

Lamb Inquiry

Special educational needs and parental confidence

**Special Educational Consortium, RNID, 19-23 Featherstone Street,
London EC1Y 8SL**

Rt Hon Ed Balls MP
Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London SW1P 3BT

April 29th 2009

Dear Ed,

When I wrote to you in December last year I reported to you concerns arising from our meetings with parents last autumn. The meetings suggested that many parents do have confidence in the system, particularly where they feel they have a good SENCO, but too many reported that the system was not on their side and said they had to 'fight' or 'do battle' with the system to get what they needed for their child.

Given what I heard then, my immediate concerns were lack of compliance by schools and local authorities with their duties in relation to children with SEN and in relation to disability requirements and in particular the gaps in information that this left for parents.

You asked me to carry out a review of the SEN and disability information requirements with a view to achieving a number of objectives:

- meeting the needs of parents;
- providing greater transparency;
- providing a clearer focus on outcomes for children with SEN and disabled children;
- improving compliance with the duties
- take account of proposals on 21st century schools and report cards.

You asked me to report to you in April. I have pleasure in sending you my report today. I also enclose the research report that we commissioned to inform my recommendations to you.

I have found the same picture that I identified to you in December: with some parents full of praise for their child's school and for the local authority they work with; others feeling uninformed and sidelined. One parent told us, 'I have a lot of confidence in the school; knowing that contact is easy makes for confidence.' Another told us, 'Both our daughter and us were treated as a nuisance and dislike was obvious.'

I am recommending a number of measures to strengthen your approach to compliance: the publication by local authorities of school information; the signposting of local authority information by schools; a website where information for parents is brought together. I am also recommending that the National Strategies report to you on the extent of school and local authority compliance with the SEN and disability requirements and that you publish this report.

Compliance is important, but I am recommending that a bigger cultural change is needed in the way schools and local authorities engage with and communicate with parents and carers. The 'core offer,' developed through Aiming High for Disabled Children, provides a set of principles for working with parents and carers. Parents need to be confident not just that schools and local authorities will provide them with the necessary information, but that they will be listened to, that they will have policies and practices explained to them, and will be informed of their rights and entitlements. We need to shift the onus from parents having to find out for themselves, to schools and services finding out what parents need.

I believe there is scope for consolidating the requirements of school SEN policies in favour of locating SEN and disability information in 'mainstream' policies, where possible, for example a school's teaching and learning policy or its anti-bullying policy should include arrangements for disabled pupils and pupils with SEN. The development of the school report card and proposals for 21st century schools provide an opportunity to embed SEN and disability in the wider work of schools. This needs to include a tighter focus on outcomes for disabled pupils and pupils with SEN.

I am recommending that Ofsted tightens its procedures on SEN and disability. I welcome the focus of Ofsted inspections on vulnerable groups of children, from September this year. I am recommending that Ofsted take into account outcomes for disabled pupils and pupils with SEN in their proposals for limiting judgements. However, I am still concerned about whether SEN and disability issues will have sufficient priority within the inspection provisions and the accountability framework as a whole.

I also want to highlight a further concern. I continue to receive evidence from parents of children with a statement who are deeply unhappy about the process they have had to go through. I have concerns about the variable quality of statements and the lack of focus on outcomes. My recommendations on effective communication and engagement with parents will address some of the concerns around the issuing of statements, but I want to look further at the core issues of quality of statements, how clear statements are, whether they are understood by

parents and how they contribute to children's progress and achievement.

The Lamb Inquiry projects will be finishing in July and I will receive evaluation reports from the projects in early August. Early evidence suggests the projects are going to be very helpful in informing my final recommendations to you in September. I have had further meetings with my Advisers and with the Reference group for the Inquiry. Our visits and meetings continue and, with support from our consultants, I have support in gathering and analysing the evidence coming in to the Inquiry. The web-based gathering of evidence will run for the whole of May and into June. I have been kept informed, by your Department, on the development of the SEN outcomes pilot, Achievement for All.

I would propose to write to you again following the open consultation and before we have the evidence of the evaluation of the projects.

With best wishes,

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brian Lamb". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Brian Lamb OBE