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THE PRIME MINISTER

21 January 2021

Dear Patrick & Nancy,

Thank you for your letter of 1 December, concerning the improvement of educational outcomes for learners with specific learning difficulties.

I appreciate the time and effort that the Council has put into addressing this issue. I agree that the lessons identified for learners with specific learning difficulties should also be applied to assist all learners. This will help us to ensure that we maximise the impact of our actions to level up education and attainment for all.

I am pleased that you consider the Government's strategy to support education providers and the technology industry to be of value. It is imperative that we do as much as possible to provide practical support for learners and, to this end, the Government has launched the EdTech R&D programme. This will serve to support schools, colleges and remote learning EdTech providers to better understand the requirements of students with special educational needs.

In order to ensure access to evidence-based support, the Government has supported the National Tutoring Programme by helping participating tuition partners to strengthen their offering and capabilities, both digitally and online. In November 2020 we published a rapid assessment review, bringing together a body of research on assistive technology for the first time, helping schools and colleges better understand how to harness the benefits of existing tools and approaches to raise the outcomes of students with SEN.

It is clear to me that drawing on, and making available, a wide range of scientific evidence is as important in education as in any technology-focused area. I know that the Department for Education is equally keen to engage with the Royal Society and British Academy to consider options for the establishment of an Office for Education Research.

As you rightly indicate, the effective use of technology has been crucial for all learners. Alongside other specific forms of support, many of the technological challenges are little different for those with special learning difficulties as for all learners, especially as COVID-19 makes it difficult to maintain school-based education.

I am grateful for your kind invitation to meet. As you will appreciate, my priority is to focus on the Government's response to the COVID-19 outbreak, but the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families, Vicky Ford MP, would be delighted to meet you. I would be grateful if your office could contact her diary manager at Ford-DIARY.PS@education.gov.uk to finalise the details.

Thank you, once again, for writing to me on this important issue.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of two lines of cursive script. The top line appears to be 'As ever' and the bottom line is a more stylized signature, possibly 'Boris'.

Sir Patrick Vallance and Professor Dame Nancy Rothwell