

Bercow: Ten Years On

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

I work with children in the early years – what does the report mean for me?

Bercow: Ten Years On presents the state of provision for children's speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) in England in 2018.

Currently there is not enough understanding of SLCN, or sufficient resources. This means children and young people don't get enough support, it isn't always effective and is not equally available for everyone. This can impact on children's social and emotional development, their school readiness, and later in life on their education, their employability and their mental health. But 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 ten years since the publication of [*The Bercow Report: A Review of Services for Children and Young People \(0-19\) with Speech, Language and Communication Needs*](#).

The current review consulted with over 2,500 people across England, collecting the views of children and young people, parents and carers, practitioners and other key stakeholders – including 223 early years setting staff.

Key findings

Five key themes came 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 good enough.
 - 77% of parents and carers said information about SLCN was either not easily available or not available at all.
- 2. Joined up systems for supporting SLCN are rare;** very often SLCN does not feature in national or local policies.
 - A key theme is the importance of local leaders who recognise the importance of speech, language and communication.
- 3. Services are not easy to get and not equally available.** Too often support for children's SLCN is planned and funded based on what is available rather than what is needed. This means there is an unacceptable level of variation across the country.
 - Many parents and carers shared stories of being let down when the support they needed was not available.

4. Support that makes a difference is based on the evidence of what works. However cuts to services and planning for the way they are run often do not come from the evidence we have.

- 52% of parents and carers said their family's experience of speech, language and communication support was poor.

5. Too many children with SLCN are being missed, and are not getting the vital support they need.

- 48% of people who completed our survey said the expertise of school and early years staff to identify and support children and young people's speech, language and communication was good or excellent.
- But 42% of parents and carers said their child's SLCN were noticed too late
- 74% of health visitors have seen a rise in the number of children with SLCN

Throughout the evidence we heard examples of outstanding practice, from which we drew out key principles to share.

What needs to happen?

I CAN and the RCSLT are making a set of recommendations to Government and decision makers about ways to improve support for children and young people with SLCN.

Communication is crucial

Everyone must understand speech, language and communication needs better.

- Parents and carers have access to information about speech, language and communication and speech, language and communication needs, shared by those who support their child.
- Government should make sure the importance of speech, language and communication and ways to improve it are included in their plans and activities.

Local good practice

Warwickshire Time to Talk spread the word locally with leaflets, multi-media campaigns, films and growing social media networks. Their promotional week is in its fifth year.

A strategy for system change

A clear, joined up message from the top is essential if change is to happen.

- The Government develops a strategy for children, with speech, language and communication at the centre.
- The local area SEND inspections by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission should continue.

Local good practice

With strong local leadership, Stoke Speaks Out is a city-wide strategy offering training and support for all practitioners working with children under seven and their families.

An accessible and equal service

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

- Public Health England should use its Fingertips tool to let Local areas know how many children have SLCN in their area.
- Local area SEND inspections should look at how well services for SLCN are provided.
- Those responsible for the way services are planned and paid for (commissioned) should be trained and have good understanding of support for SLCN.

In Greater Manchester they have committed to integrated provision across all early years services, including a focus on speech, language and communication.

Support that makes a difference

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

- There should be funding to develop and test new models of support in schools.
- Ofsted inspectors should be trained so they ask questions about progress in speech, language and communication.
- People working in the NHS collect information on the difference their support makes.

Early identification and intervention

It is essential that the signs of SLCN are spotted early and acted on. Our recommendations include:

- The Department for Education should make speech, language and communication, and identification of SLCN, a core requirement of Level 2 qualifications for the early years assistant.
- Public Health England should strengthen the support for their Healthy Child Programme, and support the development of national health visitor training on identifying and supporting SLCN.

Better Start Southend recognised the Government initiative to provide free childcare as opportunity for change. They put in place systematic approaches:

- A focus on workforce development, with a level 3 qualification at least in each setting.
- Earlier identification and intervention through screening of children's speech, language and communication has prevented the need for some children to require the statutory service.
- Work with parents has improved access to services at the earliest stage – children not attending are reduced dramatically.
- They have robust data which is used to demonstrate positive outcomes and seek further support.



Bercow: Ten Years On



What action can I take?

The *Bercow: Ten Years On* website has a range of actions you can take to help make change happen for children and young people with SLCN. These include:

- Use our information sheet to find out where you can find training in children's speech, language and communication locally to you.
- Get involved in national campaigns – read our factsheet.
- Use our guide to do a quick audit of how SLCN is reflected in your setting's policies and plans.
- Audit your setting using our checklist based on what we heard about best practice as part of this review.
- Audit the confidence and ability of staff in your setting to support SLCN using the Communication Trust's [Speech Language and Communication Framework](#).

The full report, list of recommendations and calls to action are available on the website:

www.bercow10yearson.com

For useful resources visit: www.bercow10yearson.com/resources