

Bercow: Ten Years On

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

I'm a parent or carer – 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 impacts on children and young people's 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.

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.
 - 78% of parents and carers said information 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 plans and policies.
 - 53% of people did not feel that the way children learn in schools supports their spoken language development
- 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 negative experiences, describing services as awful and frustrating
 - Just 15% of people felt that speech and language therapy was available as required in their area
- 4. Support that makes a difference** is based on the evidence of what works. However planning for services, as well as cuts, often bear no relation to 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. Parents and carers reported that despite their concerns about their child's communication skills, identification by a professional took a long time and their concerns were not taken seriously.
- Half of parents and carers said their child's needs were not picked up early enough.
 - Over half had to wait over six months for their child to get the help they needed.

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. Here are some of them:

Communication is crucial

Everyone must understand SLCN better.

- Parents and carers should have access to information about speech, language and communication and SLCN.
- Government should make sure the importance of speech, language and communication and ways to improve it are included in their plans and activities.

A strategy for system change

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

- The Government should develop a strategy for children, with speech, language and communication at the centre.
- Local area SEND inspections should continue.
- Every school SEN information report should include how they support SLCN.
- The way children and young people with mental health needs are supported should recognise the impact of SLCN.

An accessible and equal service

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

- Local areas should 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.

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 should 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.

- Everyone who works with children and young people with SLCN should understand and know about speech, language and communication. This includes teachers, early years practitioners, health visitors, and practitioners working in the care and youth justice systems
- Children who are not brought to appointments should be followed up.

The London Borough of Hackney provides speech and language therapy drop-in sessions so that parents and carers can self-refer if they have concerns about their child's speech, language and communication. The Borough provides training for early years professionals, teachers, teaching assistants and others; parents are also provided with opportunities to learn about things like Makaton, which uses signs and symbols to help people communicate.

What action can I take?

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

- Get involved in or tell your child's school about national campaigns – see out factsheet.
- Use the information available on the website to start a discussion about speech, language and communication, and SLCN, in your child's school or setting, or in your local parent carer forum
- Use our information sheet to get involved in the development of your local children's plan, making sure SLCN is an integral part – from pre-school right through to employment.
- Ask your child's school or setting about the numbers of children with SLCN, and whether support for SLCN is in the school development plan.
- Use our checklist to discuss the support your child is receiving in their school or setting.
- Look out for your local area SEND inspection and take up the invitation to meet with inspectors.
- Ask your child's setting or school about how they track children's progress in speech, language and communication.

Over the next few months, we will be posting advice and guidance on our website to help you.

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