

CHILDREN FIRST



We speak to Minister Stephen Morgan about his inspiration and vision for the early years sector in England

Q Tell us a little about yourself – what are your passions and what drives you?

As the Minister for Early Education, it won't surprise you to learn that I'm incredibly passionate about driving the best possible outcomes for children across this country.

Growing up, I was lucky enough to have a strong family network to support me, but we, and those around us, faced challenges. Keeping family finances on track, finding work or accessing much-needed services wasn't always easy.

Those challenges will be familiar to families today, and it's serving those people and their

children that drives me to do everything I can to give every child the best start in life.

Q What or who inspires you?

My Grandfather, James, has always been an inspiration to me. As a D-Day Veteran, he taught me the value of public service, inspired me to follow in his footsteps in whatever way I can!

For me, that has meant working with early years educators and doing my utmost to deliver a system that breaks down barriers to opportunity for every child.

Q You talk very passionately about the early years sector. What has been the highlight of your role so far?

It has been an honour to meet so many early educators over the last few months and see firsthand how they deliver exceptional support in many forms to families that need it.

Childminders, nurseries, school-based settings and more all have an integral role to play in our childcare system, and the highlight so far has been the change we've been able to deliver for them over the last few months.

That includes relaunching a nationwide recruitment campaign, introducing new flexibilities for childminders and offering additional training resources for educators working with children with special educational needs.

Q Tell us a little more about your role as Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Early Education?

Having spent time as a playworker and with a sister in the sector, I understand how central the early years are to breaking that unfair link between background and opportunity. A core part of my role is to champion early years educators, and work with them to do exactly that.

We are a child-centred government, which was made clear in our commitment to ensure tens of thousands more children are school-ready by 5 years old, as part of the Plan for Change.

My role spans other areas that put children on the best footing for future learning - making sure children start school ready to learn through our free breakfast club programme, access to specialist mental health professionals in every school, and enabling schools to keep pace with scientific advancements through partnerships with our innovative AI for education teams.



Q What are the biggest challenges you have found working with the early years sector and within government?

There is strong evidence that shows a high-quality early education builds the foundation for later learning, whilst starting out behind only sets you up for issues to escalate – with the most disadvantaged children most likely to suffer.

The way the current early years system is setup, we're managing to bake in inequality rather than tackle it. That's an undeniable challenge that requires wholesale, long-term reform, but I'm excited to push ahead with creating a system that works for our most vulnerable children.

Q What do you hope to achieve and what are your key focuses for the coming year?

We have already committed to rollout 30 hours of government-funded childcare by September, but our plan for reform will go far beyond delivering places to meet arbitrary milestones.

I'm proud of the decisive action we've taken – kicking off a landmark school-based nurseries rollout, delivering an unprecedented uplift in the early years pupil premium and over £2 billion additional funding for the sector this year. I intend to use this momentum to drive tangible change that



supports the early years workforce, improves quality and increases access to early years for the families that need it most.

One thing I'm particularly looking forward to is setting out our long-term vision for reforming early years this year – so watch this space!

Q Where do you see the childcare and early years sector in 5 years' time?

Our Plan for Change has set a clear milestone to make sure tens of thousands more children are school ready by 2028. That means a record number – 75% - of children will be reaching a good

level of development by age 5, transforming their life chances, and the life chances of every child in their classroom.

As we progress towards that milestone, we'll work in partnership with early years educators to open access for the families that need it through government-funded hours, reform training to drive up standards in early maths and language and join up family services to improve support through pregnancy and early childhood. **CP**

Fast facts box

- **What would people be surprised to learn about you? I am the proud owner of a Blue Peter badge for cleaning out my school's pond!**
- **What do you like to do with your spare time (if you have any)?** I'm lucky enough to live by the sea and try to get out for a seafront cycle or a walk with my dog, Albert, when I can.
- **What is the proudest moment you have had so far? Without a doubt, getting the opportunity to be a minister in this child-centred government.**
- **What is your favourite childhood memory?** Days spent by the sea with my family growing up will always mean a lot to me.