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# Bercow: Ten Years On

An independent review of provision for children and young people with speech, language and communication needs in England



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The ability to communicate is fundamental to learning, to relationships and to life chances. More than 10% of all children and young people, over 1.4 million in the UK, have communication difficulties. Too many are not getting the support they need.

## TIME FOR CHANGE

*Bercow: Ten Years On* sets out the state of provision for children's speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) in England in 2018. Currently, poor understanding and insufficient resourcing for SLCN mean too many children and young people receive inadequate, ineffective and inequitable support, impacting on their education, their employability, and their mental health. It can be different, and *Bercow: Ten Years On* explains how.

## BACKGROUND

Published by I CAN, the children's communication charity, and the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT), *Bercow: Ten Years On* marks a decade since the publication of *The Bercow Report: A Review of Services for Children and Young People (0-19) with Speech, Language and Communication Needs*.

We heard from over 2,500 people including children and young people, their parents and carers, practitioners and other key stakeholders.

## THE REPORT'S FINDINGS

Five key themes emerged from the review. The evidence showed:

- 1. Communication is crucial** to children's life chances. Yet awareness of its importance among the public and decision makers is not sufficient.
- 2. Strategic system-wide approaches to supporting SLCN are rare;** very often SLCN does not feature in national or local policies.
- 3. Services are inaccessible and inequitable.** Too often support for children's SLCN is planned and funded based on the available resources, rather than what is needed, leading to an unacceptable level of variation across the country.
- 4. Support that makes a difference** is based on the evidence of what works. However, service design and cuts frequently do not take account of the evidence we have.
- 5. Too many children with SLCN are being missed,** and are not getting the vital support they need.



**15%**

of survey respondents felt speech and language therapy was available as required.

*"I should have speech and language therapy, but it never happens."*

**Child with SLCN**



**42%**

of parents and carers said their child's SLCN were noticed too late.



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## WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

Communication is everybody's business and we all need to play our part. I CAN and the RCSLT are committed to working in partnership with national and local decision makers, commissioners and other agencies to address the challenges highlighted in the report.

Our recommendations are based on the examples of outstanding practice we heard in the review.

## COMMUNICATION IS CRUCIAL

**Everyone must understand speech, language and communication better.**

- Clear messages and information should be developed for parents and carers.
- Support for speech, language and communication should be recognised as essential to improving social mobility, health inequality and employment.

## A STRATEGY FOR SYSTEM CHANGE

**A clear unified message from the top is essential if change is to happen.**

- A new cross-government strategy for children should be developed, with speech, language and communication at its core.
- Proposals to transform provision for children and young people's mental health should be strengthened to recognise the importance of SLCN in mental health.

## AN ACCESSIBLE AND EQUITABLE SERVICE

**Children and young people with SLCN should get the support they need, wherever they live.**

- Local areas should be provided with data on estimated SLCN in their population.
- Local area SEND inspections should continue beyond 2020.
- A programme of training on joint commissioning for SLCN should be funded.

## SUPPORT THAT MAKES A DIFFERENCE

**Decisions about SLCN support should be made based on what we know will make the greatest impact.**

- Government should support the development of evidence-based integrated pathways for children and young people with SLCN.
- An evaluation programme for innovative models of school-based support should be funded.
- Ofsted training should ensure inspectors focus on progress in speech, language and communication.
- Health providers should be supported to collect data on the quality and outcomes of their intervention.

## EARLY IDENTIFICATION AND INTERVENTION

**It is essential that the signs of SLCN are spotted early and acted on.**

- Understanding of speech, language and communication should be embedded in initial qualifications and continuing professional development for all relevant practitioners.
- Commissioners should ensure that there is a system in place to follow up with children who are not brought to appointments.



**52%**

of parents and carers said their family's experience of speech, language and communication support was poor.

*"I wish I could have more help at school, so I can be like everyone else."*

**Child with SLCN**



## More information

including the full report is available at

[www.bercow10yearson.com](http://www.bercow10yearson.com)