



Edward Timpson MP

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families

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Dear Christine,

Before the summer break, I wanted to write to you to reflect on the progress we have made in the SEN and disability reforms.

We have now completed the House of Commons stages of the Children and Families Bill and have just completed Second Reading in the House of Lords. I have very much welcomed the engagement of many sector and parent-carer organisations in the careful scrutiny of the Bill clauses. The debates in the Bill Committee and in the House were rightly challenging but also constructive.

I am aware that there will still be some areas that you and others in the SEN and disability sector will want to see evolve further as we start the next Parliamentary stages in autumn. It is very much the right time to raise these points so that we can continue the constructive dialogue between the Department and the sector. We shared an indicative draft of the SEN Code of Practice at the time of introducing the Bill and a full consultation draft will be published in autumn. The Code continues to provide us with an important focus for reviewing the detail of how the reforms will operate in practice, and I am grateful for the considerable input that CDC, other sector organisations and parent-carers have already made.

One such detail for further consideration that you and I have discussed recently is the arrangements for reviewing Education, Health and Care Plans, especially the reports parents and young people receive about annual review meetings and the year 9 transition reviews. I am pleased that this important area is something that CDC and the Special Education Consortium are looking at in more detail with my officials. Similarly, I am grateful to you for the work you have done with the Department to explain in more detail the reforms to the SEN funding system. The leaflet you have published on the CDC website explains clearly that the funding changes do not change the legal responsibilities of schools and local authorities for children with special educational needs.

As we develop the Code of Practice, it will be important to write it in a way that supports a real improvement in outcomes for those with SEN in schools and colleges in order to meet the Department's wider aims to improve attainment and close the gap. I have just held roundtable meetings with my Ministerial colleagues and some headteachers and college principals on the central role schools and colleges must play, and know that you share my strong interest in spreading the reform messages effectively so that schools and colleges can respond positively to the SEN reforms.

We are thinking more widely about implementing the reforms, and how to manage the changeover to a new legal system from September 2014. We want children and young people with SEN to benefit from the changes as soon as possible, however it is not proposed to move wholesale to the new system from September next year; rather it will be the beginning of a period of gradual and orderly transition to full implementation. The pathfinder champions are now holding their first regional meetings to support non-pathfinder areas, and have recently shared core learning points through a series of information packs, which can be found here:

www.sendpathfinder.co.uk/infopacks/.

At the Association of Directors of Children's Services conference on 4 July I announced that we will be providing £9m in 2013-14 to support local areas to prepare for implementation. Evidence from pathfinder experience and evaluation reports have emphasised the value of early engagement with parents and parent carer forums. We will be publishing more information in early autumn to continue to support implementation.

I am grateful to CDC as the Department's reform partner on SEN and disability for your early thinking on implementation. I know that CDC will play a vital role through the 'Countdown to Change' programme you are leading to reach a wide range of audiences – including children, young people, parent-carers, early years settings, schools, colleges, local authority and health service professionals and wider – to help them become informed and prepared for the changes ahead.

I am writing separately to all local parent carer forums across the country through the National Network of Parent Carer Forums. Please send this letter on to parents, young people and voluntary sector organisations through your usual channels.

With best wishes



Edward Timpson MP
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