



Mr Nadhim Zahawi MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families
Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith Street
Westminster
London
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11 May 2018

Our ref: NE/jh

Dear Mr Zahawi

2014-17 Adoption Scorecards

I am writing with a formal response to your letter dated 8 May 2018.

I recognise the data you are raising with us at Bracknell Forest. I agree that the length of time taken between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family is too long compared to benchmarks. Also the length of time taken between a placement order and matching a child to an adopter is too long compared to benchmarks, however there is a story behind each child's unique circumstances.

I reflected on a question you asked recently. It was in your first few days in post as Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families. The DfE hosted a joint ADCS induction session at Sanctuary Buildings. You spoke about the importance of children and their life chances. You asked the question of our group about what advice we would have for you in your days in post. I raised with you 'never ever forget the child in your day to day work'.

I fear this may have happened already.....

We are one of the smallest unitary authorities in the country with equally some of the best and most effective performance. Therefore on a statistical level each child has huge significance. In our day to day practice this is no different. Let me please raise with you a small number of the children who have been placed successfully in this time scale in Bracknell Forest.

A 6 year old child with learning difficulties and significant health issues, including a hole in the heart. This child has complex needs with global delay and speech and language delay and therefore attended a special school.

An 8 year who had suffered sexual abuse and continued to make disclosures whilst in foster care. This was a hyper vigilant child who required a lot of patience and reassurance when the adoption order was granted.

CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND LEARNING

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A 6 year old who was adopted by their original foster carers. There was an international element to this case and delays with the court. In addition, the mother was pregnant during the care proceedings.

An 8 year old who had developmental delay and was educationally behind his peers at school. In addition this child presented with challenges in behaviour.

In 2017/18 we have had three older children adopted. These children would not appear on the 2014-2017 scorecard, but I would like to highlight the cases to you. Two of the children were sibling boys aged 7 and 8 who were placed together in an adoptive family, both of whom had special education needs. The third child was an older child aged 11 years when adopted.

I would suggest that a number of these cases above would have been abandoned or not explored with adoption as the permanent solution for the very reason you have written to us. The placements and match would be too challenging and take too long so therefore why bother.

You note that our recent Ofsted report rates Adoption as Outstanding and I would draw your attention to the inspector's comment:

In Bracknell Forest, adoption is considered for all children at the earliest indication that they cannot live with their birth families. Excellent adoption practice has, at its roots, strong strategic vision and an understanding of children's need for permanence evident at every level of service provision. The local authority is absolutely dedicated to pursuing adoption for children, including those for whom it is considered harder to find adoptive placements..... As a consequence of effective family finding and the quality of post-adoption support, there have been no adoption disruptions in the two years preceding this inspection.

I would urge you to be cautious when exploring this information with Local Authorities, which is what I hope you are referring to in your comment – "All these different pieces of information do not tell the whole picture of course".

I have a number of meetings with the DfE over the next few weeks, so on a practical level it would be useful to know which one exactly would be covering this subject area so that I can provide the information that will be useful to you in answering the issues you raise.

Thank you for taking the time to write to us.

Yours sincerely



Nikki Edwards (Mrs)
Director
Children, Young People & Learning