Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State

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Mr Peter Nieto,
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27 February 2020

Dear Mr Peter Nieto,

Thank you for your correspondence of 31 December 2019 about the death of Jacob Andrew Bates. I would like to take this opportunity to say how deeply saddened I am about Jacob's death. His loss, at such a young age and in such circumstances is deeply upsetting and I offer my condolences to those who knew, loved and supported Jacob.

Your report raises several matters of concern surrounding the use of unregulated provision.

I believe every child and young person should have access to a stable and secure placement in accommodation that can meet their needs and, most importantly, keep them safe. It is unacceptable for any child or young person's placement to not meet their needs or keep them safe, for any amount of time.

I share your concerns that unregulated settings are not always good enough, and that some children are being placed at risk or in settings that cannot meet their needs. It is clear that reform is urgently needed, and this is why on 12 February 2020 I launched a consultation on a range of proposals to ensure that unregulated provision is being used appropriately and meets the needs of the young people placed there.

I will not tolerate poor provision that fails our most vulnerable children. This is why these proposals include introducing new checks and balances in the system, including the introduction of new national standards for providers of independent and semi-independent provision. The proposals aim to improve provision and make it easier for local authorities to assess the quality of what is on offer. We are also consulting on how these standards should be enforced – either by mandating local authorities to only use providers that meet the standards, or by introducing a new quality and inspection regime, overseen by Ofsted, similar to the regime already in place for children's homes.

This consultation is an opportunity to shape our proposals and next steps in terms of what and how we might implement the proposals. It is open for response until 8 April 2020 and can be accessed at https://consult.education.gov.uk/unregulated-provision/unregulated-provision-children-in-care/. I would welcome your views, and those of all interested persons, on the detailed proposals.

It is a priority for this Government that children and young people in care have the support, protection and care they deserve. The independently led Care Review will also take a fundamental look across children's social care with the aim of better supporting, protecting and improving the outcomes of vulnerable children and young people. However, I am clear that the issue of unregulated provision cannot wait and requires immediate and decisive action to be taken. Following the consultation we will consider the responses received and publish a response which will include a timetable for any reforms that will be taken forward.

Once again, I was very sorry to hear of this tragedy and hope our proposed reforms will help prevent children and young people being placed in provision that does not need their needs.

Yours sincerely,

Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State for Education