



Department
of Health &
Social Care

From Gillian Keegan MP
Minister of State for Care and Mental Health

39 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0EU

020 7210 4850

PO-1315616

Ms Kamini Gadhok MBE
Chief Executive
Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists
By email to: ceo@rcslt.org

27 October 2021

Dear Ms Gadhok,

Thank you for your correspondence of 17 March to the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, co-signed by leaders of a number of sector organisations, about the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists' Building Back Better report. I apologise for the delay in replying.

The Government recognises the importance of speech and language therapy, and of supporting people with communication and swallowing needs. We recognise that this has been a particularly challenging time for many disabled people. We are taking forward a number of actions to support them, including children and their families.

As part of our COVID-19 recovery plan, we are working with the Department for Education (DfE) and NHS England and NHS Improvement (NHSE&I) to look at how we can improve therapies for disabled children. NHSE&I published guidance entitled *COVID-19 restoration of community health services for children and young people: second phase of NHS response* on 3 June 2020, and this was updated on 31 July 2020. This made clear that essential community services, including speech and language therapy, must be prioritised for children and young people up to 25 with special educational needs and disabilities.

The department, in partnership with the DfE, has issued guidance to support local commissioners and service leads when commissioning speech, language and communication services. To support improved early identification of speech, language and communication needs in young children, we have introduced an early identification standard as part of the two to two-and-a-half year universal health review for children delivered by health visitors. DfE has also invested in the Nuffield Early Language Intervention programme to support pupils with communication skills. Every state school with a reception class in England is able to apply through the programme for training and resources to assist in raising outcomes in children's early language, communication and speech skills. As part of the Government's commitment to build back better, we have also launched a £500million Mental Health Recovery Action Plan. This plan aims to respond to the impact of the pandemic on the mental health of the public.

I would be grateful if you could share this reply with your co-signatories.

GILLIAN KEEGAN