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The Rt Hon Gillian Keegan MP
Secretary of State for Education

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The Rt Hon Sir George Howarth MP
By email: george.howarth.mp@parliament.uk

30 November 2022

Dear George,

Thank you so much for your email of 2 November, enclosing correspondence from your constituent, _____, about childcare cost and availability.

Thank you also for congratulating me on my appointment as Secretary of State. It is a privilege to be appointed as Secretary of State for Education. As a previous minister at the department, I know how important education is to levelling up opportunities. I will work to help people build the life they want, from childcare support and helping children in care, to improving school standards and giving both young people and adults the skills they need to get great jobs.

Education transforms lives and it is our dedicated teachers, early years professionals and support staff with their knowledge, professionalism and commitment that will help us achieve that aim.

I truly believe that talent is spread equally around the country, and I will work tirelessly to ensure that opportunity is too.

Along with my excellent team of experienced ministers, I look forward to engaging with our nurseries, schools, colleges, universities, and all of the wonderful staff working across our sectors.

I appreciate the concerns outlined by Ms Reardon. We are committed to improving the cost, choice, and availability of childcare. We continue to look at ways to make childcare more affordable and to encourage families to use government-funded support they are entitled to.

We know the sector is facing economic challenges, similar to the challenges being faced across the economy. We have already announced additional funding of £160 million in 2022–23, £180 million in 2023–24 and £170 million in 2024–25, compared to the 2021–22 financial year, for local authorities to increase hourly rates paid to childcare providers.

For 2022–23, we have increased the hourly funding rates for all local authorities by 21p an hour for the 2-year-old entitlement and, for the vast majority of areas by 17p an hour for the 3 and 4-year-old entitlement. To maximise funding reaching the front line, we require councils to pass on to providers at least 95% of their government funding for 3 and 4-year-olds.

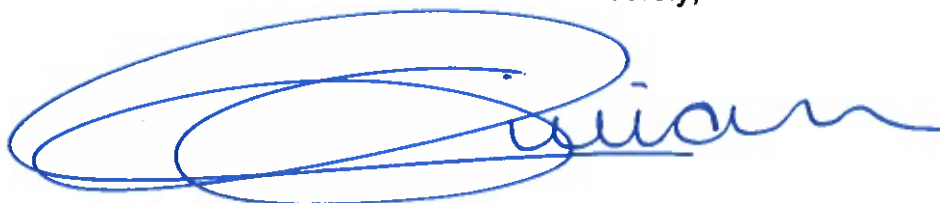
Since 2017, Early Years Funding Formulae have been at the heart of allocating our record investment in early years entitlement funding fairly and transparently across the country. Over the summer, we have consulted on proposals to update next year's 2-year-old and 3- and 4-year-old formulae with the most recent data available – and to continue doing that, each year, going forward. This will ensure the funding system remains fair, effective and responsive to changing levels of need across different areas. We will set out our response in due course.

We also recognise the impact that cost of living pressures have on families. Improving the cost, choice and availability of childcare for working parents is important for this government, and we are currently exploring a wide range of options to do this. In July, we announced measures to increase take-up of childcare support and reduce the costs and bureaucracy facing providers. The full announcement is available at: tinyurl.com/mrxtePza.

Staff-to-child ratios are an important issue, both to parents and the early years sector. On 4 July, the government launched a consultation to reform the statutory minimum staff-to-child ratios in early years settings in England and to make explicit the requirement of supervision of children whilst eating. This consultation has now closed, and the government will respond in due course. Our priority continues to be to provide safe, high-quality early years provision for our youngest children.

Thank you for taking the time to write to me on this important matter.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Gillian', with several large, overlapping loops and flourishes extending to the left and above the name.

**The Rt Hon Gillian Keegan MP
Secretary of State for Education**