centres focus on a 0-2 age range. Both these models could work and provide much needed support to families – there are other models that can work too. It is for local authorities to determine the model that they believe will work best for them, based on their area’s specific needs, the evidence base, history of local provision, local community circumstances and priorities.

14. 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)

We agree that the home learning environment is crucial to improving children’s life chances and that improving children’s’ language development must be a priority for government. This is why in July 2018, the Secretary of State for Education set an ambition to halve the proportion of children who finish their reception year without the communication, language and literacy skills they need to thrive.

To achieve this we need to take a society-wide approach, with businesses, the media, the voluntary and public sectors, and our tech industry all playing their part. In November 2018, the Department for Education hosted a Home Learning Environment summit, bringing together over 100 organisations from the public, private and voluntary sectors to discuss the best ways to work in partnership across the sectors to improve children's early language development.

At the summit we published a behaviour change model, developed with stakeholders from across the sector drawing on the latest research and evidence, and experience of what works on the ground. This sets out the simple, everyday activities that parents can do with their children in the early years to promote communication, language and literacy development – summarised as 'chat, play, read'. It also highlights the barriers that stop many parents from doing more of these sorts of activities with their children, and some of the ways we might overcome these. This model provides a clear framework to underpin all activity to support families to improve the home learning environment.

At the summit we heard lots of examples of effective work already being undertaken to support families to help their children learn. A number of businesses also made pledges at the summit to promote positive parent-child interactions in exciting and innovative ways. This includes Clarks, who are training 6,500 of their retail staff in children's speech, language and communication development and how to engage with families in stores across the country, and Addo Food who are supporting employees with children aged 0 to 5 to use their language lab facilities in Nottingham to encourage improved communication skills.

The summit was just the start. We are now developing a public facing campaign to improve the quality and quantity of parent-child interactions and make it easy for parents to adopt the positive behaviours we know will help their children to develop their communication, language and literacy skills. As we develop the campaign, we want to encourage more organisations to get involved and work together to ensure that all children have the early communication, language and literacy skills they need to succeed throughout their lives.

We are also investing in programmes to provide direct support to families, including a £6.5m investment in grants for voluntary and community sector organisations to work with families to support the home learning environment and children with SEND. This includes the Scouts who, in partnership with Action for Children, are creating and testing a national volunteer-led early years programme for children aged four and five, using face-to-face and digital interventions to improve the home learning environment, and the Institute of Wellbeing, who are adopting a tailored community and faith based outreach approach to improve the home learning environment for disadvantaged BME parents. We are also, in collaboration with the Education Endowment Foundation, committing over £4m to trial projects aimed at improving the home learning environment in the north of England (see our response to recommendations 16 to 18).

We have also appointed an expert panel to assess the quality of educational apps for children. Our intention is to provide free access to these apps to disadvantaged families to improve children's early communication language and literacy skills.

15. 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)

Greater Manchester is an excellent example of a metropolitan area which has taken the opportunity presented by the devolution of powers and budgets to innovate, transform and lead practice. The Government's role is to engage actively with the sector, including areas of leading practice such as Greater Manchester, to find out what works, grow the evidence base and to support councils and professionals in other local areas to make informed decisions about how to deliver early years services in their communities.

To support local areas we are working in partnership with Public Health England to help health and early years professionals work in a more integrated way to identify speech, language and communication needs as early as possible:

- 1) We have commissioned the Institute of Health Visiting to train up to 1,000 health visitors in 2019, who will then cascade this training within their local area to provide even greater reach. The training will equip health visitors to identify children at risk of speech language and communication need, engage with parents and support children's needs. Communities of Practice networks will offer follow up support after training to embed learning locally and across regions.
- 2) We will develop a new early language assessment tool, which will be made available to health visitors and professionals nationally. Newly trained health visitors in five areas of the country will trial the early language assessment tool to help them identify Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) as early as possible and determine appropriate level of support.
- 3) We will publish guidance for local areas on developing their own early language pathway – this will draw on the example of Greater Manchester and other practice leaders.

In addition, the DfE Early Outcomes Fund (see Q12), worth approx. £6.5m, was launched in November and will support local partnerships to a) increase leadership focus on the key issue of early language; b) enable them to undertake work to improve their services and how they are delivered; and c) resource evaluation and partnership working amongst local authorities that will spread innovations around the wider early years system. We expect to announce the successful bids shortly.

Recommendations 16-18

16. 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)

17. 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)

18. 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)

We are committed to improving the evidence base on the interventions that will support parents and families in creating a positive home learning environment. To deliver this, in collaboration with the Education Endowment Foundation, we are investing over £4 million to trial four home learning environment programmes in the north of England: Making it REAL (National Children’s Bureau), Positive Parenting Programme (Group Triple P), Parent Child Home Programme (Family Lives) and Tips by Text (Behavioural Insights Team).

The trials will use the ‘gold standard’ randomised control methodology, involve nearly 6000 families and will provide a range of practical tools to support children’s early language and literacy at home. The trials range from an intensive home visiting programme aimed at improving early literacy, to a texting initiative intended to nudge parents to do more activities that help develop literacy, numeracy and socio-emotional skills. Recruitment for the trials has commenced with reporting expected in 2021/22. The results from the trials will be published to disseminate learning across the sector and inform local commissioning decisions

Recommendations 19-20

19. We recommend that Ofsted inspections of children’s centres should be reinstated. (Paragraph 83)

When inspections of children’s centres were suspended, there was general agreement that they were not fit for purpose. However, Children’s Social Care services and all registered early years provision, including that delivered in children’s centres, remains subject to robust and regular Ofsted inspection. In circumstances where there are specific safeguarding concerns, Her Majesty’s Chief Inspectorate (HMCI) still has the power to inspect any children’s centre, and the Secretary of State has the power to direct HMCI to inspect any centre. Local authorities are responsible for managing children’s centres and ensuring the services they provide through children’s centres meet appropriate quality standards.

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)

We welcome the focus on early years support to families, led by the Leader of the House. The group's role is to seek to identify gaps in the available provision from around childbirth to age 2 and make recommendations to Secretaries of State on how coordination across departments can be improved. This is an exciting and important opportunity to refine and improve the existing system. The work of the group is progressing and the outcomes will be made known in due course.

Conclusion

We would like to thank the Education Select Committee for its careful consideration of these issues, and for its report and recommendations.

2 <http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/w/wolf%20review%20of%20vocational%20education%20%20%20government%20response.pdf> Back

3 www.ypla.gov.uk/aboutus/ourwork/16-19-statutory-guidance/ Back

4 Individual pupil information is defined as "information relating to and identifying individual pupils or former pupils at maintained schools, non-maintained schools, and independent schools". Back

CCS0419951660

978-1-5286-1192-3