

# Cross-party effort to save state-maintained nursery schools <sup>[1]</sup>

Almost 400 schools are at risk after extra government funding runs out at the end of next year

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## AVAILABILITY

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## EXCERPTS

A cross-party group of MPs has launched a campaign to fight cuts in funding for state-maintained nursery schools, warning that they will worsen inequality in children's education.

More than 70 MPs, including 12 Conservatives, have signed a letter to education and Treasury ministers urging them to secure the future of 400 maintained nurseries by continuing the current financial support beyond 2020. Among the signatories is Robert Halfon, the Tory chair of the education select committee.

Halfon told the Observer: "Maintained nurseries are some of the best examples of the state. Most have been rated outstanding by Ofsted. Why would you consider cutting funding for these schools?"

Maintained nurseries are high-quality schools for under-fives that often specialise in caring for children with disabilities and those from disadvantaged backgrounds. According to the 2016-17 Ofsted report, 63% were rated outstanding and 100% achieved at least a good grade, the second-highest mark for schools, while 64% are located in the country's most deprived areas.

One specific purposes is to close the learning gap between the most- and least-privileged children. Partly for this reason, however, the costs of running them can be higher, which is why in 2016 the government promised supplementary funding of £55m to £60m a year, but this guarantee only lasts until 2019. That figure is also one-third of the overall budget for nurseries – which will disappear if the fund is not renewed.

Bryan Lee, executive headteacher for the Plymouth Nursery Schools Federation, said schools had to announce their budgets for the next three years and this would be impossible without guarantees of future funding.

"We need the funding if we are to put forward our budget for the next three years," he said. "Our schools cost more to maintain, so we absolutely need these extra funds. Without them, we would go under."

The nurseries are already operating at a deficit, and Lee said they had made cuts and restructuring efforts. He said he had even done some of the maintenance work on nursery buildings himself to keep costs down.

Halfon said there was cross-party interest in fighting for the maintained nurseries. "This isn't about Conservative or Labour politicians. If you have a passion for education and helping those who are less advantaged, supporting these education institutions, which are doing such great work, should be the number one priority. It is not even an issue specific to my constituency. I'm talking about protecting maintained nurseries generally, as a country."

Though the only strict classification is that such nurseries must have professionally qualified teachers – which does not apply to private or state nurseries – maintained schools are a historical institution dating back a century. They were originally established by the state in deprived areas so that all young children would have access to a basic education.

Labour MPs who have signed the letter include Harriet Harman, the former deputy party leader, David Lammy and Lucy Powell, the former shadow education secretary.

They warn that the future of 397 such nurseries could be under threat. Powell said: "The education secretary [Damian Hinds] talks about the importance of the early years, and state-maintained nursery schools embody all that is excellent in the early years, supporting some of the most vulnerable children with a proven track record of closing the gap that exists pre-school."

**Related link:**

**Region:** Europe <sup>[3]</sup>

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[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/18/09/cross-party-effort-save-state-maintained-nursery-schools> [2]

<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2018/sep/16/cross-party-effort-to-save-state-maintained-nursery-schools> [3]

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