



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson MP
Secretary of State for Education
Rt Hon Wes Streeting MP
Secretary of State for Health

Copy to:
Helen Hayes MP, Chair, Education Committee
Florence Eshalomi MP, Chair,
Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee

23rd February 2026

Epidemic of avoidable SEND child suicide

Dear Secretaries of State,

I have been working with The Times to expose the agony and horror of the SEND scandal. Over the past weeks I have cried with more parents whose child has avoidably killed themselves than I ever wish to remember. Their parents' anger burned. Their deaths were avoidable because they had special educational needs and they were ignored by the state through misconduct, neglect and underfunding. Twenty of their stories are in The Times.

In one instance, thirteen-year-old Eivie White, from Maidstone, killed herself following years of failures and denials to provide the support she needed in school. Her older sister found Eivie's body. She had to remain sleeping in the room Eivie hanged herself in because the local authority refused to give them new housing. Eivie's best friend killed herself six months later, aged thirteen.

These twenty children, who took their own lives after years of documented institutional failure in education would, under the government's proposed reforms leaked on 18th February in The Times, likely have been deemed to have so-called "predictable" needs: stripped of an EHCP, denied an enforceable right to specialist provision, and left their families without any clear legal route to challenge decisions that resulted in their deaths.

While I welcome the proposed funding increases in the government's reforms and focus on early intervention, if the Times is accurate, they would remove existing legal rights and EHCP protections from the very group of children this investigation has identified as being at the highest risk of severe mental health collapse and avoidable suicide because their educational needs are not being met. They are likely to result in more tragedy.

This is on top of 204 testimonies of anonymous suicide attempts which I have published on my website, within 1,253 testimonies of harmful, unethical or unlawful behaviour by 134 local authorities on SEND. One testimony, from Leicester, says:

“Refusal to even assess my daughter for an EHCP who was seriously struggling. My daughter was suicidal aged 8, she would try to stab herself, choke herself, throw herself down the stairs, bang her head against the wall. No one cared, no one did a thing. LA did nothing. CAMHS did nothing (still waiting on a list three years). We now home educate which was out of sheer necessity to save her life. I am a single parent... so obviously this has meant a great personal sacrifice. I was working as a scientist and building my career.”

When I submitted the first 653 of these testimonies, across 114 local authorities, to the Education Committee, the Chair, Helen Hayes MP, wrote to me saying that they shared many of my concerns. The Local Government Ombudsmen wrote to me about their “common concerns.” When I submitted over 100 of these testimonies specifically concerning Surrey County Council to the Education Secretary, the Education Secretary agreed to intervene in Surrey County Council. There are 133 local authorities which also need examining.

As Dr Georgia Richards from the Preventable Deaths Tracker has said, there is no national centralised system to collate, analyse or learn from deaths following an inquest. We do not even know how many of these suicides there are. It is likely from the indicators above alone, that hundreds of SEND children are avoidably committing suicide. Whether we tolerate this goes to the heart of who we are as a country.

We all know that local authorities are chronically underfunded on SEND, but the testimonies overwhelmingly show that too often this has led to corner cutting, brutalisation, and a culture of dishonesty. This must be rooted out and replaced with vigorous new accountability mechanisms in local authority governance.

I remain convinced that a SEND system focused on properly funded early intervention, appropriate support at school, including for mental health, and integration with employers would be cheaper than today’s brutalised system which has cost so many lives. Analysis from the Early Intervention Foundation has demonstrated that billions are spent on late and crisis intervention where unmet needs escalate. Nobel Laureate James Heckman has repeatedly shown that well-targeted early support in childhood generates significant long-term return on investment to the public purse. A reform programme that fails to consider these downstream impacts risks securing short term budgetary wins at the cost of long-term fiscal sustainability and the futures of thousands of children with SEND.

Cutting children’s rights in favour of local authorities when possibly hundreds of children are killing themselves because of failings by these same local authorities, would be a catastrophic error. I will continue to hold the government and local authorities accountable in the national media for as long as it takes until there is a just education system which gives our SEND children the opportunity and hope which is their right and our country’s duty.

Kind regards,



Chris Coghlan MP
Dorking & Horley
Liberal Democrats