

Bercow: Ten Years On

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

I am a speech and language therapist – what does the report mean for me?

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

Currently, insufficient understanding of and resourcing for SLCN mean too many children and young people do not receive the support they need, impacting on their education, their employability and their mental health. But it can be different, and *Bercow: Ten Years On* sets out what needs to change.

This briefing provides an overview of the findings and recommendations of particular interest to speech and language therapists.

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 gathered evidence from over 2,500 people including children and young people, their parents and carers, speech and language therapists, other practitioners and 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 still not high enough.
 - Our evidence found a lack of awareness and information about speech, language and communication in general and more specifically about SLCN.
 - More than three quarters of parents and carers said information about SLCN was either not easily available or not available at all
- 2. Strategic system-wide approaches to supporting SLCN are rare;** very often SLCN does not feature in national or local policies.
 - 95% of survey respondents felt that central Government's contribution to raising standards and improving outcomes for children and young people with SLCN is either not clear or in need of strengthening.
 - There are fewer speech and language therapists working at a strategic level within the NHS with the ability to influence local decision makers.

- 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 a high degree of variation across the country.
- 40% of survey respondents felt that commissioners' understanding of speech, language and communication required significant improvement.
 - Only 15% of people said that speech and language therapy was available in their area as required.
- 4. Support that makes a difference** should be based on the evidence of what works. We have much more evidence about SLCN in terms of prevalence, impact and interventions than we did in 2008. However, service design and cuts frequently do not take account of the evidence we have.
- We heard from services that were rationing support in ways that are not based on the evidence about what works – and instead were restricting services on the basis of arbitrary factors such as children's age
 - The vast majority of NHS speech and language therapy services said their commissioner measured the performance of their service on outputs – such as the number of children seen – compared with around a third who were measured on the impact of their service.
 - In the same survey, more than two thirds said they had seen a reduction in the number of specialist speech and language therapy roles within their service in the past 10 years.
- 5. Too many children with SLCN are being missed.** Although the expertise of school and early years staff to identify and support children and young people's SLCN has improved, there are still many children whose needs are identified too late or not at all. Some of the most vulnerable children don't receive support because they miss an appointment.
- Half of parents said their child's needs were not picked up early enough.
 - Almost all of the respondents to a survey of NHS children's speech and language therapy services reported that they discharge children and young people who miss appointments.

What needs to happen?

I CAN and the RCSLT are committed to working in partnership with national and local decision makers, commissioners and other stakeholders to address the challenges highlighted in the report.

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

1. Communication is crucial

Everyone must understand speech, language and communication needs better.

- Public Health England should develop clear messages and information for parents and carers
- Government should recognise that support for speech, language and communication is essential to improving:
 - social mobility
 - health inequality

- employment and productivity

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.

2. A strategy for system change

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

- Government should develop a new cross-Government strategy for children with speech, language and communication at its core
- Government should strengthen its proposals to transform provision for children and young people's mental health to recognise the importance of speech, language and communication, including by ensuring that:
 - Children and Young People's Mental Health Services include embedded speech and language therapists
 - Funding is available for further research into the impact of speech and language therapy interventions in children and young people with mental health needs
- Government should establish a system leadership group to drive forward the recommendations of this report
- NHS England and other health bodies should use the evidence from the review to inform their work developing leadership in the allied health professions.

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.

3. 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 provide local areas with data on estimated SLCN in their population
- the Ofsted and Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspections of local area arrangements to support children and young people with SEND should continue beyond 2020; and
- LA SEND reviews should take account of the evidence from this review for effective joint commissioning of support for SLCN and Ofsted and the CQC should train all inspectors to challenge local areas.
- a programme of training on joint commissioning for SLCN should be funded.

Local good practice

In Worcestershire the local authority and NHS jointly commission speech and language therapy services, with a clearly defined role for speech and language therapists at each level. Schools and settings, each with a named speech and language therapist, can then commission additional activities as top-ups.

4. Support that makes a difference

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

- Government should support the development of evidence-based integrated care pathways for children and young people with SLCN
- NHS England and commissioners should work with providers and service users to identify what needs to be measured as an indicator of success
- the Education Endowment Foundation should design and fund an evaluation programme to develop and evaluate innovative models of school-based support
- NHS England should support health providers to collect data on the quality and outcomes of intervention.

Local good practice

Nottinghamshire Children's Services employ an evaluation lead who support the whole team to be involved in evaluation

5. 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 into initial qualifications and continuing professional development for a range of practitioners, including:
 - teachers
 - early years practitioners
 - health visitors
 - practitioners working in settings with known high prevalence of SLCN such as the justice system
- commissioners and providers should ensure that there is a system in place to follow up with children who are not brought to appointments.

Local good practice

No Wrong Door in North Yorkshire is an innovative service for looked after children and those on the

edge of care. Embedded speech and language therapists have identified a huge unmet need, with more than 50% of young people having SLCN.

What action can I take?

Communication is everybody's business and we need everyone to play a part in improving support for children and young people with SLCN.

While the recommendations within the main report are aimed at government, the website also includes:

- Bold calls to action for local leaders such as head teachers and service managers.
- Clear actions that everyone can take to bring about change.

Below are a range of actions that you as a speech and language therapist can take, accompanied by supporting resources.

- Use our presentation to share the findings of the report with your team and professional networks.
- Ask the settings/schools you work in about the numbers of children with SLCN, and whether support for SLCN is in their development plan.
- Share information about local prevalence of SLCN with people responsible for commissioning SLCN support.
- Tell your commissioner about guidance produced to support effective joint commissioning of SLCN.
- Use our email template, Q&A document and fact sheets to arrange a meeting with your local MP.

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



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