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Speech

Education Secretary announces new support for adoptive families

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson spoke at Coram's National Adoption Week reception announcing further funding to support new adoptive families

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From: [Department for Education](#) and [The Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP](#)

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It's a pleasure to be here with you today.

One of the best aspects of my job is that I am able to get out and about and speak to people, hearing for myself some of the great work that's being done right across the board, from nurseries right the way up to universities. I always go back to my desk after these visits full of inspiration and a new sense of purpose.

But I know that will be even more true of today.

Because today we are here to celebrate a very special group of people.

I'd like to start by thanking those of you who have made the commitment to either adopt or foster children and give them what every child needs, a home and a family. It's one of the most generous things a person can do, opening their home to a child or young person that needs the stability and love a family can provide. There are very few parallels in society that can match it – you are changing, transforming lives.

Because ladies and gentlemen, parenting is no walk in the park. In fact, it's one of the toughest gigs imaginable. I can safely say this as a parent of two absolutely – mostly - fantastic daughters. And I know that the government could build the best education system in the world, with the most brilliant teachers and the best resources, but it's not going to compare to the love and security of being placed with a devoted family.

Regardless of whether we have children or not, we all remember what it was like to be a child and how important parents were to us - and continue to be to us. In fact as we go through life, those parental bonds are one of life's constants.

As far as I'm concerned adoptive parents do all the same things birth parents do. Both provide the love and support a child needs to negotiate the challenges and joys of childhood and to help them make sense of the world. Both are there through all those rites of passage, the learning how to ride a bike, the teenage years. Both watch as they take their first steps towards independence and adulthood.

This government wants to do everything we can to help these parents, and is working with the wonderful sector to support more young people into the comfort and stability of an adoptive home. However in recent years, the trend that concerns us all is the disparity between numbers of children awaiting adoption and adoptive families ready to take them. There are simply not enough of you to go around and we desperately need to get more people like you. This is a trend that must change and I want to do everything I can to help you do that.

This is one of the reasons why it's so important to me to continue to support National Adoption Week, to raise awareness, to get more of the right people coming forward, and in the longer term, make sure that the

only barrier to adoption is finding a family that fits.

But it's also why the government is taking a number of steps to encourage more people to take on one of the most fulfilling jobs in the world, and give a child a loving and stable home.

First, there's our adoption support fund, which was set up in 2015, and has provided a range of therapeutic support for nearly 40,000 families who have been through traumatic times before adoption. Today I am delighted to announce that we are going to extend this fund through to 2021, so families can now continue to get funding for therapy for a whole year.

We have also had considerable success with our regional adoption agencies, which are managing to speed up matching children with adopter families and making sure that these are right for each other.

These are in place in 70% of the country and we aim to have all local authorities within the system by 2020.

Coram's Ambitious for Adoption was the first London Regional Adoption Agency and today I can announce four new London regional adoption agencies are now live. This is in addition to a new £645K recruitment booster fund to attract new adopters, working particularly with black churches and mosques, to help find homes for children who are harder to place, such as children from minority ethnic groups, those who are disabled, older, or who are in groups of brothers and sisters.

We are encouraging all adoption agencies to collaborate with those people who have already adopted children and with children who have been adopted, to make sure the views and experiences of all of them are taken into account. There is huge potential to learn from each other.

My department is also about to commission new research on applying behavioural insight approaches to recruiting foster carers and adopters, so that we get the right people for the children who are waiting for a home, right from the word go.

And we have cut the average time between a child entering care and being placed with a family by a third. It's now down to 14 months. It still takes too long and not all adoptive families receive the support they need. We're definitely going in the right direction. But we must go further.

None of this would be possible, of course, without some of the wonderful organisations that have been working over many decades in the interests of children who are not able to live with their birth parents, organisations like Adoption UK, Barnardo's, Home for Good as well as many others. But I would particularly like to thank Coram, which has been helping vulnerable children for centuries, nearly three of them to be

precise. All of you are doing incredible work and I am deeply grateful to all of you. Your ultimate aim, like mine, is to get more of the right people to come forward and take on this special role. Some may well have already been thinking about it and just need a nudge, others may never have entertained it but would make wonderful parents, and just need someone to plant that seed of an idea ... And the beauty is – as all of you know full well - you don't need any special qualifications, you don't need to be a certain age, you don't even need to be in a partnership. There's only one thing that's needed and that is that you can love and bring up a child.

I would like to finish by telling you that one of the reasons why I did not hesitate when the Prime Minister offered me the job as Education Secretary was because it meant that I had the chance to change things and change them for the better.

Now whatever you might think about politicians – and you don't need to tell me that our currency is not at its highest point right now – by and large we don't come into it because we want things to stay the same. Generally we want to see people leading, better, more prosperous lives.

That's certainly why I came into politics. No doubt it's something my parents passed on, that desire to make sure as many young people as possible get a good start in life. To my mind there is no more important job in government and being here today with you is all the proof I need for why I'm doing it – arguably the greatest step up the ladder, the easiest way to improve someone's social mobility, is to provide them with a loving, stable home.

Thank you.

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