



**BRITISH-IRISH INTER-PARLIAMENTARY BODY**  
**COMHLACHT IDIR-PHARLAIMINTEACH NA BREATAINE**  
**AGUS NA hÉIREANN**

**31st PLENARY SESSION**

**SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS**

**Report agreed at 30<sup>th</sup> plenary session**

**OBSERVATIONS BY UK DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS**



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*Dear David,*

When I acknowledged receipt of the recent report of Committee D of the British-Irish Inter-parliamentary Body's enquiry into special educational needs provision in Britain and Ireland, (with special reference to autism) earlier this year, I promised to let you have a considered response to circulate before the Body's plenary session on 28 and 29 November.

I enclose a note which I hope will be helpful to the Committee.

The report is interesting and timely given the recent debates on special educational needs (SEN) in both Houses of Parliament in the summer and the present Education and Skills Select Committee inquiry. It highlights a number of the issues that we sought to address in our long-term strategy for improving provision for children with SEN – *Removing Barriers to Achievement*, copies of which were, I believe, provided to the Committee.

We have developed a long-term programme because, as the Committee will have found, *many of the challenges we face in improving provision for children with SEN and their families can only be tackled by sustained action over a number of years.* This applies just as much to children with Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASDs) as to other children with SEN. The numbers of children being identified as having an ASD have increased in recent years and this, together with the range and complexity of needs across the autistic spectrum, has particular implications for the provision of services. We recognised this in 2002 when we published, jointly with the Department of Health, good practice guidance on making multi-agency provision for children with ASDs and a tool for self-review for service providers. The guidance can be found at [www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschoolsen/ads](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschoolsen/ads).

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My note, in addition to responding to the specific issues raised in your report in relation to England, sets our SEN strategy in the context of our wider policies and programmes for children. Together these policies and programmes will, I believe, help to improve the lives and life chances of children with SEN and their families in the coming years.

*Yours ever,*

*Andrew -*

**ANDREW ADONIS**