

SUBJECT  
cc Master

DSG



Re

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

3 February 1986

Dear Tony,

Geoffrey Dickens MP came to see the Prime Minister at his request at 4.00 p.m. on 30 January to discuss his proposal that there should be a Minister for Children. Mr. Dickens said that he was not seeking a new Ministry, but rather an addition to the DHSS team who would have a designated responsibility along the lines of the present Minister for the Disabled or Minister for Small Business. Such a designation would be popular amongst the child care organisations who had represented to him that a central co-ordinating Ministerial role was needed. The designated Minister for Children would rapidly become a specialist as had other similar Ministers, and would be able to ensure that co-ordination was tighter than occasionally seemed at present. Moreover, from the presentational point of view the designation of a Minister would provide a focus of attention for the undoubted will to tackle the problems which the Government had shown. Problems of child abuse had been very much in the public mind in recent months and the Government, as well as doing something about the problem (which they were) should also be seen to be doing something. Mr. Dickens went on to say that overall he was optimistic. The aftermath of the recent cases would bring about a significant tightening up of procedures by local authorities. He believed, however, that the Government should also be seen to be tightening up.

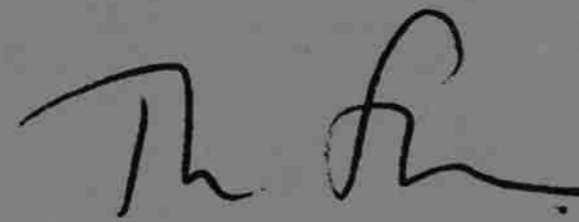
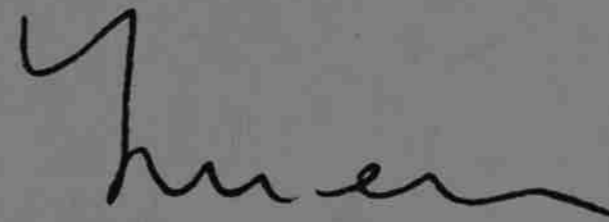
The Prime Minister said that she was always reluctant to designate particular roles for Ministers where this might raise unrealistic hopes and expectations about what is achievable. It was clear, for example, that recent appalling cases of child abuse could only have been prevented by more vigilant neighbours or more efficient social services. None of that could be achieved by a designated Minister and indeed none of her contacts with the NSPCC led her to believe that they were pressing for a Minister. Moreover, the appointment of a particular Minister with no changes in Ministerial responsibility would not mean that policies would not have to be agreed inter-departmentally as at present. Nevertheless, she understood the case which Mr. Dickens was putting forward

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and she asked him to continue his consultations with child care organisations. For her part she would reflect upon what he had said: she did not rule out his proposal.

I am copying this letter to Michael Stark (Cabinet Office).



Timothy Flesher

Tony Laurance, Esq.,  
Department of Health and Social Security.

