

Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE
Secretary of State
Rt Hon Vicky Ford
Children and Families Minister
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
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Dear Mr Williamson and Ms Ford,

May we start by wishing you a happy new year, but while the year might be new, significant challenges still remain relating to early years and the Coronavirus crisis. Clearly much of the local, regional and national debate has been around schools reopening, and we welcome the much needed changes announced last week in relation to Hackney, but we shouldn't ignore the impact on early years and other vital services.

We are writing to you for urgent action on behalf of early years providers in Hackney and across the sector. We understand that providers in Tier 4 London Boroughs such as Hackney are expected to remain open, even though it has now been rightly recognised that Hackney is an area where primary schools should close, except to children of critical workers and vulnerable children. This position is creating some of the same concern and uncertainty amongst providers, staff, parents and carers and the wider community that we also share.

We have advised Hackney early years providers to take time to focus their attention on risk assessments which take account of the increased prevalence, new variants and infection rates of the virus. We do not expect providers to open until they are assured that conditions are safe. We ask the Government to recognise that many of our providers, and those right across the private, voluntary and independent sector, will need to restrict their operations in the coming weeks and months and that this will in turn impact on their attendance records. For those that do remain open, the impact of Tier 4 on demand for childcare makes the Government's advice to local authorities to "return to the normal funding approach (that is, 'funding following the child') for all



providers from 1 January 2021” deeply concerning.¹ Without looking again at this approach, the impact on the sector and its sustainability; we could see lasting damage to vital services delivered in a very mixed sector which could have implications for local employment, access to work for families, equalities in the labour market, early childhood development and undo a decade or more of expanding high quality provision. From the start of the crisis we have stood up for the sector locally recognising its contribution to children and families, but also ensuring that both national and local business support was in place, especially in our discretionary schemes.

As set out by the Early Years Alliance,² the early years sector requires financial support for staff absences; cleaning costs; provision of home testing kits; and prioritisation, along with their school staff colleagues, for Covid-19 vaccinations, to help maintain confidence and protect the health and wellbeing of the workforce and their families.

We know that Early Years workers, from individual childminders through to nursery staff, have worked incredibly hard throughout 2020 to offer families support and to sustain their businesses. As we seek to manage the new strains of coronavirus and the challenges this brings to us all in 2021, Early Years staff need to know that their businesses are secure and that their safety and wellbeing is protected alongside that of the children they care for.

We look forward to your response at the earliest opportunity.

Yours sincerely,



Philip Glanville
Mayor of Hackney



Cllr Caroline Woodley
Cabinet Member for Families, Early Years
and Play

CC

Kate Green MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Education

Tulip Siddiq MP, Shadow Minister for Children and Early Years

Diane Abbott MP, Member of Parliament for Hackney North and Stoke Newington

Meg Hillier MP, Member of Parliament for Hackney South and Shoreditch

Cllr Sophie Conway, Chair of LBH Children and Young People Scrutiny Commission

Cllr Margaret Gordon, Vice Chair of LBH Children and Young People Scrutiny Commission

Early Years Alliance

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<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/use-of-free-early-education-entitlements-funding-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/use-of-free-early-education-entitlements-funding-during-coronavirus-covid-19>

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<https://www.eyalliance.org.uk/news/2021/01/alliance-writes-gavin-williamson-over-appalling-exclusion-early-years-schools-reopening>