Rt Hon Ed Balls MP
Secretary of State

Sanctuary Buildings Great Smith Street Westminster London SW1P 3BT
tel: 0870 0012345 dcsf.ministers@dcsf.gsi.gov.uk

Toby Salt
Deputy Chief Executive
Strategic Director - School Leadership Development
National College for
Leadership of Schools and Children's Services
Lime House
Mere Way
Ruddington
NG11 6JW

5 March 2010

Dear Toby

INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF TEACHER SUPPLY FOR PUPILS WITH SEVERE LEARNING DIFFICULTIES (SLD) AND PROFOUND AND MULTIPLE LEARNING DIFFICULTIES (PMLD)

Thank you very much for undertaking this important and timely review into the supply of teachers trained to meet the needs of pupils with severe learning difficulties, and pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties.

As you highlight in your report, children with the most complex educational needs, such as those with severe, profound and multiple learning difficulties, are some of the most potentially vulnerable in our education system. They need – and deserve - the best of the teaching profession to enable them to fulfil their potential at school, and in their adult lives.

I asked you to identify in your review the key barriers to the supply of trained teachers for pupils with SLD and PMLD, but also the opportunities for improvement and good practice. I am impressed with the extent to which you have been able to clarify the key issues and to identify their root causes. I am also encouraged by the examples that you cite of existing good practice and specialist training. These should be shared and built upon in the future.

My Department is already making significant investment in special educational needs and disability teaching and learning to strengthen special education teaching and ensure that it is developed as an integral part of the education system.

Most recently, as you are aware, this has included up to £4m to take forward recommendations from the recent Lamb inquiry, to ensure that teachers have access

to advanced and specialist SEN training. We have invested millions in developing the *Achievement for All* pilots to raise achievement and participation for children with SEN and disabilities, and in nationally accredited training to support legislation requiring all SEN Co-ordinators to be qualified teachers. We also have clear commitments in the 21st Century Schools White Paper to greater inclusion and participation for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities.

I see your review as an important part of our wider investment in this sector.

The evidence in your report presents a strong case for why we should invest further in teachers of children with, severe, multiple and profound learning difficulties. You highlight some important and urgent issues that I am keen are addressed as soon as possible, particularly:

- the range of specialist opportunities offered to trainee and newly qualified teachers;
- the quality and consistency of specialist professional development opportunities available to experienced teachers in mainstream and special schools;
- the disproportionally high level of leaders in special schools nearing retirement age, whose expertise will need to be replaced over the next five to seven years.

Your report also indicates that some teachers who gave evidence to the review did not feel valued by the wider teaching profession for the specialist skills that they could offer, and that they felt it was difficult to progress professionally outside a special school context. This is an unacceptable situation - teachers of pupils with very complex needs must not feel sidelined. The best support must be available for specialist teachers to feel recognised and rewarded for the work that they do, to progress in their careers, and to encourage others to enter this sector of teaching.

In your letter to me of 25 February 2010, you suggest that your recommendations would have greatest impact if taken forward as a whole. Given the strength of evidence presented in your report, and the breadth of issues identified, I agree and accept all your recommendations in full.

My Department will publish a plan later this month to set out how your recommendations will be implemented, and how, over the next year, we will allocate £600,000 to:

- ***develop a six month ITT specialist option and a Teach First specialist route*** for pilots to start in 2011, plus specialist induction support for newly qualified teachers, to provide more opportunities for trainee teachers to experience specialist teaching and increase the supply of skilled specialist teachers for the future;

- ***clarify existing QTS rules, particularly in relation to special school placements and specific arrangements for overseas trained teachers***, to ensure that new and prospective teachers who wish to enter specialist teaching are supported in achieving qualified teacher status in specialist settings, as part of wider QTS requirements;

- ***commission new self-study training modules on SLD and PMLD and develop a method of quality assuring specialist CPD materials,*** to ensure that all teachers have access to the quality SLD/ PMLD professional development materials that they need to develop their teaching skills and continue to improve outcomes for children;

- ***set in place new arrangements to collect data on specialist teacher demand and supply,*** to provide more detailed information on this sector and manage supply to this sector effectively for the future.

I am very grateful for your swift and thorough work on this review to highlight crucial issues that need addressing now to ensure that we develop a truly excellent specialist teaching workforce for the future.

Like you, I want to see real, positive differences made to teacher supply for this vitally important area of specialist teaching. My Department has a high level of commitment to ensuring that all children get the quality of education that they deserve to fulfil their potential, and I want SLD/ PMLD teacher supply to be a priority within this wider context. To ensure that this momentum is maintained, I would be grateful if you could review progress on this work in a year's time and report back to my Department on your findings.

As you make clear in your report, this is not a large population of teachers or children, but it is a very important one. Approximately 38,000 school-aged children in England have severe, or profound and multiple learning difficulties. We need teachers with the relevant skills and experience to meet the needs of every one of these children. If, as your report indicates, this number is likely to grow in the future, then we need to prepare now. I believe that targeted action now will be effective in creating the skilled teachers and leaders that we will need for the future.

By taking forward the work outlined above, I expect to see more of the most highly skilled teachers being attracted into this area of teaching, access for those already in this sector to practical, relevant support to continually develop their skills, and a wider teaching profession in which specialist teaching skills which are highly valued and utilised.

Most importantly, I want the impact of this to be witnessed in improved outcomes for children who have the most severe, multiple, and profound learning difficulties, and who deserve our best care.

Yours sincerely,

ED BALLS MP