



Vicky Ford, MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
20, Great Smith Street
London SW1 3BT

8 March 2021

Dear Minister,

The Council for Disabled Children has been contacted by a number of respected partner organisations with expertise in education and SEN and disability. We are deeply concerned about the change in name from exclusions to 'suspensions' and 'expulsions'.

The word 'expulsion' conveys a more vigorous, or even aggressively physical approach to removing children from schools and, for some, the language provokes a visceral reaction. The language is dated and evokes an era that pre-dates the abolition of corporal punishment in schools.

This language is at odds with the concern expressed in Edward Timpson's Review of exclusions about the disproportionate impact of exclusions on particular groups of pupils, and the very poor outcomes for children who are excluded from our schools. It also seems to be at odds with the strong messages from the Prime Minister on 'levelling up' and the messages about 'catch-up' and 'recovery' in the post-pandemic return to school.

Nor does it help to re-name fixed-term exclusions as 'suspensions.' 'Suspension' seems to trivialise the action of exclusion and suggest that this is not really an exclusion, yet, we know, not least from the outcome of Tribunal decisions in disability discrimination claims, that a number of fixed-term exclusions can combine to have a detrimental impact on outcomes for disabled pupils.

We have rising exclusions, including the exclusion of very young children, alongside a range of other ways in which children are being removed from schools, or encouraged to leave. It is of great concern to us that entitlement to education for disabled children and children with SEN is being significantly compromised. Despite all the information, data

and research on this, the DfE has not acted to address this inequality as it should have done. It is a reasonable expectation that, aware of what the research and data says, DfE would have identified objectives under the public sector equality duty and have taken positive action to address these inequalities. Yet, the first action to be taken by the DfE seems to encourage a more vigorous approach to removing pupils from school. It is particularly unfortunate that, without any real action on exclusions, the wider public may think that the DfE believes the change of name is part of a solution.

It has been suggested that the origins of the change of name lie with the Timpson Review. Our reading of the Timpson Review is that it recommends nothing on this. It is, however, clearly in the Government response to the Timpson Review. The suggestion, from the DfE, of origins in the Timpson Review is somewhat misleading.

Some of us have been working tirelessly over many years, and working with the DfE, to reduce exclusions of disabled pupils and pupils with SEN, and to limit the long-term damage to life-outcomes caused by exclusions. It seems unthinkable to us that the DfE would proceed with a change of this nature without consulting, even informally, some of those who have been involved.

The wider world is looking to the SEND Review to address the significant issues in identifying and meeting children's special educational needs and securing better outcomes. If the first sign of action on SEN and disability is a change in name from exclusions to expulsions, this is setting up the Review for a negative response. We don't think most people are yet aware of the change of name, but there is little doubt, once parents, the sector, professional bodies and others become aware of this change, there will be a deeply negative response. Our concern is that this may drown out anything constructive the SEND Review may herald.

We have not consulted widely but wanted to contact you quickly to warn you of the potential impact of these changes. Jolanta Lasota contacted us as CEO of Ambitious About Autism and in connection with her leadership role with the Autism Education Trust. Jolanta has worked tirelessly to highlight and address the disproportionate exclusions of autistic pupils. Kate Fallon is supporting this letter in her capacity as chair of the Special Educational Consortium; in her role as General Secretary of the Association of Educational Psychologists, her instincts tell her that members, when they know about the changes, are likely to be very unhappy about them.

For all the reasons we have set out in this letter, we would urge you to reconsider this name change. It trivialises a deeply serious issue affecting life outcomes for disabled

pupils and pupils with SEN; it risks fuelling anger about the failure to reduce exclusions of disabled pupils, including some of our youngest children; and this, in turn, risks undermining any constructive proposals brought forward by the SEND Review.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Philippa Stobbs". The script is cursive and fluid.

Philippa Stobbs
Assistant Director, Education and Equalities
Council for Disabled Children

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jolanta Lasota". The script is cursive and somewhat stylized.

Jolanta Lasota
CEO Ambitious About Autism

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kate Fallon". The script is cursive and clear.

Kate Fallon,
Chair, Special Educational Consortium