



Edward Timpson MP

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families

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3rd

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Den Adopter,

I'm writing to you and everyone who has adopted a child from care to express my sincere thanks for the commitment and energy you bring to parenting some of our most vulnerable children.

My own parents adopted two boys, as well as being foster carers to more than 80 children, so I understand the challenges that many of you face on a daily basis. In my two years as Children's Minister I have met with many of you, and I know that too many of you feel that the love and commitment created within your families is not always met by the support you and your children need from mainstream and specialist services.

As this is National Adoption Week I also wanted to tell you about what the Government is doing to improve this, and to improve the adoption system.

Recruitment and Matching

We promised to remove delay and frustration from the process for both children and adopters. To achieve that, we have:

- Introduced a quicker approvals process so that adopters can now be approved in just 6 months, and so that people who have already adopted a child can be "fast tracked" for another adoption in the future;
- Created a one stop-shop for information and advice for potential and existing adopters <http://www.first4adoption.org.uk/>;
- Supported adoption activity days to allow approved adopters a greater involvement in identifying children they might adopt;
- Invested £17 million in the voluntary sector to increase the capacity of voluntary adoption agencies to recruit adopters;

- Invested a further £200 million to reform and improve local authority services.

As a result of these reforms, as well as the huge efforts of local authorities and voluntary adoption agencies, we saw the number of adoptions rising to over 5,000 adoptions in 2013-14. This is a 63 per cent increase in just the last three years. It means thousands more of our most vulnerable children have found the loving and permanent homes they so desperately need.

Adoption Support Fund

However, once adopted a child's needs don't change overnight. We know that children adopted from care have often lived through terrible experiences which do not just simply disappear when they have settled with their new families. It is vital that children are given the right support they need and the education they deserve to help them get on in life. Last year, I announced the development of a new Adoption Support Fund to improve access to therapeutic services to support adoptive parents and their children. We have since been working with 10 local authorities and voluntary sector partners to test out how the fund could work in practice. We have approved 68 applications for specialist adoption support services totalling £321, 526 with an overall average of £4, 728 per application.

I can confirm that we will be introducing a new national Adoption Support Fund across all areas of the country in 2015, supported by over £19m government funding. It will provide adoptive families with the right support - from cognitive therapy to music and play therapy and attachment based therapy - to ensure that these children have a stable and fulfilling childhood - a fundamental right for every child, no matter what their starting point in life. Further details about how the fund can be accessed by you and your family will be issued later this year, and will be available from your adoption agency and the First4Adoption website <http://www.first4adoption.org.uk/>

Education

We have also prioritised adopted children in our education reforms. If your child is 2 years old and was adopted from care you are entitled to 570 hours of free early education or childcare a year (this is often taken as 15 hours each week). More information can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/free-early-education>. For more information about provision in your area, you should contact your local authority's Family Information Service.

We have also changed the rules so that all children adopted from local authority care have top priority for admissions for state-funded schools, including academies. This means that your child should be able to attend whichever school you think best meets their needs. More information can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-admission-of-children-adopted-from-local-authority-care>

In May 2014 eligibility for the pupil premium was extended to all children adopted

from care in schools. The pupil premium is additional funding (worth £1,900 per adopted child this financial year) to help make sure vulnerable and disadvantaged children get the support they need to thrive at school. You should ask your school how they are using this funding to support your child and other adopted children. (The funding allocated to schools is based on the number of adopted children they have, so you should make sure the Headteacher knows your child is adopted.) Further information is available from <http://www.first4adoption.org.uk/being-an-adoptive-parent/adoption-support/pupil-premium/>

Health Support

Many adopted children need the support of mainstream and specialist health services, but sometimes struggle to obtain these. We have therefore asked all national and local health service commissioners to specifically consider adopted children's needs when developing local services, and have commissioned the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) to develop guidance on attachment issues to help professionals respond to the specific needs of many adopted children.

The government has also set up a taskforce to overhaul the way Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) is commissioned, to ensure young people are offered the most appropriate care, whether in the community or in hospital. Over the coming months I'll be working with Ministerial colleagues to ensure that the particular needs of adopted children are met by this work.

Thank you again for all you do.
Kindest regards,
Edward.

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