**Open letter to Andrew Warren, Chair of the Teaching Schools Council**

7 November 2016

Dear Andrew Warren

Dame Reena Keeble's report for the TSC on “Effective Primary Teaching Practice” has caused a [furore](https://www.tes.com/news/school-news/breaking-news/primary-experts-say-reception-year-needs-overhaul-improve-pupils) for venturing opinions about how the reception year should be taught, despite having very limited early years expertise within its primary-focused advisory group. Unfortunately this has led to recommendations which appear to show a lack of understanding of the distinctive and evidence-based pedagogy that underpins the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS).

We might agree with the report that “reception is the most important year”, and that “done well and properly invested in, it will provide pupils with a strong foundation for the rest of their time in school.”  However, abundant evidence shows that effective early years pedagogy is that which develops confident and able learners, and that pushing children into formal learning too early damages their achievement later on. Although the report does emphasise that it is not recommending formal drilling, and does reference Ofsted's extremely helpful definition of teaching in the early years, the tone of the report, in referring to "aimless" activity and centring its attention on expectations for phonics and number, reflects a very limited view of early years pedagogy. While the report suggests that planning in Reception should start “with the learning outcome in mind”, it would do well instead to adhere to its own earlier guidance on learning that emphasises focusing on children’s current understandings and how meaningful activities are to them: “We learn new things in relation to things we already know and new understanding is built on prior knowledge and understanding. Finally, we remember things better when we give things meaning”.

The report bases its recommendation for a review on an assertion that there is "confusion about expectations among teachers and heads” relating to the reception year.  Where there is confusion, this often arises from pressure to create practice that does not align with the statutory requirements of the EYFS.  Confusion may also arise when there is a lack of understanding and consensus on what constitutes effective reception practice.

The EYFS differs from the National Curriculum for sound, well-evidenced reasons relating to child development.  Good transitions do not come from diluting good early years practice with elements of primary practice: on the contrary, with a school starting age of 5 - one of the lowest in the world - KS1 needs to take on board key elements of early years practice, such as supporting the characteristics of effective learning. Indeed, any children who do not reach a good level of development in the reception year as measured by the EYFS Profile should be entitled to continue to experience the pedagogical approach required in the EYFS in Year 1.

It is regrettable that the report is based on visits to only 20 schools, and that it drew conclusions from this small and unrepresentative sample. This is not credible evidence of a need to review the reception year, or the requirements of the EYFS, and certainly not of the advisability of any such review being led by primary teachers and leaders alone.  Nursery teaching, while part of many primary schools, was not included in the report’s remit.  Reception teaching, which belongs firmly within the EYFS, should not have been addressed either without real dialogue between early years and primary colleagues.

We look forward to the Teaching Schools Council commissioning an expert report on early years pedagogy which draws on relevant research and the many excellent examples of reception classes using the principles laid out in the statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage.  These achieve outstanding results for their children going on to KS1 and 2. All the signatories to this letter would support that.

Yours sincerely

Beatrice Merrick, Chief Executive, **Early Education** (The British Association for Early Childhood Education)

Nancy Stewart, Vice Chair and Wendy Scott OBE, Primary School Governor/President **TACTYC** (Association for Professional Development in Early Years)

Melian Mansfield, Chair, **Early Childhood Forum**

Liz Marsden, CEO and Jan Dubiel, National Director, **Early Excellence**

Neil Short, Chair, **National Association of Small Schools**

Tony Bertram and Chris Pascal, President and Vice President of Early Education and Directors of the **Centre for Research in Early Childhood** (CREC)

Marion Dowling, Vice President of **Early Education**

Helen Moylett, Vice President of **Early Education**, PGCE and MA tutor at **CREC**

Peter Elfer, Principal Lecturer, Early Childhood Studies, School of Education, **University of Roehampton** and Vice President of **Early Education**

Laura Henry, Early Years consultant and Vice President of **Early Education**

Lesley Staggs, Vice President of **Early Education** and the first National Director for Early Years

Emeritus Professor Philip Gammage, Vice President , **Early Education**

Joy Reynolds, Headteacher/Head of Centre, Lanterns Nursery School & Extended Services and Patti Snook, Head of Centre, Bushy Leaze Children & Families Centre, **Foundations Teaching School Alliance**

Helen Ruff, Headteacher/Head of Centre, ACE Children’s Centre and Nursery School/**ACE Teaching School Alliance**

Maureen McGillicuddy, Lead of **Birmingham Nursery Schools Teaching School Alliance (BNSTSA**)

Donna MacDonald, Deputy Head, Tanglewood Nursery School/ **Tanglewood Teaching School Alliance**

Karen James, Head Oak Tree Children's Centre/Ludwick Nursery School/**Acorns Teaching School Alliance**

Leslie Patterson, Headteacher, Etherley Lane Nursery School/ **Durham Primary Teaching School Alliance**

Isabel Davis, Executive Head Teacher / NLE, Bedford Nursery Schools Federation and **Peter Pan Teaching School Alliance**

Helen McHale and Sarah Cottle, Co–Headteachers, Cookham, Maidenhead and The Lawns Nursery School Federation/**Foundations for Learning Teaching School Alliance**

Jane Pepper, Headteacher Childhaven Community Nursery School/**Scarborough Teaching Alliance**

Caron Rudge, Headteacher - Training and Partnerships, **BEYA - Barnet Early Years Alliance**

Sally Franklin, Acting Head Teacher, **North Islington Nursery School**

Panna Naggar, Headteacher, Northfleet Nursery School/**Early Foundations Teaching Schools Alliance**

Wendy Colebourne, Headteacher at Harrington Nursery School and Director of **Derby Early Years Teaching School**

Claire Quinlan, Head teacher, **Highters Heath Nursery School**

Steve Elliott, Headteacher, **Overchurch Infant School**, Wirral

Steven Badcott,  Executive Headteacher, **Halberton & Uplowman Federation**, Devon

Judith Twani, Regional Development Manager, **Early Excellence**

Ruth Swailes, **Independent School Improvement Adviser**

Julia Norman, Senior Teacher, **Wells Primary and Nursery School**, Norwich

Chris Currie, Primary Head,**Dixons Allerton Academy**, Bradford**. EYFS Specialist Leader of Education**

Binks Neate-Evans, Headteacher, **West Earlham Infant and Nursery School**

Kate Beaumont, **Seven Kings Primary School**, Essex

Su Yay-Walker, Headteacher, **Burlington Infant and Nursery School**

Elaine Bennett, EYFS and Yr1 leader, Friars Primary School and Nursery, Early Years consultant and author, Keeping Early Years Unique founder, Southend, Essex

Professor Julie Fisher, Early Years Adviser & Visiting Professor of Early Childhood Education

Di Chilvers, Advisory Consultant in early education and Early Education Associate

Ruth Moore, Freedom To Learn Network Ltd

Kathryn Solly, Specialist Early Years Speaker, Consultant, Trainer and Author

Kym Scott, Independent Early Years Consultant

Pete Moorhouse, Early Years Consultant and Honorary Research Fellow, Graduate School of Education. University of Bristol

Jan White, Consultant for Learning Outdoors in Early Childhood

Anna Ephgrave, Early Years Author and consultant

Rhian Fisk, EYFS leader, Writtle Infant School

Sue Allingham, Early Years Consultant

Leah Morris, Early Years Lead and Reception Teacher, Southend, Essex