



Rt Hon Ed Balls MP
Secretary of State

Sanctuary Buildings Great Smith Street Westminster London SW1P 3BT
tel: 0870 0012345 dcsf.ministers@dcsf.gsi.gov.uk

Dear Colleague,

On Tuesday 10 July, in my first speech to Parliament, I outlined the way forward for the Department for Children, Schools and Families.

I am only too aware of the extraordinary responsibility in front of me. It is hugely significant that we have named the new department after the people that we ultimately work for.

Over the last ten years, there have undoubtedly been huge improvements in schools and in services for children, families and young people.

Standards in primary schools are at record levels, with over 58% of 15-year-olds achieving five or more GCSEs in 2006, compared to only 45% ten years ago; and the number of failing schools is down by half. There are 35,000 more teachers working in our schools now than there were in 1997. There are now over 1300 Sure Start Children's Centres providing essential, easy-to-access services for children and young people. Teenage pregnancy rates are at a 20 year low, and 600,000 children have been lifted out of poverty.

But there are still huge challenges. We have an increasingly competitive global economy that will make more and more intensive demands on the skills levels of workers in this country. There are still many communities that are spiked by poverty and long-term unemployment, and it is still the case that children who start off poorly rarely match or exceed the achievements of their better off peers.

What I'm not here to do is to impose a radical overhaul, or a raft of short-term announcements. While we will continue to build on our achievements, I also want us to think and, at the highest level, I want us to listen and engage the talents of school leaders, parents, children, businesses and the voluntary sector. It is their voice and their expertise that should ultimately inform the future policy, mission and vision of this new department. It is their voice and their expertise that will help us tackle the very acute challenges we still face.

In my address to Parliament on Tuesday I announced the commencement of a major consultation – with experts, professionals, children and parents – on what the long-term aims and objectives of my department should be. I will construct three working groups to look at education and other services for children and young people - one for 0-7-year-olds, one on 8-13-year-olds and another on 14-19-year-olds. The consultation will begin shortly and report in the autumn.

As the very name of this new department implies, our work will ultimately be informed by the needs of the people we work for – children, families and young people. Schools are at the heart of this - positioned as key agents of social change.

What I want us to build together is a system which combines creativity with rigour, that understands happiness and achievement go hand in hand, and ultimately marries individual ambition with social justice.

Kind Regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ed Balls'.

Ed Balls
Secretary of State
Department for Children, Schools and Families

department for
children, schools and families

