

**Jennette Arnold OBE AM**City Hall  
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More London  
London SE1 2AA**Our ref:** MGLA021014-8345**Date:** 18 NOV 2014

Dear Jennette

Thank you for your letter of 30 September about support for children with complex needs. I apologise for the delay in responding to you.

It is clear that London is going through a time of rapid change, with pressures on schools increasing all the time. These changes pose particular challenges to excellent education for all children in London. Nevertheless, I am committed to providing a good school place for every child, including those identified with complex needs. My Education Programme is striving to prepare all of London's children for life and work in a global city.

I am glad that you found the 2013 Annual Education Report useful in highlighting the achievement gap at GCSE level between children identified with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and their non-SEN peers. I agree that this is an important issue and requires attention.

The term 'Special Educational Needs' is complex, in that it acts as an umbrella term for a variety of different needs. As you have specifically referred to the term 'complex needs' in your letter, I assume that you are most interested in what my Education Programme is doing to meet the needs of those pupils who are experiencing the most severe difficulties in accessing mainstream provision. So, this response is framed by a definition of SEN as children identified with severe and complex needs who, almost exclusively, hold a Statement of SEN.

I agree that increasing parental influence over decisions made that affect their children's education is an important step forward. However, I also recognise that parents, schools and health services will require support to ensure that the recommendations are implemented effectively. The reforms to the SEN system, as introduced by the 2014 Children and Families Act, are a good example of the rapid change that London's education system is responding to. The new and forthcoming DfE guidance materials will provide support to help with implementing the new Code of Practice that has arisen from the Act. In particular, the published support guide: 'Special educational needs and disabilities: a guide for parents and carers' will be useful to many parents who are struggling with the reforms.

You will be aware that there are long-standing challenges to effective multi-agency work in meeting the needs of children with complex needs, and successful implementation of new Education, Health and Care plans will require these challenges to be overcome. This should ensure that we see better public service integration in education. My Education and Youth team are currently scoping out these specific challenges, and ensuring that the Education Programme is taking account of them.

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Three of the pathfinder local authorities for the reforms are in the London boroughs of Bromley, Bexley and Enfield. Challenges that have been reported by pathfinder schools so far include: insufficient involvement of children in decision-making, the challenge of managing parental expectations, key worker capacity difficulties and limited multi-agency involvement leading to incomplete plans. Once all of the pathfinder reports have been published, I will work with other stakeholders on the London-specific challenges, and identify any support which the Greater London Authority may provide.

I agree that an inclusive ethos in London schools should be advocated, with a focus on mainstream provision for all children. Thus, all London schools should be inclusive in their admissions. However, I recognise that there are some instances in which the needs of some children are better met through the facilities of specialist provision.

The 2014 Children and Families Act sets out the principles that local authorities must have regard to when supporting disabled children and young people and those with SEN. I expect London boroughs to adhere to these principles; they embody an inclusive culture. This stretches to all schools - new and old, LA-controlled and Academies. I expect that they follow the Admissions Code, and adhere to the new DfE guidelines on SEN.

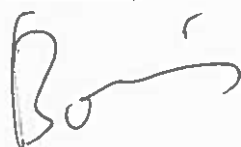
As you will be aware, the London Schools' Gold Club celebrates and shares exceptional practice in London's schools. Currently only six per cent of London's schools qualify. The Gold Club criteria are currently based on academic outcomes, with a particular focus on the most disadvantaged children, such as those eligible for free school meals or with previous low attainment. Already within this cohort, there are some schools that are demonstrating exceptional academic attainment, despite significant numbers of disadvantaged children, such as Cherry Orchard Primary school in Greenwich (35 per cent SEN), Roman Road school in Newham (33 per cent SEN) and Elm Wood School in Lambeth (30 per cent SEN).

I have established a working group, which includes schools representatives, to identify appropriate measures for the inclusion of Special Schools and Alternative Provisions in the Gold Club. I would be happy to report back to you on their conclusions when appropriate.

I agree that it is important to advocate that all schools are inclusive in design, whether they are new build schools, existing schools or free schools which are taking over existing buildings. I expect all schools to make reasonable adjustments to their buildings, to ensure that children are given access to the facilities that they require in order to participate in the learning environment effectively, whilst acknowledging the challenges and restrictions of space in London.

Finally, I hope that you and other Assembly members will join me in celebrating the success of London's schools at the Annual Education Conference this week.

Yours ever,



**Boris Johnson**  
Mayor of London