



2019-0023802NZPO

Nadhim Zahawi MP

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families

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Vicky Sellen, Senior Participation and Support Worker
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14th July 2019

Dear Vicky,

Thank you for your letter of 16 June, from Courtney, Adam, Dennis, Chelsea, Jake, Conner and Kayley, all of whom are children in foster care with Affinity Fostering, about Child in Care reviews in school.

I was glad to read of the Passport to Parliament project you have been working on and the excellent work 'Voices' young person's group have been doing. Your video does a brilliant job of explaining your concerns about reviews being held in school. As you say, our guidance is very clear that these reviews must be child-centred and focused on your needs. It also makes it very clear that you should not have to miss valuable education time or health appointments in order to attend your review.

Before your review takes place, there should be a discussion between you and your social worker about who you would like to attend the meeting and about where the meeting will be held. As your letter and video make clear, the time and venue for reviews can have serious consequences for your education and may lead to bullying, which is not acceptable in any way. I am very sorry to read that your thoughts and feelings about the venue for your reviews have not been listened to by those that are supposed to make sure your voice is heard.

As you may already know, a new law was passed called the Children and Social Work Act (2017). This has a list of seven things that councils should always think about when they are making decisions about your time in care. These are called the Corporate Parenting Principles. One of these principles is about making sure you are listened to, respected and that your views are taken seriously. This should include your wishes when it comes your care reviews.

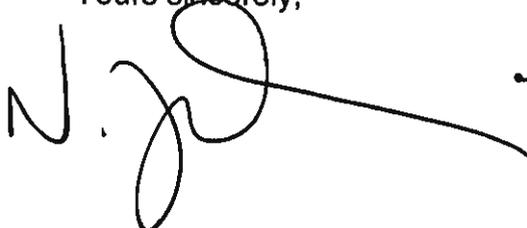
While I agree that, in the vast majority of cases, holding reviews in school is far from ideal, there may be some young people who prefer it. My preference is to encourage everyone to listen to the wishes of each individual young person, rather than to say it should never happen.

I have asked departmental officials to share a link to your video with the National Independent Reviewing Officer Manager's Partnership (NIROMP), so they can make their members aware of it and so they can share it with the independent reviewing officers (IROs) that they manage. You may also be interested to know that this week NIROMP has published their strategic priorities for 2019-22. A youth friendly version can be found at: tinyurl.com/Y2vvf5mf. I hope you will agree that their ambition is to put your voice at the centre of everything they do.

Unfortunately, there is no further funding for projects currently and any future funding will be subject to the spending review process taking place this year. HM Treasury carries out spending reviews to decide how to spend public money, usually for a period covering many years, in line with the government's priorities. The overall amount of spending available depends on the wider financial position. The money the government spends is reviewed to make sure future funding continues to be efficient and cost-effective.

Thank you again for sharing your concerns with me. Please feel free to share this letter with schools and IROs when you share your video with them. I hope that in future your thoughts and concerns are heard and your reviews are held in more suitable venues.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'N. Zahawi', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

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