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Ms Beatrice Merrick
Chief Executive
Early Education
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Nick Hudson
Director, Early Education

Our ref: 291127

Dear Ms Merrick

Further to Andrew Hebden's letter of 1 April 2014, I am now able to respond in full to your letter of 28 March 2014.

Thank you for your overall support for Sir Michael's recent letter to early years inspectors and for Ofsted's proposals for a separate EYFS judgement in school inspections. We know that high quality education in the early years is key to providing children with the opportunity to fulfil their potential.

In your letter you raise a concern about using the term 'teaching' in the early years. Since you wrote, *Ofsted's Early Years Annual Report 2012/13* was published on 3 April 2014. In it a further explanation of teaching in the early years was given: 'Teaching for small children is not blackboards and desks, it is counting bricks when building a tower, learning nursery rhymes and familiar songs, or gently coaching a child to put their own arms into their own coat'. Sir Michael also used his speech to launch the report to state that there is a false dichotomy between play and learning. He is keen to focus attention on what we mean by teaching in the early years. This is important so that children from the poorest backgrounds are not disadvantaged by a lack of guidance or purposeful play. Our inspection evidence shows that children are not always given appropriate instruction and guidance, so we want to improve this as a matter of urgency.

You raise a point about training and its link to the quality of our inspectors, particularly those who are employed by our inspection service providers. We are constantly seeking to improve the quality of inspection and acknowledge that there is still work to be done in this area.

Sir Michael has recently appointed HMI trainers who specialise in early education to work with inspection providers to improve this aspect of our work. We will continue to look at ways to improve the quality of our inspections. In particular, to provide further training to ensure that inspectors focus on how well the provision improves the progress of different groups of children.

All our inspection documents, including those for our inspectors are underpinned by the EYFS and the regulations made under the Childcare Act 2006. There must be no confusion from early years practitioners about these requirements. If a provider fails to meet any part of the EYFS requirements, this will impact negatively on their inspection judgement and continued registration ultimately resulting in cancellation if sustained improvement is not forthcoming.

It is also important to put the letter to inspectors alongside other documents recently published, including the guidance in our evaluation schedule and guidance from which you quote. Inspectors are required to use these documents published on our website when carrying out an inspection. You also mention *Development Matters* and the *Early Years Outcomes* documents published by the Department for Education. Ofsted does not have the power to recommend which resources should be used by practitioners to help them to improve children's progress. However, as shown in our recent survey report *Are you ready? Good practice in school readiness*, Ofsted does not suggest that school readiness should be viewed in a narrow form. Indeed our report makes it clear that all the aspects of children's development are important in preparing children to start school.

In terms of engagement with key players in the sector, regional directors meet regularly with sector colleagues at bespoke meetings and at speaking engagements. In addition, as National Director for Early Education, I convene a National Consultative Forum quarterly. Currently I am reviewing the attendees with an intention to create a more strategic forum to look at some of the issues you raise in your letter.

I would like to thank you again for writing to Ofsted and will look forward to working with you in the future.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Nick Hudson".

Nick Hudson
Director, Early Education