



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

23<sup>rd</sup> October 2020

*Dear Constance,*

**RE: SIGN LANGUAGE IN SCHOOLS.**

Thank you for your recent correspondence in respect of teaching sign language in schools and the associated Early Day Motion (EDM); your comments upon which I have read with great interest.

Notwithstanding the fact that as a Government Minister I am unable to sign EDMs, in any event, I have general concerns about the effectiveness and expense of the EDM system, and I think it is much more effective to raise concerns directly with Ministers, both verbally, and in writing, rather than signing EDMs.

Clearly, every child should get the education that is right for them and I know that my ministerial colleagues are committed to this goal, and are supporting the education of all children and young people with special educational needs or a disability, including those with a hearing impairment.

I am pleased that schools can choose to offer sign language in their curriculum, or include it as part of their extra-curricular activities programme. This includes offering existing British Sign Language (BSL) qualifications. I understand that the Department for Education is also working with subject experts and Ofqual on introducing a BSL GCSE, with the intention to consult publicly on draft content early in 2021. The precise timings of this may be subject to change.

Beyond the school setting, the Government provides funding for adult learners aged 19 and over to undertake BSL qualifications through the Adult Education Budget, up to, and including, Level 2.

BSL forms part of the local flexibility offer (non-statutory) and qualifications are either fully funded (if the learner is unemployed or participating in the low wage trial), or co-funded depending on the age, prior achievement and employment status of the learner. BSL qualifications at Level 3 and above can be funded through an Advanced Learner Loan.

In addition, the Government has funded the development of a family sign language programme, known as the 'I-sign' programme, which is freely available at the National Deaf Children's Society family sign language website.

Once again, thank you for having taken the time to contact me and if I can ever be of any further assistance to you then please do not hesitate to contact me again.

*With best wishes,*  
*Tom*

**TOM PURSGLOVE MP**  
**MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT**  
**CORBY & EAST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE**