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Dear Susie,

As the London Heads of Early Years, we are writing to request the Department for a review of the current guidance for the early years and childcare sector. In particular, a review of [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): implementing protective measures in education and childcare settings](#) would be welcomed in light of greater freedoms allowed by wider government policy.

Early years and childcare providers have fed back that whilst they have the health and wellbeing of the children, their staff and themselves at heart, they now feel some flexibility to make reasoned, risk assessed decisions around resources and practices within guidance that supports their efforts to minimise risk, without being overly restrictive.

This is not currently possible due to some concerns under insurance cover, because of which they feel bound to follow guidance to the letter. Whilst manageable for small numbers appropriate at the start of the pandemic, over time and with increased numbers, without a good range of resources, some providers are finding their environments feeling overly formal and somewhat clinical. Refreshed guidance could balance a high quality learning environment whilst minimising transmission risk through good hand hygiene and robust hierarchy of controls.

Resources are integral to education in both sectors. Yet while there has been a clear policy shift to the use of resources in schools, similar amendments are yet to be seen within guidance for early years and childcare settings. Some notable disparities can be seen here:

Schools	Early Years Settings
Guidance for full opening: schools - Updated 27 July 2020	Coronavirus (COVID-19): implementing protective measures in education and childcare settings

<p>Equipment and resources are integral to education in schools. During the summer term, their use was minimised, many were moved out of classrooms, and there was significant extra cleaning. That position has now changed for the autumn term, because the prevalence of coronavirus (COVID-19) has decreased and because they are so important for the delivery of education.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● remove unnecessary items from classrooms and other learning environments where there is space to store it elsewhere ● remove soft furnishings, soft toys and toys that are hard to clean (such as those with intricate parts)
<p>Classroom based resources, such as books and games, can be used and shared within the bubble; these should be cleaned regularly, along with all frequently touched surfaces.</p>	<p>Reduce the use of shared resources</p>
<p>It is still recommended that pupils limit the amount of equipment they bring into school each day, to essentials such as lunch boxes, hats, coats, books, stationary and mobile phones. Bags are allowed. Pupils and teachers can take books and other shared resources home, although unnecessary sharing should be avoided</p>	<p>by limiting the amount of shared resources that are taken home and limit exchange of take-home resources between children, young people and staff</p>

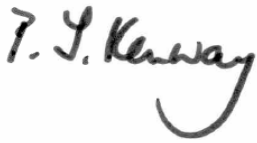
Given that young children are now able to access adjusted environments with their families such as shops, restaurants, outdoor playgrounds, swimming pools, etc. the guidance to remove soft furnishings and limit resources such as sand and water seems a little out of step. There also remains some disparities between locally issued guidance from the London Coronavirus Cell on prohibiting the use of water play and national guidance held on the Foundations Years website: [NCB implementing protective measures in the early years](#). Such guidance might also benefit from review.

We are also keen to see any future interactions of national guidance offering scope for providers to make professional judgments in response to local risks and outbreaks. For example, where transmission risks are lower, greater flexibility could be offered, but in

higher risk areas or where outbreaks have occurred, additional local controls should be imposed, based on changes to risk.

We feel that in order to rebuild professional confidence within the sector, some greater flexibility that enables providers space to make professional judgments about resources is needed. A balanced approach of a well-managed, risk assessed, high quality early learning environments that avoids overly limiting learning experiences would benefit children's learning and wellbeing.

We look forward to a response.



Penny Kenway
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Allison Jones
Head of Early Years and Childcare (LB Merton)

On behalf of London Councils Heads of Early Years Group

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Lead for Early Years, Association of London Directors of Children's Services