

NICK CLEGG

LEADER OF THE LIBERAL DEMOCRATS

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The Autism Trust
45 Nightingale Road
Hampton
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TW12 3HX

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Dear Ms Tommey,

Thank you very much for your letter.

I'm delighted to be able to write to you about making sure we support people with autism and their families and carers. I know how important this is for millions of people up and down the country. I am also aware how important it is that the upcoming autism strategy, which owes an enormous amount to the hard work and dedication of campaigners around Britain, does as much as possible to address the needs of all those affected.

In particular, we need to do more to help those who look after people with severe autism and, indeed, other full-time carers. The Liberal Democrats have plans to deliver immediate help – we would provide a week's respite care to the million carers in England who currently provide more than 50 hours of care every week. Each carer would be entitled to receive a personal budget each year, equivalent to the cost of a care home's weekly charge, to redeem with whichever local service they choose – so that people who need it most can have a break.

But it's not enough just to address these needs in isolation – we need to make sure that our basic services can help people with autism and provide them with the assistance they need. This is especially true in schools, where too often children with autism won't receive enough support. We believe every child needs the best possible education, so we'd invest £2.5bn in a Pupil Premium, targeted at pupils who need it most. The money could be used to cut class sizes or offer extra tuition – and it would be a huge step towards giving every child a fair deal. We would also guarantee Special Educational Needs diagnostic assessments for all 5-year olds, improve SEN provision and improve SEN training for teachers.

We also need to do more to help people by giving more of their money back. Families of people with autism who are also on low incomes – people acting as carers or in part-time jobs – need help to make ends meet even more than most low and middle earners. Our plan to make the first £10,000 people earn tax-free, paid for by closing loopholes, introducing a mansion tax and taxing aviation fairly, could give these people hundreds of pounds back each year – money which could make a huge difference.

Thank you once again for writing. Liberal Democrats look forward to working with campaigners on autism, both now and in future.

Yours sincerely,


Nick Clegg
Leader of the Liberal Democrats