



Department
for Education



Department
of Health &
Social Care

Bob Reitemeier CBE
Chief Executive
I CAN
31 Angel Gate
Goswell Road
London
EC1V 2PT

Kamini Gadhok MBE
Chief Executive
Royal College of Speech and Language
Therapists
2 White Hart Yard
London
SE1 1NX

Dear Bob & Kamini,

22 October 2018

Bercow: Ten Years On Report – Government Response

The Bercow: Ten Years On report, published on 20 March 2018, raised some key issues concerning speech, language and communication provision. We were pleased that Nadhim Zahawi, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families, was able to attend and speak at the launch of the report. This letter provides the Government's response to the report and its recommendations.

We are committed to improving children and young people's speech, language and communication skills, and a lot of progress has been made over the last ten years since the first Bercow report was published in 2008. The 0-25 Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) reforms, introduced through the 2014 Children and Families Act, represented the biggest change to the SEND system in a generation. The move to a more child-centred, multi-agency and participative Education, Health and Care (EHC) needs assessment is improving the support that is available to children and young people with SEND.

We have now reached the end of the first phase of implementation of the SEND reforms and a significant amount of progress has been made. However, we recognise that there is still more to do to ensure that real culture change is fully embedded within nurseries, schools and colleges, and across the SEND system as a whole. We are having an ongoing dialogue with children and young people with SEND, parents and SEND sector organisations to ensure that education, health and social care services can work together more effectively, which is a key theme of the Bercow: Ten Years On Report.

The Government has funded a SEND leadership programme and recently completed delivery of legal training to all local authorities and their health partners to ensure they are clear on their statutory responsibilities and to support better collaborative working. In November 2017, we announced an additional £29m to support ongoing implementation beyond the end of the 0-25 SEND reforms transition period. We are also funding a consortium of partners, including the Council for Disabled Children and Contact, to work with health and social care partners and support joint working.

As you know, from May 2016, Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) began inspecting local areas on their effectiveness in meeting their new SEND duties under the 2014 Children and Families Act. The SEND inspections are proving an important driver for change and identifying strengths and weaknesses across all areas of the 0-25 SEND reforms. For example, Ofsted and CQC local area inspections have reported that:

- in Gloucestershire, the local authority is successfully developing post-16 internships through strong collaboration with local colleges and employers. As a result, young people who have SEND are increasingly successful in gaining high-quality work experience;
- in West Berkshire, the needs of children and young people with SEND is high on the agenda for leaders and the EHC plan process is positive for the vast majority of parents and carers. EHC plans are completed on time in almost all cases and effective quality-assurance processes are ensuring that they meet the needs of children and young people well; and
- in Wigan, the identification, assessment and meeting of needs for the youngest children with SEND is a real strength across the local area. As a result, an increasing number of children are 'school ready' or have appropriate support in place as they begin school.

All local areas will be inspected by 2021 and as announced at the ADCS conference in July 2018, we have asked Ofsted to design a programme of further local area SEND inspections to follow the current round, and for their advice on further monitoring of those areas that have been required to produce a Written Statement of Action.

The Bercow: Ten Years On report called for there to be a greater recognition of the importance of speech, language and communication to the social mobility agenda across Government. On 31 July 2018, in his speech at the Resolution Foundation, the Secretary of State for Education announced his ambition to halve the number of children finishing reception year without the early communication or reading skills they need to thrive by 2028. To kick start this, the department is convening businesses, broadcasters and a broad range of other organisations to be part of a coalition and to attend a summit this autumn to explore innovative ways to boost early language development and reading in the home. The Secretary of State also announced that this would be supported through a new app competition to harness the potential of technology to support early language and literacy at home.

This ambition builds on the Government's wider social mobility action plan, *Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential*, published in December 2017 and backed by £100m of investment. As part of this, the Department for Education has partnered with Public Health England (PHE) and Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) to maximise the opportunity presented by the 2 to 2½ year review, one of the five mandated health reviews delivered as part of the universal Healthy Child Programme (HCP) by health visitors.

As part of the plan, we will trial an early language assessment tool and train health visitors in its use. This will help to ensure that speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) are identified early on and the right help put in place. Early years practitioners will be supported through our £20m investment in professional development, which will be focused on early language, literacy and numeracy.

We know that to make the most of every pound, it is important that we root action in the evidence. That is why we are working in partnership with the Education Endowment Foundation to invest £10m in practical projects to better understand 'what works' in the early years in settings and in the home, including for early language and literacy. Our £8.5m local government programme, which includes local authority peer reviews, also aims to identify and spread best practice, and has a specific focus on early language. This will complement our wider partnership work with PHE to develop an evidence-driven early years model SLCN pathway and guidance, which will support areas to improve how local services are organised and commissioned.

The importance of supporting speech, language and communication skills is an identifiable theme in the priorities of all of the Opportunity Areas. We are investing £72 million over a 3-year period in the Opportunity Areas to unlock barriers in some of those areas of the country where the social mobility challenges are greatest. In each of the 12 Opportunity Areas, we are working to improve educational outcomes across the different phases and age ranges. SLC-specific programmes include the following:

- In Stoke-on-Trent we are extending the successful "Stoke Speaks Out" initiative to 25 primary schools with lower than average numbers of children attaining a Good Level of Development. This will provide targeted, specialist support for early language, communication and literacy.
- In Oldham, we are focusing on early literacy and development and have committed to ensuring that all children are school ready by the age of five.
- In Derby, we are inviting schools in the most deprived areas to participate in "Talk Derby", an ambitious SLC programme offering a package of support including developing an improvement plan against their school's particular needs; training and development for 'front-line practitioners' in identifying and supporting SLC needs; and training parents to introduce an early talkers programme.
- In Blackpool, we are targeting nine secondary schools in a KS3 reading project. This will provide a series of interventions with the aim of increasing students' reading fluency, enhancing their vocabulary and improving their comprehension.
- In Bradford, we are engaging and empowering parents in three of Bradford's most disadvantaged local communities, providing opportunities for them to gain skills and confidence in supporting children's learning and aspirations with a first focus on literacy.

In the Mental Health Green Paper published in December 2017, *Transforming children and young people's mental health provision*, the Government set out some clear expectations about the changes every area should be seeking to achieve to improve activity on prevention; better partnership working between children and young people's mental health services and schools; and improved access to specialist support.

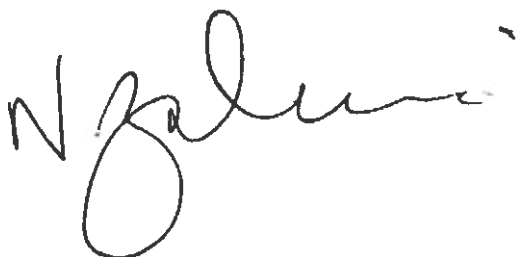
As part of this, we will test how the new mental health support teams proposed in the green paper, can work with other professionals such as speech and language therapists, including in support of delivering schools responsibilities for pupils with SEND. The aim will be to improve identification of mental health needs so that they can be addressed as part of wider packages of support.

There are other key reports that we must also take into account when considering the needs of children and young people with SEND. Christine Lenehan's review into Residential Special Schools, *Good intentions, Good Enough?* and the Autism All Party Parliamentary Group's report, *Autism and Education in England 2017*, both raise some very important issues. The Education Select Committee's inquiry into the 0-25 SEND reforms will also contribute significantly to the ongoing debate.

We are establishing a Leadership Board of key stakeholders in response to the Lenehan review, a key focus of which will be to work with local authorities and NHS Clinical Commissioning Groups to support them to improve local planning and commissioning. We are in the process of setting this up and are currently considering its remit and membership.

It is helpful that you are in regular contact with officials to continue to provide your views on the needs of children and young people with SLCN. The Government is determined to do what it can to help put in place the right framework of support to ensure these children and young people get the support they need.

Yours sincerely



Nadhim Zahawi MP

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
for Children and Families



Caroline Dinenage MP

Minister of State for Care