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Friday 11<sup>th</sup> January 2013

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am pleased to have been given the opportunity to respond on behalf of 4Children to the consultation "Inspection of Sure Start Children's Centres".

4Children is the national charity all about children and families. We have spearheaded a joined-up, integrated approach to children's services and work with a wide range of partners around the country to ensure children and families have access to the services and support they need in their communities. We run Sure Start Children's Centres as well as family and youth services across Britain.

We develop, influence and shape national policy on all aspects of the lives of children, young people and families. As the Government's strategic partner for early years and childcare we have a crucial role in co-producing policy with the Department for Education and representing the sector's views and experiences.

As Ofsted is clearly keenly aware, a number of changes to the way children's centres are managed and organised at the local authority level have happened over the past three years. We are pleased to welcome Ofsted's efforts to ensure the inspection framework is able to engage with the new models of children's centre management and delivery effectively – and agree wholeheartedly with the locality based approach set out in the consultation. This approach appears to make practical sense, and will also help families and policy makers to make nationwide local authority level comparisons of children's centre quality, which we believe will be an additional driver to increase quality.

We are also pleased to welcome the inspection criteria set out in the consultation. The focus on targeted services appropriately reflects government priorities, and will drive the sector to reach out to the most vulnerable, while the expectation that centres approach safeguarding in a multi-agency manner is vital – as set out by the Munroe Review. While some centres may initially struggle to meet the new standards for reaching out to the most vulnerable, we are confident that a tough inspection regime will help encourage centres to focus their resources where they are needed most.

We also welcome Ofsted's approach to raising the standard of 'satisfactory' centres across the inspection regime. Ensuring services are of the highest quality is particularly important

to the most vulnerable and youngest children, and we agree that centres should deliver at the level of 'good' or above wherever possible.

It will be vital however, to ensure that where centres do not meet that minimum standard, Ofsted is able to work constructively with centres and local authorities to draft a constructive and implementable action plan to improve performance. Further, we have some concerns that where centres are judged to be inadequate, or in need of improvement, that the time span between may be too large. While the consultation document suggests up to 18 months may elapse before a failing centre is reassessed, we believe that wherever possible this should be done within 12 months.

Please do let us know if you would like to discuss any of these issues further, and we will be happy to arrange a meeting.

Yours sincerely

(by email)

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