

Deputy R Ward
Chairman
Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel

20th September 2019

Dear Deputy Ward

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a written response to the Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny review with regard to the Government Plan and in particular to R91/2019.

R.91/2019

“Improving education outcomes: Early Years p.26 of R.91 and p. 36 of GP”

Schools and Education – Early Years

The first few years of a child's life are fundamentally important to their future life chances. There is a wealth of evidence to show that they shape children's future development influencing how well children do at school, their health and wellbeing.

Children develop rapidly in their early years. The experiences they have between birth and age five, but in particular in the first two years, has a significant impact on their cognitive and social-emotional development, affecting their future life chances.

High quality early learning that delivers a broad and comprehensive range of knowledge and skills can ensure positive progression through school and beyond to later life. This is of vital importance to children who are vulnerable and/or disadvantaged (in the broadest terms) who may have had limited opportunities within the first 1001 critical days.

There is a plethora of research evidence that highlights the importance of improving outcomes for children as early as possible through early intervention and high quality early years provision for vulnerable 2 year olds is a critical element of this.

The report 'The Foundation Years' by the Rt Hon Frank Field, highlights the interventions and action needed to prevent poor children from becoming poor adults. There is a growing consensus that this needs to start in the early years and Brighter Futures fully endorses this view.

Children's earliest experiences define their outcomes in childhood and beyond into adult life and those who fall behind before school often struggle to catch up. In order to address this disparity, a newly developed Nursery Education Fund (NEF) must give urgent and due consideration to ensuring there is sufficient funding for high quality nursery provision for vulnerable and disadvantaged two year olds.

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It is clear that all young children, whatever their background, vulnerability or circumstances deserve the best possible start in life and they must be given the opportunity to fulfil their potential. A failure to provide sufficient access to high quality early years education, especially for vulnerable 2 year olds, fails to put children first - a key Government priority.

The current lack of funding of nursery places for vulnerable 2 year olds should be addressed as a matter of urgency. The current review of the NEF provides the ideal opportunity to do so. The allocation of sufficient high quality provision for vulnerable two year olds will go a long way to remediate early vulnerability. In addition, such provision will begin to address the cycle of disadvantage at the earliest opportunity to prevent children falling further behind in their cognitive, social and emotional development and readiness for school. A lack of investment not only fails to put vulnerable children first but the evidence demonstrates that a lack of early investment is very expensive to remediate later through intensive support and interventions later.

The Government's first and most important strategic priority has been clearly identified as 'Putting children first'; by failing to ensure that vulnerable and disadvantaged (broadest terms) children at a stage in their life where it has the greatest potential to be transformative, Jersey will be failing to 'Put children first'.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ruth Brunton', written in a cursive style.

Ruth Brunton
CEO