

Appendix 1- Recommendations and Cabinet Members' Responses

Recommendation number	Recommendation	Cabinet Member for Best Start for Children and Families' response
1	<p>The study has shown there need to be more trained, experienced teachers to provide targeted intervention for young children. This is a national government resourcing issue. The Leader of the Council, the Cabinet Member for Best Start for Children and Families, and the Chair of the Children, Schools and Families Scrutiny Committee should write to the Secretary of State for Education to request increased funding for education so that schools have sufficient resources to provide the appropriate specialist support that will enable every child, including those with special educational needs or social, emotional, and mental health needs, to fulfil their potential.</p>	<p>We agree that more national funding is needed to support early education, with a particular need to focus on communication and language development especially. However, additional funding has been provided through the Family Hub grant, which has enabled further high-quality professional development for school nursery staff to support children's communication and language development.</p> <p>A specialist teacher has also been appointed to support the roll-out of Camden Kids Talk screening and interventions in school nurseries and the scope of support offered by the Inclusive Intervention Team has been increased to include school nurseries and the reception year.</p>
2	<p>There is a clear need to recruit and retain good experienced Early Years staff. The Leader of the Council, the Cabinet Member for Best Start for Children and Families, and the Chair of the Children, Schools and Families Scrutiny Committee should begin a Camden campaign to raise the status of what it is to be an Early Years practitioner in Camden and to recognise that it is a sound career choice.</p>	<p>Regrettably, the national funding provided for early education places through the free entitlement is not sufficient to pay a salary that reflects the importance of early years practitioners in shaping lifelong outcomes for children. However, Camden continues to support its settings with recruitment and vacancies are shared through the Provider forum. A new early years recruitment campaign is also underway, which will run alongside national materials. We recognise that there is still more to do and will continue to explore opportunities to promote early years as a career.</p>

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<p>3</p>	<p>There is a need for an organised cadre of volunteers to be introduced into all Camden Primary Schools and Early Years settings to help with toileting and physical development, such as climbing and balancing. There would be a brief period of training built in so the volunteers can develop and extend the language of the Covid-19-born children, especially those born into disadvantaged backgrounds. The Leader of the Council, the Cabinet Member for Best Start for Children and Families, and the Chair of the Children, Schools and Families Scrutiny Committee should begin a Camden campaign to recruit, manage and monitor such a team.</p>	<p>The effective support of children's learning requires appropriate training and evidence shows that there is a strong correlation between staff qualifications and outcomes for children, so we do not support this recommendation. However, we do recognise the important role that volunteers, such as Camden's parent champions, play in encouraging take-up of the free entitlements and their impact in increasing the take up of 2-year-old places, which now stands at 84% - the highest ever achieved in Camden.</p>
<p>4</p>	<p>Similarly, there is a need for more Speech Therapists to help parents of children aged 0-5 years. There are long waiting lists for children in Camden to access speech therapy support. This is a national government resourcing issue. The Leader of the Council, the Cabinet Member for Best Start for Children and Families, and the Chair of the Children, Schools and Families Scrutiny Committee should write to the Minister of Health to ask for increased funding for speech therapists so that families, Nurseries, and schools have sufficient resources to provide the appropriate specialist support to enable every child, including those with special educational needs or social, emotional, and mental health needs, to fulfil their potential.</p>	<p>Camden currently has a waiting list for specialist provision, as the number of referrals has risen significantly and there is an ongoing need to recruit more speech and language therapists both nationally and locally. Regrettably, there are insufficient trained speech and language therapists, with 21% of SLT posts currently vacant.</p> <p>However, despite this, the Camden KidsTalk project is introducing a stronger approach to prevention and early intervention, which will see all Camden children screened for speech and language delay at the one-year health review and strategies to encourage language development shared with parents.</p>

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5	<p>There is a clear issue of language delay among those Camden children from disadvantaged backgrounds. This will impact on schools' ability to show academic success with their primary-aged children, according to central government measures, even though the schools will doubtless continue to succeed in helping children make considerable progress. Despite Ofsted and the Westminster APPG on Oracy highlighting this, teachers reported that they saw little evidence of government recognition of the severity of these issues. Teachers want the government to publicly recognise that this cohort of children are badly impacted, they are behind, and they need a national catch-up period which does not consist of more of the same, i.e., phonics. It is clear that SATs tests will impact unfairly on many children in this cohort. The Leader of the Council, the Cabinet Member for Best Start for Children and Families, and the Chair of the Children, Schools and Families Scrutiny Committee should write to the Secretary of State for Education to ask for the public recognition, a catch-up period, and a change in the way results of SATs at KS2 are published. Alternatively, that SATs at KS2 are suspended for this cohort of children. This catch-up period needs to protect curriculum time for the social, emotional, and physical development of our Early Years children.</p>	<p>We agree with the need for a national catch-up period.</p>
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<p>6</p>	<p>The parents of children who seemed to be developing differently from others had a feeling of being abandoned by all the services - Health Visitors, nurses, and GPs. While it is clear that there should be national guidance on key developmental milestones, with advice on what to do if your child is not developing at the expected rate, this report recommends that the Executive Director Supporting People should ensure that the materials for Camden Kids Talk are made available to all new parents.</p>	<p>Camden KidsTalk resources are now shared with parents at the one-year health review and are accessible via families@camden.gov.uk, the council's new Family Hub website, and via a padlet which is promoted through QR codes at local centres and nurseries. In addition, a 'Top Ten Tips' poster has been developed and is being distributed to venues that parents visit.</p> <p>The new 'Best Start for Baby' service, which invites parents to attend a session with a Health Visitor every 3 months in their child's first year, presents a significant opportunity to share resources that support communication and language development. This service will be run Borough-wide by the end of March 2024. SEND support through the Family Hubs is also developing, with specialist Stay and Play sessions, sensory rooms, monthly drop-ins with SENDIAS, family support and benefits advice available.</p>
<p>7</p>	<p>The recent Camden Council Report (2022) on the disproportionate effects of Covid on Black, Asian, and other ethnic minority children commits the borough to 'work directly, and with our partners, to rapidly increase access to digital devices and resources to support the reduction of the disadvantage gap in education', and 'to use the new Education Strategy to tackle disproportionality in attainment'. As Building Back Stronger: Camden's Education Strategy to 2030 (2022) claims, 'Inequalities cannot be tackled without addressing racism...Education should be at the forefront of breaking down barriers established by racism'. This report recommends that this</p>	<p>The service is working to increase understanding of disproportionality, with Public Health colleagues launching a new Family Hub delivery strand focusing on equity and inclusion. We recognise that the current recording of children's ethnicity at birth is inconsistent, which inhibits the ability to report accurately on disproportionality. Health partners are committed to achieving universal completion on records.</p>

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	message is widely disseminated to Early Years and Key Stage 1 providers in Camden.	
8	There is clearly insufficient funding to support the growing demand for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). The Leader of the Council, the Cabinet Member for Best Start for Children and Families, and the Chair of the Children, Schools and Families Scrutiny Committee should lobby the Secretary of State for Education urgently in the strongest terms for more money for SEND now. This would be for all pupils, but especially for this Covid-born cohort.	We agree that additional national funding is needed to support the growing demand for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.
9	The practitioners were unanimous in seeing the beneficial results of children from disadvantaged backgrounds attending Nursery or Pre-School. The Leader of the Council, the Cabinet Member for Best Start for Children and Families, and the Chair of the Children, Schools and Families Scrutiny Committee should lobby the Secretary of State for Education and the Treasury to ensure that the current three-years-old funding be available to all pre-schoolchildren.	In March 2023, the government announced extensions to the free entitlements. Phased in from April 2024 until April 2025, the one- and two-year-old children of working parents will be entitled to funded hours of early education. Whilst new funding is positive, there is a concern that a focus on the children of working parents may increase the inequality gap in educational attainment.
10	The leadership in local government in Camden shown by the Chief Executive, the Director of Children's Services and Deputy Chief Executive, the Leader of the Council, and the Director of Early Intervention and Prevention is outstanding and should be commended. The recommendations contained in the Literature Search addressed to local government are all in place in Camden, including having a Named Lead for Early Years intervention.	We are grateful for, and agree with, the panel's recognition of our Early Years leadership team and our commitment to continually invest in this area, recognising its importance in delivering positive outcomes for Camden's children and families.

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11	The sharing of best practice through Camden Learning Early Years Partnerships and the Camden Family of Schools is excellent and should continue to be supported and funded.	We are grateful for, and agree with, the panel's recognition of the value and effectiveness of sharing best practice through Camden Learning Early Years Partnerships and the Camden Family of Schools.
12	Camden Council should be commended for its Cost-of-Living Crisis Fund that has been ear-marked to support families in need in the financial year April 2022 - April 2023. This initiative is clearly going some way to alleviate the hardship many families are facing, which results in some of our Camden Early Years children going hungry. It is strongly recommended that Camden Council continues the Cost-of-Living Fund into the financial year April 2023 - April 2024.	This has continued. Overall, since the Cost-of-Living Crisis Fund launched in September 2022, we have received 12,820 applications. Residents have applied for the fund to meet an array of emergency essential needs, ranging from energy bills to food expenditure, or for energy efficiency improvements products. Of those applications, 87% have been approved and £3.8m in awards have been given to our residents.
13	It is recommended that this initial research project is repeated, with a more in-depth set of interviews, in two years' time to track the 'Covid- generation children' and assess the impact of the pandemic on their progress in 2025.	We agree with the recommendation to revisit this research project but would propose expanding its scope to include children's health and SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) services. We would also suggest conducting the study with the same cohort of children and commissioning a specialist children's research organisation, to enable a comprehensive assessment of the impact of the pandemic on the progress of the 'Covid-generation children' in 2025.