The Rt Hon. Michael Gove MP

Secretary of State for Education

Department of Education

Sanctuary Buildings

20 Great Smith Street

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 15th August 2013

**Parenting and the National Curriculum**

I am writing to encourage you to review the recent changes to the National Curriculum and to encourage that emphasis is placed on parenting and infant care-giving.

I am concerned that the most recent drafts of the National Curriculum for England, in particular the science curriculum do not embody the current state of knowledge on parenting and the importance of early relationships, between adults and children.

My report ‘*The Foundation Years: preventing poor children becoming poor adults’* found that the earliest years of a child’s life have a significant impact on later attainment in school and future life chances. The report emphasised how parenting and the family environment play the most significant role in influencing these future life chances, healthy pregnancies, authoritative but positive parenting as well as an understanding of the importance of early affection towards your baby all contribute towards this. In addition to this, neuroscientific and economic research suggests that the period between conception and the age of two is the most cost-effective time to ensure that all elements are in place for the child’s future health, social and academic success.

This school curriculum, which sets out to [prepare] ‘pupils at school for opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life’ (Section 2), should reflect a commitment to giving all young people an appropriate understanding of the theories that can inform their future parenting, their most vital responsibility, thus ensuring that future generations are better prepared to enter school. Students would welcome this. My report noted that pupils whom I have met wish to be taught how to be good parents (page 19 of the report).

I strongly urge that:

* The KS3 biology curriculum should cover current understanding of the theories behind strong parent/care-giver relationships and their effects on later development and the infant brain. This could feature in the sections on interactions and interdependencies and genetics and evolution.
* The section of the GCSE science curriculum that examines the interaction of the genome and the environment (p. 13 of the current draft), should explore recent research on mammalian upbringing as an example of studies of such interaction, and draw attention to its relevance to human care-giving.
* The statutory primary curriculum should recognise how differences in physical and emotional care-giving affect development, including brain development.
* The importance of healthy attachment, positive parenting and strong relationships should be included within the statutory element of the sex and relationships section of the curriculum.

In addition to these recommendations I would be happy to speak with you about a project that the Foundation Years Trust, which I chair, is currently undertaking on parenting and life skills in schools.

The Trust has commissioned Erika Greenslade of Manchester Academy to produce materials for schools which educate teenagers on the role and realities of parenting (without encouraging parenthood) and the need for life skills. This project has resulted in the production of appropriate examples of how these skills can be integrated into the existing curriculum framework whilst giving relevant context to some of the theory being taught. Delivery through lessons and themed project days have been conducted to enable young people to look at the various bodies of knowledge parents need in

order to best promote their children’s life chances, ranging from human brain development and the role of attachment, to household budgeting.

I would be happy to meet with you and your advisers to discuss this further. I can be contacted via my secretary, Amy Oliver, on 0207 219 5193 or by email fieldf@parliament.uk.

With best wishes,