

Rebecca Pow MP debate on speech, language and communication support for children 4 July 2018

We very much welcome Rebecca Pow's debate and the opportunity it represents to highlight the *Bercow: Ten Years On* report.

Why does it matter?

- 10% of children – 1.4 million in the UK - have long-term speech, language and communication needs (SLCN). This is equivalent to three children in every classroom in primary and secondary schools.
- In areas of social disadvantage, around 50% of children start school with delayed language and other identified SLCN.

Without support these children and young people risk underachievement, behaviour and mental health difficulties, limited life chances and a lack of social mobility. This makes addressing children and young people's SLCN a social justice issue.

There is also an economic impact: communication skills are essential in the workplace, but employers report challenges in recruiting young people with adequate communication skills.

Background to *Bercow: Ten Years On*

Bercow: Ten Years On is an independent review of the state of provision for children with SLCN in England. The report was published by I CAN, the children's communication charity, and the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) in March 2018.

The review found a fragmented system, failing thousands of children with SLCN by not identifying them early enough, or putting support in place:

- More than half of parents and carers had to wait longer than six months for their child to get the help they needed, with a third waiting over a year.
- Only 15% of those surveyed felt that speech and language therapy was available in their local area as required.

For more information about *Bercow: Ten Years On* please see the two-page summary:
<https://www.bercow10yearson.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Bercow-Ten-Years-On-Summary-Report-.pdf>

Support for *Bercow: Ten Years On*

- We have been absolutely delighted by the level of support that *Bercow: Ten Years On* has received from parents and carers, professionals and organisations representing children and young people with SLCN.
- This has demonstrated a real desire to ensure that support for the 10% of children and young people with long-term SLCN is improved.
- There is a similar desire to improve the life chances of the 50% of children in areas of social disadvantage who start school with delayed language and other identified SLCN.

Political support and Government action

- We have been equally delighted by the response of politicians of all parties and none to the report.
- Replying to a question from Nick Smith during Prime Minister's Questions on 21 March, the Prime Minister said that the Government is considering the report very carefully and will respond to it in due course. We welcome this and look forward to seeing the Government's response.
- We have been encouraged by our discussions with officials at the Department for Education and welcome the Government's plans to help close the word gap in children aged 0-5. We look forward to discussing the report with officials in the Department of Health and Social Care.

Building on these foundations

More needs to be done if children and young people with SLCN are to be properly supported to fulfil their potential. We need to ensure:

- **Ongoing support across the age range** - 10% of children and young people have long-term SLCN. To ensure these children and young people have the best possible chance in life, they need to be provided with the right level of support throughout their schooling and beyond. This might include speech and language therapy, support from school staff, or advice and support for parents/carers and other professionals. While we welcome the plans to address speech, language and communication in the early years, we also need to help children and young people with SLCN right now, including those over the age of five.
- **Reducing risks** - we need to ensure that early identification and support is as robust as possible to help children and young people with SLCN fulfil their potential, and reduce the risk of a range of negative outcomes in relation to educational attainment, behaviour, mental health and wellbeing, employment prospects, and possible involvement in the criminal justice system.
- **Improving life chances** – children's speech, language and communication should be a significant factor in the Government's social mobility strategy across the age range.

The need for a cross-Government strategy

The central recommendation of *Bercow: Ten Years On* is that a new cross-Government strategy for children should be developed, with speech, language and communication at its core.

- Speech, language and communication is an issue which cuts across many Government departments, including Education, Health and Social Care, and Justice. That is why cross-Government action is needed.
- As the majority of speech and language therapy services are commissioned by Clinical Commissioning Groups and provided by the NHS, it is essential that the Department of Health and Social Care plays its full part in responding to *Bercow: Ten Years On*. It is only with cross-Government action that we can improve the life chances of all children and young people with SLCN.
- In relation to this cross-Government strategy, and the recommendations as a whole, it would be useful for the Government to indicate when it will formally respond to the *Bercow: Ten Years On* report. The Prime Minister committed to this in her response to Nick Smith at Prime Minister's Questions on 21 March.

Speech, language and communication needs – who are the children and young people?

- More than 10% of all children and young people – 1.4 million in the UK – have long-term SLCN which create barriers to communication or learning in everyday life:
 - 7.6% have developmental language disorder – a condition where children have problem understanding and/or using spoken language, with no obvious reason for these difficulties.¹
 - 2.3% have language disorders associated with another condition such as Down Syndrome, hearing impairment, autism or learning disability. ^{ibid}

- SLCN also include conditions such as speech difficulties, stammering and many others.
- These children and young people will need long-term support.
- Children living in areas of social disadvantage are at much higher risk, with around 50% of children starting school with delayed language and other identified SLCN.^{2,3}

The impact of SLCN on children's life chances

Without support, children and young people with SLCN risk underachievement, mental health problems and poor life chances:

Educational attainment

- Young children with SLCN were two and a half times less like to made expected academic progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage compared with all children.⁴
- Primary school pupils with SLCN were four times less likely to achieve the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of primary school compared with all pupils.⁵
- Secondary school pupils with SLCN were three times less likely to gain grade 4/C or above in English and maths at GCSE, compared with all pupils.⁶

Social, emotional and mental health

- 81% of children with emotional and behavioural disorders have unidentified language difficulties.⁷
- Young people referred to mental health services are three times more likely to have SLCN than those who have not been referred.⁸

Life chances

- Children with poor vocabulary skills are twice as likely to be unemployed when they reach adulthood.⁹
- 60% of young offenders have low language skills.¹⁰

References

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- 3 Law, J., McBean, K and Rush, R. (2011) Communication skills in a population of primary school-aged children raised in an area of pronounced social disadvantage *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders*, 46(6): 657-664
- 4 Department for Education Early Years Foundation Stage results 2017
- 5 Department for Education Key Stage 2 SATS results 2017
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- 7 Hollo A, Wehby J.H, Oliver R.M. (2014) Unidentified Language Deficits in Children with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders: A Meta-Analysis. *Exceptional Children* 80(2): 169-186
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- 9 Law J., Rush R., Schoon I. and Parsons S. (2009) Modelling developmental language difficulties from school entry into adulthood: literacy, mental health, and employment outcomes. *Journal of Speech, Language and Hearing Research*, 52(6): 1401-16
- 10 Bryan K Freer J and Furlong C (2007) Language and communication difficulties in juvenile offenders *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders*, 42(5):505-520

For more information, please contact Peter Just on peter.just@rcslt.org or 020 7378 3630.
