



**Rt Hon Damian Hinds MP**  
Secretary of State

Sanctuary Buildings Great Smith Street Westminster London SW1P 3BT  
tel: 0370 000 2288 [www.education.gov.uk/help/contactus](http://www.education.gov.uk/help/contactus)

Jo Churchill MP  
via email: [jo.churchill.mp@parliament.uk](mailto:jo.churchill.mp@parliament.uk)

31 October 2018

Dear Jo,

Thank you to you and your fellow Suffolk MPs, James Cartlidge (South Suffolk), Dan Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich), Therese Coffey (Suffolk Coastal) and Peter Aldous (Waveney), for taking the time to meet with me to discuss your concerns about school and high needs funding in your local area.

During the meeting, you highlighted concerns about the capacity of the education and social care system to deal with rising levels of demand. You commented particularly on:

- the rise in prevalence of autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) diagnoses;
- the shortage of specialist places, which is increasing the distance children have to travel to receive their education;
- the mismatch between provision available and the range of children's needs;
- inadequate levels of CAMHS support being provided in Suffolk, and the poor links with education; and
- the importance of training for teachers, to equip them to deal with children with complex needs both in initial teacher training and continuous professional development activity.

As we discussed, it is important to think through the incentives in the system, given the current trend that a greater proportion of children with complex special needs are in specialist rather than mainstream provision. We must ensure the system has enough capacity, and I agree there is a clear need for teachers to be adequately trained in this area. I am keen to explore how we might ensure schools have access to counselling and support services, and that young people's needs are identified early enough for something to be done before problems escalate and require more drastic interventions.

My officials have noted Suffolk Council's plans, which you mentioned, and which I understand have been discussed at Suffolk schools forum meetings earlier this year. My department also received a bid from the council for a 60 place special school in Ipswich for children with autism. Like all free school waves, this is a competitive process and we will assess all bids against the criteria. We are looking to approve around 30 new special and alternative provision free schools in total in this wave and in early 2019 we will invite applications to find trusts to open the schools in the successful local authority areas.