**February 2024**

**Support for Dingley’s Promise Manifesto – Improving funding access for children with SEND in the early years.**

Dear ,

I am writing in support of the manifesto shared by Dingley’s Promise, specialists in early years SEND practice.

The current situation for local authorities, early years education providers and families of children with SEND is in crisis. Numbers of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) are rising quickly across the country and adversely, places available for children with SEND are scandalously low.

As outlined in the recent government SEND and Alternative Provision plan, the best start in the early years is critical for an inclusive education system, however due to funding pressures on local authorities and settings, children with additional needs are being turned away and parental trust in the education system is being lost.

With the new early years entitlements, without an expansion in provision, we are facing a worsening situation for those who are the most vulnerable in the education system.

**Funding**

The funding system is not working for a number of reasons:

* Settings are in many cases being forced to fund SEND support themselves – especially when a child first arrives, and they have to pay for support while applying for funding.
* The link between Disability Access Funding and Disability Living Allowance puts added pressure and stress on families, who have to make the detailed application so that settings can access the funding.
* Special Educational Needs Inclusion Funding (SENIF) has a complex application process and is often given for less hours than the child’s entitlement.

**We recommend:**

* The application process for SENIF to be reviewed so that it is truly reflective of the cost of delivering specialised care and is as simple as possible to speed up the process of accessing funds.
* Removing the link between DAF and DLA to make funding more easily accessible and taking unnecessary pressure off parents.
* Ring-fencing part of the High Needs Block specifically to support children in the early years.

We urge you to raise these points in forthcoming parliamentary debates to ensure that this important issue is addressed as soon as possible, and we can start to see an improvement in access for children with SEND to their early years entitlements. Without urgent action, many of these children and their families will be failed by the education system before they even start school.

Yours Sincerely