



Rt Hon Ed Balls MP
Secretary of State

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29 April 2009

Dear 

Thank you for your letter today with recommendations on improving information for parents of children with special educational needs and disabled children (SEND).

Since I asked you to look at this issue in December 2008, as part of your inquiry into parental confidence in the SEN system, we have published *The Children's Plan One Year On*. In that document, we said that parent engagement had to be at the heart of the children's services system and this is particularly important for parents of children with SEND. I agree with you that our expectations of those working in schools and other children's services should be of good engagement and communication with parents, rather than simply providing information, and I accept your recommendations for improvements in this area.

You will be aware that we are investing £31m to improve outcomes for children with SEND, through the *Achievement for All* pilots, which will start in ten areas this September. An important part of these pilots will be a requirement for a conversation between schools and parents of children with SEND. Schools will listen to the concerns and aspirations of parents and children and reach agreement on what support will enable the child to achieve positive outcomes.

I asked you to consider how to improve compliance, so that parents and the public can be confident that statutory duties are being met, and I am grateful for your recommendations. Sarah McCarthy-Fry wrote to schools and local authorities earlier this year on the priority we attach to improving outcomes for children with SEND and the importance of local authorities complying with their duties. I will set out in detail in July how we will take forward your recommendations on compliance, in discussion with local authorities.

I also accept your recommendation that, wherever possible, we use the major reforms we are planning to make services responsive, personalised and



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accountable to **all** parents, work for parents of children with SEND. In preparing our White Paper on 21st century schools, I want to mainstream the needs of this group of parents and children in our proposals.

However, there are two areas where I would welcome your further advice. I note your concern about whether the Ofsted inspection provisions, and the wider changes to the school improvement and accountability framework, give sufficient priority to SEN and disability. While I accept your recommendations in this area, I would welcome your advice by July on whether any changes to the framework and its implementation are necessary, including through legislation.

The second area is on statements of special educational needs. I agree that we need to focus on better quality and clearer statements, whether they make sense to parents and their contribution to improving children's outcomes. Rather than wait until your final report, I would welcome interim advice in July about how we can make improvements in this area.

I appreciate the continuing hard work of you and your advisers.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Ed Balls', written in a cursive style.

ED BALLS MP