



Department
for Education

Department for Education
Ministerial and Public
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Mr Howard Lamb
The Surgery, 48 Marsh Road
Pinner, Middlesex
HA5 5NQ

Our ref: 2022-0008714

9 March 2022

Dear Mr Lamb

Thank you for your letter of 15 February addressed to the Prime Minister, regarding your concerns about diagnosing children with autism. Your letter has been forwarded to the Department for Education, as the issues you have raised fall within the department's policy remit. On this occasion, I have been asked to reply.

I was sorry to read about the circumstances you have described in your letter and can appreciate how difficult this must have been for the child you mention and his mother. We know that parents/guardians can face challenges when their child needs extra support in their education, and it is clearly important that children receive the appropriate support, so they can make good progress in their education.

However, I must explain that government ministers and officials are not in a position to comment on or attempt to intervene in individual cases. This is not because of any lack of concern, but so that there can be no risk of perceived or actual interference in the independence of the judiciary or other agencies which may be involved with cases such as social services.

If anyone feels a social worker has acted unprofessionally, they can make a formal complaint by contacting the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) at:

Fitness to Practise Department
The Health and Care Professions Council
Park House
184 Kennington Park Road
London
SE11 4BU

Phone: 020 7840 9814
Freephone: (in the UK): 0800 328 4218
Email: ftp@hcpc-uk.org
Website: www.hcpc-uk.org

Alternatively, the local County Council can be contacted as you have the right to make a formal complaint under the local council's complaints procedures. This can be done by writing to either the Director of Children's Services or the Designated Complaints Office for the county council. They must then consider the complaint, appointing at least one person independent of the county council to take part in dealing with the issues raised and provide you with a written response within 28 days.

I can see from your letter that you raised a complaint with the local authority at the time, and that that an appeal was also made to the First-tier Tribunal for Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) which is the correct process to follow.

Turning to your point about diagnosing a child with autism, I will provide you with some background information on this matter.

Giving autistic children and young people the right start in life is hugely important in ensuring that they can have successful and rewarding lives.

The Children and Families Act 2014 provides a framework for ensuring that autistic children are identified early and receive the support they need. The SEND Review will look at how the system has evolved since 2014, and how it can be made to work best for all children and young people and their families.

Autistic children often need support from education, health and social care, and ways of working that strengthen this join-up. Further improving joined-up support is a key part of the cross-government SEND Review and Autism Strategy.

The department has worked closely with the Department of Health and Social Care to develop a refreshed cross-government Autism Strategy. This recognises the progress that has been made, as well as the challenges and priorities for reducing inequalities, and enabling autistic people of all ages to have the same opportunities as everyone else to lead healthy, happy and fulfilling lives.

The new, national strategy for autistic children, young people and adults: 2021 to 2026, was published on the 21st July 2021, and sets out our vision to make life fundamentally better for autistic people, their families, and carers by 2026. This can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-strategy-for-autistic-children-young-people-and-adults-2021-to-2026/the-national-strategy-for-autistic-children-young-people-and-adults-2021-to-2026>.

The new autism strategy has, for the first time, been extended to children and young people, as well as adults, in recognition of the importance of ensuring that they are diagnosed and receive the right support as early as possible and across their lifetime. It is backed by funding of over £74 million in the first year alone to improve understanding in society, reduce diagnosis waiting times and improve access to and the quality of health, social care, and education for autistic people.

The department has funded the Autism Education Trust (AET) since 2011 to deliver autism awareness training to education staff in early years, schools and further education settings. It has so far reached more than 305,000 people and has

developed good autism practice guidance and practice frameworks aimed at supporting and improving practice within education settings.

I hope this information is helpful and once again, thank you for writing on this important matter.

Your correspondence has been allocated reference number 2022-0008714. If you need to respond to us, please visit <https://www.education.gov.uk/contactus> and quote your reference number.

Yours sincerely

D Birkett
Ministerial and Public Communications Division

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