

# Bercow: Ten Years On

## – 1st Anniversary Update



The *Bercow: Ten Years On* report put provision for children's speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) in the spotlight. It described a fragmented system, which fails many children and young people with SLCN by not identifying their needs early enough, or putting in place effective support.

The report made 47 strategic recommendations aimed at decision-makers, accompanied

by a range of practical, online resources to support people to take action, which can be found at [www.bercow10yearson.com](http://www.bercow10yearson.com)

In March 2019, one year on from the launch of the report, significant progress has been made; 17 recommendations have already been completely achieved, and several others are in progress.

Children's early language is high on the Government agenda,

but for school-aged children, and those with long-term SLCN such as developmental language disorder, there has been little change. Progress in establishing a strategic approach to planning and commissioning support across the age range for children with SLCN is limited. Given the numbers of children and young people with SLCN, and its impact on their life chances, urgent action is needed.



### THE SIZE OF THE ISSUE

**10%** of all children have long-term speech, language and communication needs.

This includes **7.6%** of children who have developmental language disorder.

Yet only **3%** of school pupils are identified with SLCN as their primary need (4.1% in primary schools and 1.4% in secondary schools).

Only **14%** of pupils with identified SLCN have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.

### THE GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

- Theresa May responded to a question at Prime Minister's Questions, committing to look very carefully at the report and respond.
- In response to a petition on the Parliament website, the Government stated that it is firmly committed to ensuring that children with SLCN receive the support they need to reach their full potential.
- A joint written response by the Education and Health and Social Care Departments to *Bercow: Ten Years On* reiterated that the Government is determined to help put in place the right framework of support for children with SLCN.

*"We do not want to see any child held back from achieving their potential, and that includes ensuring that children with speech, language and communication needs are given the support they need."*

Theresa May, Prime Minister's Questions 21 March 2018



### THE YEAR IN NUMBERS

**1** parliamentary debate

**2** meetings with ministers

**17** recommendations fully achieved

**80+** parliamentary questions answered

**11,622** signatures on the petition calling on the Government to implement the recommendations in the report

**21,983** posts on Twitter using the #Bercow10 hashtags

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## KEY SUCCESSES

### 1. Communication is crucial

- Evidence-based interventions and training are being promoted through the Early Years Social Mobility Peer Review Programme.
- The advisory groups for the Department for Education and Public Health England's work on closing the word gap have drawn strongly on speech, language and communication expertise to inform new initiatives.
- Communication skills are recognised in the criteria for Functional Skills qualification.
- Government are developing clear messages and information for parents as part of their Chat, Play, Read campaign.

### 2. A strategy for system change

- The Government has asked Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) to design a programme of further local area SEND inspections to follow the current round.
- Public Health England sought expert advice on the links with speech, language and communication which has informed its work on improving public mental health outcomes for school age children.
- Following the Lenehan Review into residential special schools, a SEND System Leadership Board will focus on joint commissioning for SEND.

### 3. An accessible and equitable service for all families

- Public Health England has integrated data from health and education on children's speech, language and communication development through its Fingertips tool.
- Local areas are now able to use this data in their needs analysis and planning.
- Ofsted and CQC inspectors undertaking Local Area SEND

inspections have been trained to challenge areas on how they plan and commission support for SLCN.

- In 2019 Ofsted will publish a report on how mainstream pupils access specialist therapies.

### 4. Support that makes an impact

- Ofsted and CQC inspectors undertaking Local Area SEND inspections have been trained to challenge areas on whether SLCN support is commissioned on outcomes rather than outputs and;
- ... on how areas can collect and use data on children's language.
- The Education Endowment Foundation has made a commitment to evaluate projects, including whole school approaches, which aim to improve outcomes for children with SEND, including those with SLCN.

### 5. Early identification and intervention are essential

- The qualifications criteria for a level 2 early years practitioner includes supporting children's speech, language and communication as a core requirement.
- Public Health England's speech, language and communication pathway for children under 5 will include information about indicators of SLCN.
- Public Health England has commissioned a training programme for health visitors, which will include information on identifying and supporting SLCN.



## KEY POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

Department for Education Home Learning Environment campaign launched to improve early language.

SEND System Leadership Board established with focus on joint commissioning.

NHS Long Term Plan identifies speech and language therapy as a workforce group in short supply.

Draft Ofsted inspection handbooks emphasise importance of pupils developing language and vocabulary.

*"We are committed to improving children's speech, language and communication skills"*  
**Children and Families Minister, Nadhim Zahawi, and Minister for Care, Caroline Dinenage joint response to Bercow: Ten Years On**



**These are all welcomed as positive first steps - but robust long-term evaluation is required to establish whether improved outcomes for children and young people follow.**

## BUT MORE NEEDS TO BE DONE

Despite this significant progress, much more still needs to be done. In five key areas urgent action is needed to improve the life chances of the 1.4 million children and young people with SLCN in the UK.



Theme	Solution
<b>1. Joint commissioning</b> Joint commissioning based on a robust analysis of local need is key to ending the postcode lottery for children with SLCN. The establishment of the SEND System Leadership Board is a welcome first step.	Given the extent to which SLCN cuts across education, health and social care, justice and other policy areas, there should be a commitment that commissioning for SLCN will be an explicit focus of the Board, with a transparent process for drawing upon the knowledge and experience of SLCN experts.  There also needs to be improved accountability measures for Local Authorities, Clinical Commissioning Groups and Integrated Care Systems, so that areas where joint commissioning is not taking place can be identified and supported to do so.
<b>2. Support for long-term SLCN</b> The Government's ambition to tackle social mobility by supporting early language development is clear. But more than 10% of children have SLCN that will need support during and well beyond the early years, and despite the intention of the Children and Families Act to extend support to children from birth to age 25, in many areas this continuity of support is not available.	Children and young people with SLCN would benefit if the Government extended its work in the early years to include support for children with identified SLCN, as well as identification and support right across the age range. Measures to improve joint commissioning could improve access to specialist support, but need to be underpinned by an evidence-based pathway which also includes universal and targeted support. This could build on the pathway which Public Health England is developing for children aged 0-5.
<b>3. Professional development</b> Teachers need to be supported to ensure they can provide high quality teaching which enables all children to develop spoken language skills. They need to be able to identify children who may have SLCN as early as possible and support them effectively.	This should be addressed both through the early career framework for new teachers, as well as through providing national programmes of training for all education staff. It is also crucial that all those who are working in schools to support children and young people's mental health understand the links with SLCN.
<b>4. Incentivising schools</b> With increasing pressures on their time and budgets, it's essential that schools are encouraged from the top to give speech, language and communication the priority it deserves.	This should include providing guidance to schools on how they can use their pupil premium funding to develop language skills, as well as ensuring school inspections consider the way that teaching improves pupils' spoken language and supports pupils with SLCN.
<b>5. Vulnerable groups</b> Some groups of children and young people are much more likely to have SLCN than their peers: those excluded from school, in care, in the justice system, and with mental health problems.	All practitioners working in these settings need to be trained in how to recognise SLCN and respond effectively in order to secure the best outcomes for children and young people. They must also have access to specially commissioned speech and language therapy services for those young people who need them.



## A CROSS-GOVERNMENT STRATEGY

The most effective way to address these issues is as part of a system-wide approach: a cross-Government strategy for children, with speech, language and communication at its core, overseen by a cross-Government ministerial group. The Government has already taken this approach with the establishment of the cross-Government ministerial group for early family support, so it can be done. The Government must now take the bold step to extend this joined-up approach beyond the age of two to give all children and young people the chance to fulfil their potential.

## Where next for Bercow: Ten Years On?

Together, I CAN and the RCSLT will continue to press the Government to take the necessary steps to improve the lives of children with SLCN, and their families. We remain committed to working in partnership with national and local decision makers, commissioners, professionals and families, and with young people themselves, to find solutions and make change a reality.

Join the conversation  
on social media  
using the hashtags  
**#speakupforSLCN** and  
**#speakupforcommunication**



[www.ican.org.uk](http://www.ican.org.uk)



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## More information

Visit  
[www.bercow10yearson.com](http://www.bercow10yearson.com)  
to read the recommendations in full.