



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

2nd February 2024

Dear Constance,

RE: AUTISM AND EDUCATION

Thank you for your recent correspondence in respect of autistic people's experiences of education. I have read your comments with interest.

First, thank you for your kind invitation to attend the National Autistic Society's parliamentary event held on the 23rd January 2024. Unfortunately, owing to prior, longstanding diary commitments, I was unable to attend, although please rest assured that I will continue to follow the issues raised closely and it is an organisation I have worked with extensively in the past and I am very familiar with their important work.

I fully acknowledge that people with autism face a number of challenges at school. My colleagues at the Department for Education are aware of these barriers and are working to ensure that all students with autism receive the education they deserve.

In March 2023, the Government published its 'Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Alternative Provision (AP) Improvement Plan'. The improvement plan sets out that the Government will establish a single national system that delivers for every child and young person with special educational needs and disabilities from birth to age 25, so that they enjoy their childhood, achieve good outcomes, and are well prepared for their next step, whether that's employment, higher education, or adult services.

The transformation of the system will be underpinned by new national SEND and AP standards, which will give families confidence in what support they should receive and who will provide and pay for it, regardless of where they live. There will be new guides for professionals to help them provide the right support in line with the national standards, but suited to each child's unique experience, setting out for example how to make adjustments to classrooms to ensure a child remains in mainstream education.

This package forms part of the Government's significant investment into children and young people with SEND and in AP, with investment increasing by more than 60 percent, compared with 2019-20, to over £10.5 billion by 2024-25.

I would also make the point that all teachers need to be equipped to teach pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). High-quality teaching is the single most important in-school factor in improving outcomes for all pupils, including those with autism.

Training and development to support pupils with autism starts at the beginning of a teacher's training through their initial teacher training (ITT) course, which is then embedded through the 'Early Career Framework' (ECF). Careful consideration has been given to the needs of trainee teachers in relation to supporting pupils with SEND, and the ECF builds on that training for early career teachers.



The 'Teachers' Standards' already set clear expectations that teachers must understand the needs of all pupils, including those with SEND. To identify opportunities to build teacher expertise, the department is undertaking a review of the 'ITT Core Content Framework' and ECF. The review, due to be published in early 2024, has an aim to support trainees and early career teachers to be more confident in meeting the needs of children and young people with SEND, through engaging with the most up-to-date evidence to inform their practice and applying this in the contexts in which they work as new teachers.

Once teachers qualify and are employed in schools, head teachers also use their professional judgement to identify any further training, including specific specialisms, for individual staff that is relevant to them, the school, and its pupils; for example, through the Universal Services Programme.

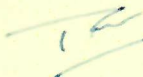
The programme offers online training, professional development groups, bespoke school and college improvement projects, sector led research, autism awareness training and a focus on preparation for adulthood, including employer led webinars. The programme commenced in May 2022 and will run until Spring 2025. Universal Services includes autism-specific training and resources led by the Autism Education Trust, with over 100,000 professionals undertaking autism awareness training since 2022.

So far, 6,500 school and college staff have accessed free online training modules, and 81 schools and over 135 colleges have identified and led their own SEND focused school improvement projects. These projects focused on SEND governance, teaching assistant deployment, early identification of SEND and curriculum.

Finally, the Government's current 'Autism Strategy' will run from 2021 to 2026 and is being implemented to improve the lives of children and adults with autism. This strategy aims to tackle the barriers autistic people face so they can live independent and fulfilling lives; ensure faster diagnosis and better access to health and social care for autistic people of all ages; and support better education, tailored to the needs of autistic children and young people.

This strategy was backed by £75 million in its first year alone, £40 million of which is through the 'NHS Long Term Plan' to improve capacity in crisis services and support children with complex needs in inpatient care.

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 PURSGLOVE MP
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT
CORBY & EAST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE