

Paul Waugh MP

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State
Minister for Early Education
Department for Education
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By email: privateofficePUS.education@education.gov.uk

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Dear Minister,

I am writing on behalf of Babyzone to congratulate you on your appointment to the Department for Education, and in particular the Early Years brief. It is, we think, one of the most exciting and consequential jobs in government. Few roles offer such a direct line between decisions taken now and the life chances of a generation of children.

The evidence on the early years is unambiguous: the first five years shape everything that follows, and the gaps that open before a child starts school are the hardest to close afterwards. In England's most deprived neighbourhoods, just 58% of children reached a Good Level of Development by age five in the latest official figures, against 77% in the least deprived. The Best Start in Life strategy, and the target for 75% of children to reach a Good Level of Development by 2028, represent the most serious attempt in years to close that gap. We support the ambition wholeheartedly, and we are writing because we believe organisations like ours can help you deliver it.

Babyzone is a registered charity (1198316) running free, open-access, drop-in hubs for families with children aged 0 to 5 in some of the country's most deprived neighbourhoods. We operate eleven hubs, principally across England, with further openings planned this year and an ambition to reach twenty by 2028. We are universal and barrier-free by design, with no booking, no referral and no means-testing requirements. Yet we reach those who need support the most, with 74% of the families we reach living in IMD Deciles 1 to 4.

The families who stand to gain most from the Best Start rollout are often those least likely to come forward for appointment-based, referral-led provision. What the voluntary sector brings is trust and connections built in the communities it serves. Where that trust already exists, it can be put straight to work in service of the Department's goals. The ambition behind Best Start Network Sites is an encouraging step, and we would welcome the chance to work with the Department and local authorities on how charities can best support your policy agenda. Our experience is that the sector can accelerate delivery and implementation considerably.

We have been fortunate to welcome both of your predecessors in the role. Stephen Morgan MP visited our Hammersmith and Fulham hub and subsequently described us as embodying *"the vision this Government wants to achieve across the country through our Best Start in Life strategy."* Olivia Bailey MP then visited our Barking and Dagenham hub in March 2026, alongside the Children's Commissioner, Dame Rachel de Souza, for a session with parents that fed into the Department's work on early years screen time.

Minister Bailey subsequently wrote that:

"Babyzone is a great example of how warm, welcoming community spaces help families connect, access services and feel supported. It reflects the ambition behind the Family Hubs programme: bringing help together in one place so families get what they need, when they need it."

Dame Rachel also reflected on the visit:

"Venues like these show that families engage with services delivered with trust and compassion. As the government rolls out its Best Start Family Hubs, they should look to organisations like Babyzone as an example of an integrated, community-led model of support that is working so well."

We were grateful for the energy and genuine willingness to engage that both Ministers brought to the early years brief, and we very much hope to build an equally productive relationship with you. We would therefore welcome two things: a meeting with you and your officials to share what we have learned about reaching families that services often struggle to reach, and the chance to host you at one of our hubs. Given your constituency in Rochdale, our Blackburn, Wigan and Warrington hubs are all within easy reach. Our other sites include Chorley, Grimsby, Barnet, Barking and Dagenham, Hammersmith and Fulham and Croydon, alongside hubs in Swansea and Glasgow, with hubs in Bristol, Brent and Preston due to open in September.

Babyzone exists because the evidence is clear: the first five years shape everything that follows. We are grateful that this Government shares that conviction, and we stand ready to support you in any way we can as you work to give every child the best start in life.

Yours sincerely,



George Looker
Chief Executive Officer
Babyzone