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Claire Coutinho MP

Minister for Children, Families and Wellbeing

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Cllr Sophie Conway
Chair, Children and Young People Scrutiny Commission
London Borough of Hackney

Cllr Margaret Gordon
Vice Chair, Children and Young People Scrutiny Commission
London Borough of Hackney

By email: martin.bradford@hackney.gov.uk

26 June 2023

Dear Cllr Conway and Cllr Gordon,

Thank you for your letter of 14 April, addressed to the Secretary of State, about legislative requirements to bring unregistered educational settings within regulatory oversight to reduce associated safeguarding risks. I am replying as the minister responsible for this policy area and apologise for the delayed response.

May I begin by thanking you for drawing my attention to the risks posed to children being educated in unregistered educational settings. Many of the points you raise were raised separately with me in a letter of 10 March from Philip Glanville and Antoinette Bramble.

In my response to Philip and Antionette I reiterated that it remains the department's intention to legislate on the safeguarding measures that were in the discontinued 2022 Schools Bill when parliamentary time allows. This includes the children not in schools register, extending the independent schools registration requirement and powers to investigate unregistered schools).

Given that local authorities (LAs) are legally responsible for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children in their areas, regardless of the educational setting they attend, it is crucial to explore what more can be done with the existing powers available to LAs. The department and Ofsted are to intervene and ensure that all children receive a safe and suitable education which equips children for life in modern Britain. Practical steps can be taken at present, and we should not wait for new legislation in this area before acting. In particular, I am keen to explore with LAs, such as Hackney, whether a more effective use of School Attendance Orders may drive a behaviour change in those communities you have concerns about or have otherwise positive impacts.

I concluded my letter to Philip and Antionette by suggesting, as a first step, that they facilitate an official-level meeting to examine what more can be done under existing powers. Such a meeting would further help inform departmental thinking ahead of any future legislation. That suggestion remains.

Thank you for writing on this important matter. I hope you will find this reply useful.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Claire Coutinho', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Claire Coutinho MP
Minister for Children, Families and Wellbeing