

Emma Mander

Stockport

21st September 2023

Secretary of State for Education
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Dear Secretary of State for Education

We the undersigned, are parents and caregivers for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND). Our SEND children have been let down time and time again by an education system that lacks resource, training and understanding, and by behaviour policies that sanction behaviours that are beyond our children's control.

Despite overwhelming evidence about the positive outcomes from a more therapeutic approach, outdated sanction led behaviour policies remain in our schools, and continuously let down children with SEND and anxiety.

Our neurodiverse children have been punished, isolated, suspended and even expelled from education because their Autism, Sensory difficulties, Anxiety, ADHD or other needs are not understood, and their needs are left unmet. The mental health difficulties in our children are much worse since COVID than the Government acknowledges. Yet, parents have been threatened with police action or had communication blocks imposed on us where we are trying to advocate for our children, and families have been left traumatised and isolated.

Many of us have had to fight for years to access resources and support for our children, and often only with the help of specialist third sector organisations like Great Minds Together who have helped and guided us to navigate this complex, challenging and difficult system – which begs the question, how many children and young people are falling straight through all of these gaps?

Even if your government succeeded in reducing the diagnosis time down to two years, a great deal of trauma can occur over a 24-month period, and in the time leading up to even beginning the diagnosis process. We are depriving our children of sufficient access to education and failing them. What does this mean for the country's future?

The Educational psychologists that are required to deliver the care plans in schools are under-resourced and there are no current means to increase the number with only 203 funded places being allocated each year. What we know is the last figure for children waiting for an autism assessment alone is 140,000 – that we know about. These figures do not add up, children will continue to be failed if this isn't changed.

We know schools are already underfunded, with only statutory work for special educational needs and disability being provided by the local authority some schools are now required to commission their own educational psychology service – which they don't have the funding to do. With some schools only able to allocate funding for 2 children per year for an Educational Psychology Assessment.

We urge the Government to consider the important role of educational psychologists and the positive impact this can have in schools to ensure that mental health services are available for those in need, but most importantly for the children of our country.

Needs that are left undiagnosed and unmet are likely to worsen and cause significant damage to our children's' mental health. Unmet needs are frequently manifested in the Tier 3.5 Crisis intervention programme of Great Minds Together. Once at crisis point, the resources and funding required for the most severe cases can cost upward of £50k a week. Many of these cases could have been prevented had the correct support and resources been in place early on, many of these cases start with having unmet and/or unidentified needs at school and children who struggle to cope in the school environment, and the impact of lack of knowledge, understanding and behaviour policies that only exasperate needs, not help them.

We ask that your department review the behaviour policies and educational psychologist resources in schools and look at how we can better support our children and young people with SEND. Implementing a therapeutic behaviour approach as a statutory expectation nationwide, and allocating a full-time Educational and/or Clinical Psychologist to every mainstream school will significantly reduce costs in other areas on the system including social care and the NHS and most importantly it will help schools meet the needs of our children more effectively.

Your Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Emma Mander." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Emma Mander