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**Rt Hon Nicky Morgan MP**  
Secretary of State

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Rt Hon George Howarth MP  
House of Commons  
London  
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*Dear George*

21 March 2016

Thank you for your email of 26 February, enclosing correspondence from a number of your constituents, about the importance of early years education.

I can assure your constituents that I recognise the importance of ensuring that all children have access to high-quality early education. The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) sets the standards for the provision of learning, development and care for children from birth to age five that all registered early years providers must follow. The EYFS helps early years providers to prepare young children for school and improve their life chances by requiring them to deliver high quality provision.

One of the seven areas of learning and development in the EYFS that shape educational programmes is 'communication and language.' The EYFS makes clear that children should be given opportunities to experience rich language environment; to develop their confidence and skills in expressing themselves; and to speak and listen in a range of situations. It also requires practitioners to ensure children have sufficient opportunities to learn and develop a good standard in English language so they are ready to begin Year 1.

The recently introduced Common Inspection Framework (CIF) enables Ofsted and inspectors of independent schools to make judgements using consistent criteria across all ages of education. It gives greater clarity and comparability on education settings to parents and providers.

To improve the quality of the workforce, we have introduced Early Years Teachers who must meet the same entry qualification requirements as teachers of older children. We will continue to work collaboratively with the sector in further developing our workforce strategy. This will include a review of progression routes to identify what else can be done to help good quality staff to fulfil their potential and forge a successful career within early years education.

We want all children, regardless of their starting point, to have access to high quality early education and childcare, as we know this makes a difference to outcomes. To help close the gap between disadvantaged children and their better off peers we introduced the Early Learning Programme for two-year-olds in September 2013 and already around 160,000 of our most disadvantaged two-year-olds are benefiting. We have also introduced the Early Years Pupil Premium, worth £50million a year. This provides nurseries and schools delivering the early education entitlement with an extra 53p an hour for disadvantaged three- and four-year-olds.

We are currently running pilots in seven local authorities to test different ways that early years practitioners can work with health professionals to identify parents of two-year-olds who are not in formal childcare. We want to make sure these children can benefit from an Integrated Review, which draws on the expertise of health and education practitioners to provide a fuller picture of a child's development at age two. It reassures parents that their child's development is on track and provides targeted support where development is less than expected. The National Children's Bureau will evaluate the pilots and produce a report to Department for Education in spring.

Thank you for writing on this important matter.

*Morgan*  
*Nicky*

RT HON NICKY MORGAN MP