

FROM THE MINISTER/ÓN AIRE



Department of  
**Education**  
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AN ROINN  
**Oideachais**  
MÁNNYSTRIE O  
**Lear**

COR 368/2009

Tel: 028 9127 9618  
Fax: 028 9127 9779

Mr Liam Steele  
Head of Committee and Members' Services  
Belfast City Council  
City Hall  
BELFAST  
BT1 5GS

COMMITTEE AND MEMBERS SERVICES			
07 Apr 2009			
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DEVEL.	E. DEV.	ARTS	T & PROM
REFERENCE:	42998		
REFERRED TO:			

April 2009

*A Liam a chair*

You wrote to the Office of the First Minister/deputy First Minister (OFM/dFM) on 10 March 2009 about financial support and assistance for Conductive Education for Children with Cerebral Palsy. As this matter is within the remit of the Department of Education (DE) your letter to the First Minister and deputy First Minister has been forwarded to me for reply.

I should first of all explain that only the Buddy Bear School provides Conductive Education for children with cerebral palsy. The Buddy Bear School is an independent school and DE does not directly fund any school in the independent sector. DE has, however, provided support to this school by granting approval to it under Article 26 of the Education (NI) Order 1996, as suitable for the admission of children with special educational needs. Education and Library Boards (ELBs) do not, therefore, have to seek the prior approval of DE before placing a child in the school. Only 2 independent schools in the north of Ireland have received such an approval.

While DE cannot core fund independent schools, the Special Educational Needs (SEN) framework has established a mechanism of providing financial support to meet the SEN of children placed in independent schools. In short, the funding follows an individual child when that child is placed in an independent school. Should a Board place a child with a statement of SEN in the Buddy Bear School, then the Board shall pay the fees in respect of the education provided for the child at the school and other costs, such as transport.

Further, the ELBs consider that it is important to clarify that Cerebral Palsy is a medical condition. Typically, children in the north of Ireland with Cerebral Palsy



Rathgael House, 43 Balloo Road, Bangor, Co Down  
An Roinn Oideachais, Teach Ráth Giall, Bóthar Bhaile Aodha, Beannachar, Co an Dúin  
Mánnystrie o Lear, Rathgael Hoose, 43 Balloo Róad, Bang'r, Coontie Doon

access a range of medical interventions and therapeutic support from medical professionals including Orthopaedic Specialists, Occupational Therapists, Physiotherapists and Speech and Language Therapists. Professionals who have been involved in the assessment and intervention of children with specific Cerebral Palsy profiles provide advice, support and training both to parents and to schools to maximise opportunities for social and educational inclusion. Consequently, children with Cerebral Palsy can be placed in a range of mainstream schools as well as Special Schools.

You will be interested to note that I met with a delegation of Buddy Bear Trust (BBT) representatives and parents led by Mr Brendan McConville, Chairperson of BBT, on 23 January 2008. Following consideration of the proposals presented at the January meeting, I responded to Mr McConville on 12 June 2008, fully explaining DE's position in relation to the options put forward and advising that DE has concluded that none of the presented options were viable. This position was also conveyed to those MLAs who had made representations on the Trust's behalf, the Committee for Education and to OFM/dFM.

In recent correspondence, however, on 28 November 2008, the BBT had presented its proposals differently and DE has also given careful consideration to these. I wish to reassure you that I have consulted widely, both north and south of Ireland, including the Department of Education and Science, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and OFM/dFM but I have again concluded that the funding options presented to me continue to be unviable.

I have, therefore, noted the contents of your letter and the Council's support of Conductive Education.



**CAITRÍONA RUANE MLA**