Bercow: Ten Years On

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

I work in a school or college – 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, poor understanding of and insufficient resourcing for SLCN means too many children and young people receive inadequate, ineffective and inequitable support, impacting on their employability and their mental health, as well as their educational attainment:

- Just 26% of young children with SLCN made expected academic progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage compared with 69% of all children.

- Just 15% of pupils with identified SLCN achieved the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of their primary school years compared with 61% of all pupils.

- Only 20.3% of pupils with SLCN gained grade 4/C or above in English and maths at GCSE, compared with 63.9% of all pupils.

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](#)*.

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:

- **Communication is crucial** to children's life chances.

  - Our evidence found a lack of awareness and information about speech, language and communication in general and more specifically about SLCN.

- **Strategic system-wide approaches to supporting SLCN are rare**; very often SLCN does not feature in national or local policies.

  - 53% of survey respondents did not feel that the way children learn in schools supports their spoken language development.

- **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.

  - The increase in the number of schools commissioning speech and language support has led to some examples of good practice.

- However, it has also resulted in higher levels of variation for children and young people with SLCN – so the support available depends not just on where they live, but where they go to school.

> "Commissioning by schools varies very much from head to head and their priorities – some heads see very little value of speech, language and communication and feel other curricular areas far more important. Thus, very big discrepancies between similar schools..."
> Professional Association

- **Support that makes a difference** should be based on the evidence of what works. However, the way support is planned frequently does not take account of the evidence we have.

  - While the evidence around SLCN has grown since 2008, we need more evidence about effective service models in schools.

  - In a sample of 42 Ofsted reports, no school reported assessing or tracking progress in spoken language.

  - Children and young people prefer to receive support in school – from people who know how to help them.

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

  - **48%** of people thought 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

  - Yet half of parents said their child's needs were not picked up early enough.

  - Where schools are prioritising SLCN, there was evidence of better identification, intervention, and improved outcomes for pupils.

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.

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 recognised as crucial for social mobility and employment. This includes by:

  - Identifying communication and language as a focus for the next round of Pupil Premium Awards

  - Ensuring the communication skills for the workplace are recognised in Functional Skills qualifications

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. Speech, language and communication should be at the centre of this.

- Ofsted should review the extent to which the teaching and monitoring of spoken language is taken into account in its framework for inspection.

- Local area SEND inspections should continue.

- Every school SEN information report should include how they support children and young people with SLCN.

- The way children and young people with mental health needs are supported should recognise the link between mental health and 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.

- Services should be commissioned based on what we know works best for children with SLCN.

Local good practice

Some schools are forming networks to share resources; a partnership made up of 10 schools in Brighton, most of whom have a speech and language champion. The network provides a safe place for schools to discuss how they can use their funds effectively, also providing a vehicle for sharing and disseminating ideas.

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.

- Funding for the What Works database of interventions for children and young people with SLCN should continue.

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Early identification and intervention

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

- The new framework for newly qualified teachers should include content on how to support speech, language and communication

- There should be a national programme of training for education staff working with children with SLCN.

- Children who are not brought to appointments should be followed up.

The Academies Enterprise Trust ran a pilot project across eight of its academies, building early identification into their regular data analysis and prioritising a whole school approach linked to their SEN strategy. They:
- Improved identification by looking at expected prevalence and "red flags"
- Used school data and language measures to track progress
- Carried out intervention in and out of the classroom
- Provided professional development for a more skilled and confident teaching staff
- Carried out training and level 3 qualifications for support staff, maximizing impact

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What action can I take?

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:

- Log on to the Speech, Language and Communication Framework website for a quick audit of your confidence in supporting children and young people's speech, language and communication and SLCN.

- Use our information sheet to find out where you can find training local to you in children and young people's speech, language and communication.

- Get involved in national campaigns like No Pens Day Wednesday, the Communication Commitment, Shine a Light Awards, and the Voice Box joke competition.

- Use our guide to do a quick audit of how SLCN is reflected in your school or college's policies and plans.

- Share information about progress in spoken language, and the impact of SLCN support with school Ofsted inspectors

**The report, full list of recommendations and calls to action are available on the website:
www.bercow10yearson.com**

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