September 2014

Dear Graham,

I am writing as promised to follow up on the discussion we had about Teaching School Alliances in the Westminster Hall Debate of 9 September.

Since 2011, 600 Teaching Schools representing 488 Teaching School Alliances have been designated. There are currently 19 Teaching Schools that are maintained nursery schools and a further 109 nursery schools that are members of a Teaching School Alliance. We are now focusing the growth in the number of Teaching Schools in areas with the least representation. This includes early years.

Teaching Schools are part of the government’s drive to give schools more freedom and to enable schools (including nursery schools) to take increasing responsibility for managing the education system. The vision for Teaching Schools is to establish a network of outstanding Teaching School Alliances that will drive significant improvement in the quality of professional practice and its impact on pupils and children in the early years. Based on the model of teaching hospitals, Teaching Schools act as hubs of outstanding practice, built on the core principle of peer-to-peer improvement. The combination of outstanding initial training, teacher development and strong leadership is based on a sound understanding and evidence base of what works best. Designated Teaching Schools work with a range of partners – including other schools, universities, private and voluntary sector early years providers and post-16 providers – to form Teaching School Alliances. These broad networks foster collaboration and encourage the spreading of good practice, innovation and knowledge across their membership.

Teaching Schools and their Alliance partners deliver against six key roles:
• lead the development of a school-led initial teacher training (ITT) system, through School Direct and in some cases by seeking full accreditation as an ITT provider
• lead peer-to-peer professional and leadership development
• identify and develop leadership potential
• provide support for other schools
• designate and broker Specialist Leaders of Education (SLEs). So far Teaching Schools have designated 127 SLEs in early years.
• engage in research and development.

By the end of 2014/15, we will have committed almost £100 million to developing the network of Teaching Schools.

Teaching Schools receive a grant each year to support their work. This is on a sliding scale as they aim to become more sustainable over time (Year 1 - £60,000, Year 2 - £50,000, Year 3 and 4 - £40,000). In his speech to Policy Exchange on 'The Importance of Teaching' on 5 September 2013, the previous Secretary of State said: "The first group of Teaching Schools have now been operating for 3 years and I can now confirm that their funding will continue beyond the planned 4 years into a fifth year."

Teaching Schools develop their own business models, including charging policies, to support delivery against the six roles listed above. The core funding is used to build capacity within their Alliance structure. Activities undertaken by Teaching Schools include: needs analysis; Continuous Professional Development (CPD) sessions for practitioners, practice-sharing networks, and coaching and mentoring including the deployment of SLEs beyond the maintained schools sector. For example, Bristol Local Authority commissions their maintained nursery teaching schools to provide improvement support to the whole sector through their offer.

In addition to developing broader early years support in the Teaching Schools infrastructure, 20 Teaching School Alliances have been granted funded at £10,000 each to develop and test models for developing local hubs of early years practice, the intention being to initiate and support the sharing of best practice, joint practice development and joint CPD opportunities that bring together a range of early years practitioners and settings. The activity is being co-ordinated nationally by Everton Nursery School and Family Centre. The research is ongoing and outcomes will be reported in April 2015.

Building on this, the government is offering new funding of up to £5 million to support sector-led improvement in early years to drive up quality. The purpose of the funding is to enable all types of early years providers to link up with
existing local improvement infrastructures or to develop new ones through Teaching Schools and their Alliances to share their expertise and access support. Teaching Schools provide a local infrastructure to facilitate improvement support that has the capacity to be self-sustaining. To make it work for early years, however, it is essential that early years providers share their expertise and shape the local improvement-support offer available through Alliances. This funding will be awarded through Teaching Schools in January 2015.

Thank you for raising this important matter. I hope my reply is helpful.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]

Sam Gyimah MP