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Rt Hon Nicky Morgan MP
Secretary of State

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Andrew Copson
Chief Executive
British Humanist Association
By email: chiefexec@humanism.org.uk

19 February 2016

Dear Andrew

Thank you for your email of 28 January about my department's proposals regarding objections to school admission arrangements.

I can assure you that I want every child to be able to access a good local school. I do, however, believe it is important for us to free schools from bureaucracy wherever possible so that they are able to focus on delivering an excellent education for their pupils. As part of our forthcoming consultation on the school admissions code, we will, therefore, be proposing a number of changes which are intended to reduce these burdens on schools. A number of the changes we are considering relate to the functions of the Schools adjudicator as it is very time consuming for a school when an objection is referred about their admission arrangements.

We do, however, also want parents to be confident that the admissions system is fair and works for them. Where a parent has concerns about the fairness of the admission arrangements of their local school, it is important that they are able to refer these concerns to the adjudicator. We want to ensure that the adjudicator is able to focus on those concerns and is not held up by the need to also consider large numbers of objections referred by interest groups from outside the local area.

Local authorities play an important role in ensuring that the admission arrangements of schools in their areas are fair when considered collectively. That is why we propose that, in future, only local parents and local authorities should be able to refer objections about a school's admission arrangements. This proposal is, of course, subject to full public consultation and to parliamentary approval, and we will give your concerns careful consideration during the consultation process.

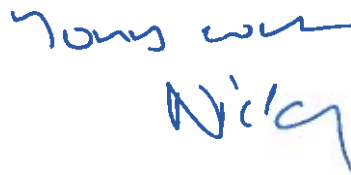
I note that parents have, on occasion, approached the BHA with their concerns about a school's admission arrangements, and that the BHA has then referred these objections to the adjudicator on their behalf. Under our proposed arrangements, there would be nothing to prevent the BHA from providing advice and support on submitting an objection to a parent that approaches it. I can also assure you that, under both the present and proposed arrangements, the adjudicator will always respect a parent's request for anonymity.

I am grateful for the work that you and your colleagues on the Fair Admissions Campaign have put into highlighting examples of non-compliance with the school admissions code. As you know, we expect all schools to have fair and transparent admission arrangements and, where there is evidence to suggest that this is not the case, parents and local authorities can, and do, raise those concerns directly with the chief schools adjudicator. As part of our current review of the school admissions code, we are considering the recommendations you published last October and note that a number of these are similar to the adjudicator's own recommendations in her annual report. Further details can be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/zbc496>.

I am aware that your colleagues meet regularly with my officials to discuss areas of mutual interest. I hope that this constructive relationship continues and that you feel able to use those meetings to raise any issues and concerns going forward.

I am copying this letter to Ms Pavan Dhaliwal, who has also written to the Minister of State for Children and Families on this issue.

Thank you for writing on this important matter.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Nicky Morgan', with a stylized flourish above the name.

RT HON NICKY MORGAN MP

CC: Ms Pavan Dhaliwal