



David Johnston OBE MP

Minister for Children, Families and Wellbeing

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Robin Walker MP

Chair of the Education Select Committee

13 October 2023

Dear Robin,

Further to my letter of 23 September addressing the issues raised in your letter of 19 September in relation to the Delivering Better Value programme, I am now writing to respond to the broader points raised.

Thank you for your comments about mediation, tailored lists and the Supported Internships pilot. We will of course be happy to provide further updates on this as work progresses, including the areas taking part in the Supported Internships pilot.

As you note in your letter, all school inspectors receive SEND training on induction, followed by enhanced training and annual 'top-ups'. However, Ofsted does not currently hold reliable information on the proportion of inspectors who come from a special school background.

Funding

We're aware that some local authorities do not plan sufficiently for increases in need for specialist provision places and that this, and other aspects of current funding arrangements, can leave schools with a shortfall until it is corrected in the following year. Our operational guidance acknowledges that an increase in pupils admitted in excess of funded places could result in the school incurring additional costs. Our expectation is that the local authority should agree as early as possible with the school how those costs are met.

Regarding pay for non-teaching staff, schools have the freedom to set pay and conditions according to their circumstances, which may include higher salaries or allowances for more specialist roles. Most schools, including academies, follow local government pay scales for school support staff.

Timescales

Standardisation and digitisation of EHCPs

Since the publication of the Improvement Plan, we've worked with families, and stakeholders across the sector to create an EHCP template which will improve the quality of plans and the experience of getting one. It is based on the current legal

framework and seeks to make clear the link between need, provision and outcomes. Through the SEND and AP Change Programme, we will pilot the template to understand whether any further refinements are needed, before using it as the basis of the approach to EHCP digitisation. Our work on digital is now in its alpha stage. In combination, these two strands of work are laying the foundations to deliver our commitment to create a national digital requirement for EHCPs by 2025.

National Standards

Since publication of the Improvement Plan, we have been building our evidence base and scoping the first practice guides for professionals. We will test our work with stakeholders across education, health and social care through the SEND and AP Change Programme, with a view to publishing a significant proportion of the National Standards by the end of 2025. This timing ensures they are deliverable, evidence based and support the mission of the new national SEND and AP system to improve outcomes, build parental confidence and restore financial sustainability to the system.

Early Years SENCO training places

We have increased funding for an additional 2,000 SENCOs to be trained, taking the total up to 7,000. The number of EY SENCOs who have completed the training to date has already exceeded the monthly targets. The project is on track to train a minimum of 3,000 SENCOs by August 2024.

Workforce

The recruitment and retention of qualified staff is a priority for the department. In the SEND & AP Improvement Plan, we committed to exploring opportunities to build teachers' SEND expertise through the review of the Initial Teacher Training Core Content Framework and Early Career Framework (ECF). Our findings will be published in early 2024 and implemented when the ECF delivery contracts are renewed. Frontline staff will also benefit from the practice guides we are developing.

The number of Teaching Assistants (TAs) in schools has increased year on year since 2017/18, reaching 281,100 (FTE) TAs working in state funded schools in 2022/23. However, this is not a live picture and every school's circumstances are different. Schools can use our free Teacher Vacancies Service to recruit quality candidates and access levy funding to train and upskill TAs through the Level 3 Teaching Assistant Apprenticeship.

Regional disparities

Regional distribution of EY SENCO trainees

We note the Committee's concern about the regional distribution of early years SENCOs across the country. The data provided to the Committee on 17 July 2023, relates to the distribution of the current government-funded training offer, with the regional targets in the training contract determined by levels of economic

disadvantage. We'll continue to work with the training provider to fulfil the regional targets over the life of the contract.

Regional breakdown on the location of careers hubs

All areas of England have a Careers Hub, which over 90% of schools and colleges nationally are part of. Careers Hubs are aligned to Local Enterprise Partnership or Mayoral Combined Authority geographies. Further information on their location can be found at the [CEC website](#).

Progress checks at age two

Some areas have greater capacity to join up across education and health services than others so we will not be mandating an integrated review. However, we have published evidence, guidance and resources to encourage join up where possible and support local implementation of the healthy child programme on [GOV.UK](#).

I welcome the Committee's continued interest in our work to enable more children and young people with SEND to fulfil their potential. I look forward to working with you as we progress delivery of the commitments we set out in the SEND and AP improvement plan.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Johnston', with a stylized flourish at the end.

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