



HOUSE OF COMMONS

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Dear Secretary of State

Re: Provision for Developmental Language Disorder in Sheffield

I have been contacted by a constituent of mine in relation to her son and their experience of accessing support for his Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) in Sheffield.

Because of the lack of provision within our own Local Authority due to massive under-resourcing from Central Government, this young man has to travel an hour each way to a school in Mansfield to get the specialised support he needs. This comes at an annual cost of £55,000 to the Local Authority as there is no dedicated provision within the city.

In an attempt to navigate the system and seek ways of working together, I called a meeting of various agencies in January and the resounding message from that was the lack of adequate funding from Central Government with an £18 million deficit for SEN and within that, £6 million short for the high needs block. This is in the context of over 3000 young people accessing support for Speech and Language Therapy in Sheffield, and a 97% take up of the service for those who need it within the 1 – 3 year old category.

I was advised that the Local Authority and NHS have worked together to deliver this service, but they have been hampered by the loss of Sure Start, the impact of which I am sure you are aware.

The CCG recognise that more investment in therapy services is needed but this has recently been delayed due to a lack of capacity. Indeed, the CCG advised me that they currently have 5 FTE vacancies in the SLT service out of 50 staff. I was advised that the struggle to recruit is attributable to the withdrawal of the student nurse

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bursary, extortionate tuition fees, and concerns around Brexit.

The view of the Local Authority is that the challenge under the existing government is how to make SEND more valuable in terms of an inclusive approach. There was recognition that the move to a funding formula based on vulnerabilities will be much more effective, but the resourcing still needs to be adequate.

We heard that, very often, children hit crisis before their needs are identified. Attempts to tackle this have been introduced via Vulnerable Learner Reviews at primary level in order to monitor changes within certain individuals. This started in Sept 2018 and the Local Authority is looking to roll this out to Reception and Primary classes every 2 years. An initial review took place last year and the Local Authority is now moving onto a review of an integrated strategy working with other agencies to consider how to overcome challenges. The commitment to make this work is clear, with lots of innovative thinking, but the agencies are clearly struggling under the pressure of insufficient funding, and the service users are suffering as a result because there is only finite capacity within any of the agencies involved.

It is clear to me that action needs to be taken in relation to the following areas:

- A review of SEN funding so that it is allocated based on need
- Best practice guidance should be provided to local authorities on how to be robust with schools on their spending on SEN e.g. not going into general pot.
- Teacher training should include provision to allow early identification and assessment of young people with special needs.

I would be grateful if you could provide me with an update on what steps the government is taking on all of the above.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Louise Haigh', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Louise Haigh MP