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Vicky Ford MP

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families

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30 July 2021

Dear Mr Clack,

Thank you for your email of 13 July following my visit to Oswaldtwistle School.

Sara Britcliffe and I very much enjoyed meeting Mrs McKenna and her excellent team when we visited the school earlier this month.

It was also good to meet some of the very inspiring children and young people that the school supports. One of my very first visits after taking over as the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families was to an alternative provision (AP) school in East London. Soon afterwards the coronavirus outbreak took hold and while I was not able to visit any more schools, I have met regularly with a group of AP leaders.

I have been incredibly impressed by the way that AP schools like yours have responded to these very challenging circumstances. The hard work and dedication of AP leaders, staff and governing bodies has ensured that thousands of often very vulnerable children and young people have remained safe, supported and engaged in education throughout the pandemic.

I can assure you that AP is one of my main ministerial priorities. As part of the department's SEND Review, we will be setting out plans for reforms of the AP system, which will incentivise early support, and ensure those who are permanently excluded have access to high-quality education in Pupil Referral Units and other types of AP schools.

As I discussed with Mrs McKenna, I am very concerned about the numbers of AP pupils in England who disengage from education after year 11. That is why we have established an £8 million AP transition fund for year 11 students to counteract the ongoing disruption caused by the coronavirus outbreak. Last year, this fund helped around 6,500 year 11 students to move into suitable post-16 destinations. I was very pleased to learn that last year some pupils from your school were supported by the fund and that 96% of the year 11s continued in education, employment or training. I hope that this year's fund will help the year 11s who left Oswaldtwistle this summer.

Please extend my thanks to Mrs McKenna for hosting the visit, Sandra and Paul who showed us around the school, the teachers who allowed us to join their lessons and Olivia, the year 11 pupil who greeted us when we arrived. We were made to feel very welcome. This is an outstanding achievement and I hope that after the restrictions have eased, myself and departmental officials will be able to carry out more visits to schools like Oswaldtwistle to see at first hand the invaluable support that AP schools provide.

Thank you for writing about this important matter. I hope this reply is useful.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Vicky Ford". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a small dash at the end.

Vicky Ford MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families