



**Edward Timpson MP**

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Special Needs Jungle

By email

10 February 2015

*Jan Tania and Renata,*

It was a pleasure to meet with you again recently to talk about how the special educational needs (SEN) and disability reforms are being implemented. I was particularly grateful for the efforts you took to provide me with feedback from a range of people about their early experiences of the new system. All sources of feedback are really helpful as they help us to really understand what is going well together with pinpointing the areas of development we need to focus on. The experiences your fellow parents provided emphasised how important it is that we do get it right for children and young people with SEN and disability and for their families. In particular, the messages came across strongly that we still have a way to go in:

- Expanding the knowledge and understanding of the detail of the reform across local authority staff and other professionals;
- Making available information to all that is accessible and accurate;
- Ensuring the benefits of co-production are fully realised;
- Making sure that our systems are fully geared towards preparing young people for adulthood.

I have asked my officials to consider how they can work with our strategic partners to address these points. However, I have met parents who have had a very positive experience of the reforms. They told me that they have felt involved and listened to. They like the positive new ways of presenting information about their child's needs and provision. One parent said that having the opportunity to meet with key people together rather than having many different meetings was helpful, and that they welcomed the 'immense' support from the parent partnership. These positive experiences are clearly not yet shared by all, but, I am determined to make sure that even more families benefit directly from the changes we've brought in.

Clearly, local authorities have a central role in making sure that happens. The task of transferring statements and Learning Disability Assessments is a very demanding one. That's why we are continuing to provide local authorities and their partners with support, challenge and resources to help them do that task. More widely, we are continuing to provide support that is helping them develop the systems and the necessary skills across the workforce.

We are also following up on individual local authority issues where these are drawn to our attention by various organisations including by parents themselves. The SEND advisers have been given your evidence so they can follow up with the councils where further intervention is appropriate. If they wish to do so, families can write to my Department to register their concerns. However, in my experience, it is normally best to resolve these issues locally. If parents want to make a complaint, in the first instance they should usually go to their local head of SEN. They can also ask to use the local disagreement resolution service and seek advice from the parent carer forum or through Contact a Family. The Contact a Family Helpline is 0808 808 3555, and they are open during office hours. If you need to raise a complaint more formally, you can still complain to the local authority, seek mediation on issues that can be appealed to the SEN and Disability Tribunal and if necessary appeal to the Tribunal. Information about how to do all of this will be published on the local offer.

I want every family to know that if they need help with an Education Health and Care plan assessment (whether for a new plan, or because they are transferring from a statement or LDA to a new plan), they can get it. Every local authority must offer an Independent Advice and Support Services (IASS) for families, and details of your local IASS are here: <http://www.iassnetwork.org.uk/find-your-iass/>

In addition to IASS, the Government is also funding Independent Supporters. They can help young people and parent carers in a number of ways, such as working with professionals to help you collect the information you need for the EHC plan. It is early days, but based on the first 100 evaluation responses received directly from parents and young people, 80% would recommend the service to others, and nearly 95% said their work with the Independent Supporter was either extremely useful or very useful. So, if you think Independent Support might help you, you can find details of your local provider from:

<http://www.councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk/news/january-june-2015/getting-in-touch-with-your-local-independent-supporter>.

We have said many times that these are the biggest reforms in SEN and disability in 30 years. It is inevitable that there will be teething problems. However, based on the numerous contacts I have with people right across the SEN system, from professional to parents, charities to children I am confident that positive change is happening all over the country, and the support is there for your experience to be a good one too.

*Kindest regards,*

*Edward*

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