

Children in need data bulletin

What can we learn from national data on children in need with a disability?

Key facts and stats¹

- There were 50,800 children in need with a disability or illness in March 2015, 13% of all children in need. The proportion of children in need with a disability has fallen in each of the past five years (since 2011) while the number of children in need has risen overall. This suggests that thresholds for assessing disabled children's services have been rising.
- Children in need with a disability represent 0.4% of the 0 - 17-year-old population in England.
- Disabled children in need are most likely to be boys and of secondary school age.
- Disability/illness was the main social care need for the majority (63%) of children in need who had a disability recorded. The other reasons for needing support were:
 - Abuse or neglect, for nearly one in five (18%, 9,190 children) children in need with a disability
 - Family difficulties for 13%, because of acute family stress or family dysfunction.
- There is great variation at local authority level in the number of children in need with a disability and in the disabilities recorded. Six of the largest authorities have over 1,000 children in need with a disability, while seven authorities have less than 100 (with a median of 260). It is likely that these wide variations reflect local eligibility criteria and the way services are organised (e.g. availability of Early Support) rather than variations in the number and needs of disabled children in each area.
- Learning (broadly defined as having SEN) is the most common disability recorded, for 46% of children in need with a disability. Autism/Asperger syndrome is the second most common, for 31% of this cohort. The next most common disabilities are communication (24%), behaviour (23%), and mobility (22%).
- The proportion of children in need with a disability recorded as autism/Asperger syndrome has risen most over the last five years (from 26% of the cohort to 31%), echoing the clearest trend in the SEN data.
- For over half (56%) of disabled children in need, only one disability is recorded and for almost three quarters (73%) only one or two disabilities are recorded. This suggests that relatively few children with complex disabilities and their families are supported as children in need, perhaps because they are supported by other services – local research is required to understand this.

Data notes

Sources

1. SFR41-2015. Children in need census data, 31 March 2015, on children in need with a disability recorded aged 0-17 years (inclusive) in England.
2. Time series 2011-2015 compiled from previous annual children in need census bulletins, all at:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-children-in-need>
3. Special request to DfE for data breakdowns on all children in need with a disability (N=50,800). Published at
<https://councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk/help-resources/resources/data-report>

Data limitations

Children in need census data submitted by local authorities are confidence rated. We excluded those with the lowest rating (1) from comparative analyses of local authorities, in line with data quality guidance.¹

Rounding conventions

The number of children is rounded to the nearest ten and low values are suppressed, in line with DfE conventions. Percentage figures are rounded to the nearest percentage point (with one exception). Values of 0.5% or 5 are rounded up. Analysis of rounded data can give rise to small differences (usually 1 percentage point or 10 children), which would be avoided if unrounded data were available.

We have not tested the significance of these data, but where there are doubts about robustness, these are highlighted.

How many disabled children are assessed as children in need? What proportion of children in need do they represent? How has this changed over time?²

There were 50,800 children in need with a disability in March 2015, representing 13% of all children in need. Nationally, over 3% (391,000) of children and young people are assessed as children in need of support from social services.

Children in need with a disability represent just 0.4% of the 0–17-year-old population in England.³

Looking back over the past five years, the proportion of children in need with a disability fell from 14% in 2011 to 13% in 2015. Numbers fluctuated from year to year, but between 2011 and 2015, overall the number of children in need with a disability fell, while the total number of children in need rose. This suggests that thresholds for assessing disabled children as children in need of support from social services are getting higher; more positively, it may reflect the roll-out of Early Support.⁴

How does this vary by local authority?⁵

There is significant variation in the number and proportion of children in need with a disability in different local authority areas. This reflects variations in local practice (service thresholds, early support etc.) more than variations in number of disabled children locally.

The number of children in need (CiN) with a disability in each local authority ranges from 60 in Herefordshire (5% of CiN) to 1,620 in Devon (28% of CiN) with a median of 260 children (13% of CiN). Six of the largest authorities (Hertfordshire, Birmingham, Hants, Essex, Kent and Devon) have over 1,000 children in need with a disability. At the other end of the spectrum, seven authorities have less than 100.

In percentage terms, the lowest proportion of children in need with a disability is 3% (90 children) in the London Borough of Lambeth, followed by Herefordshire on 5% (60 children). The highest proportion of children in need with a disability is 31% in Windsor and Maidenhead (260 children), followed by 28% (1,620 children) in Devon County Council.

Personal characteristics⁶

Gender

67% of disabled children in need are male, 33% female, similar to other national data on disabled children. This is a much stronger gender split than among children in need overall, 52% of whom are male and 45% female (with 2% gender unknown, mostly unborn children).

Age

The number of children in need peaks in the 10-15 years age band, most significantly for those with a disability. By contrast, children in need with a disability are less likely to be assessed as being in need in the early years

² SFR41-2015. DfE rounds headline national statistics up to the nearest 100. However most of the data tables presented in this section are based on the headline figure of N=50,770 (rounded to nearest 10).

³ Analysis of SFR 41-2015 data (table B2 and annex: age at mid-year 2014 projections using 2011 Census data)

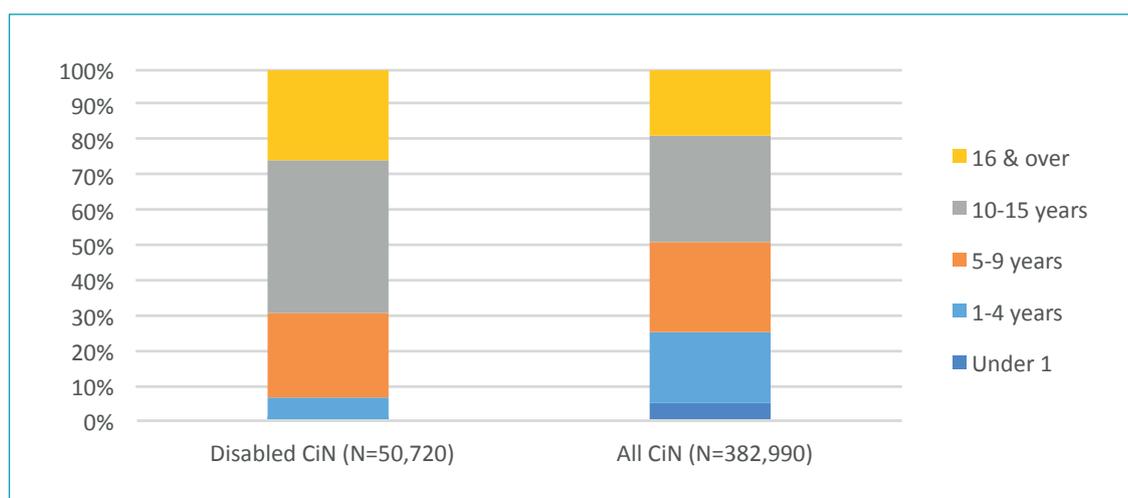
⁴ See <https://councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk/our-work/whole-child/practice/early-support-integrated-and-person-centered-approach>

⁵ National tables, B2. Please note that the ranges described in this section exclude 10 local authorities whose data had the lowest confidence rating.

⁶ Breakdown of data on children in need with a disability (N=50,770) by special request to DfES. Compared with data from SFR 41-2015 national tables (A3 and A4). Note: Excludes unborn children and those whose gender was unknown (as source data was broken down by age and gender).

Analysis of rounded date may affect totals by +/- 10 children.

Age distribution of CiN with a disability, compared to all CiN (March 2015, England)



Note: Excludes unborn children and those whose gender was unknown (as source data was broken down by age and gender). Analysis of rounded data may affect totals by +/- 10 children.

(0 - 4), compared to children in need overall. These two trends echo the age distribution seen in the SEN and disabled looked after children (LAC) data.

Ethnicity

Low numbers of disabled children in need meant that the data on ethnicity could not be broken down beyond high level headings. These show a similar ethnic profile of disabled children in need compared to all children in need (see table below), with:

- Disabled children in need are slightly more likely to be White or Asian, compared to all children in need
- Slightly less likely to be of mixed origin or Black

What do we know about the social care needs of children in need with a disability?⁷

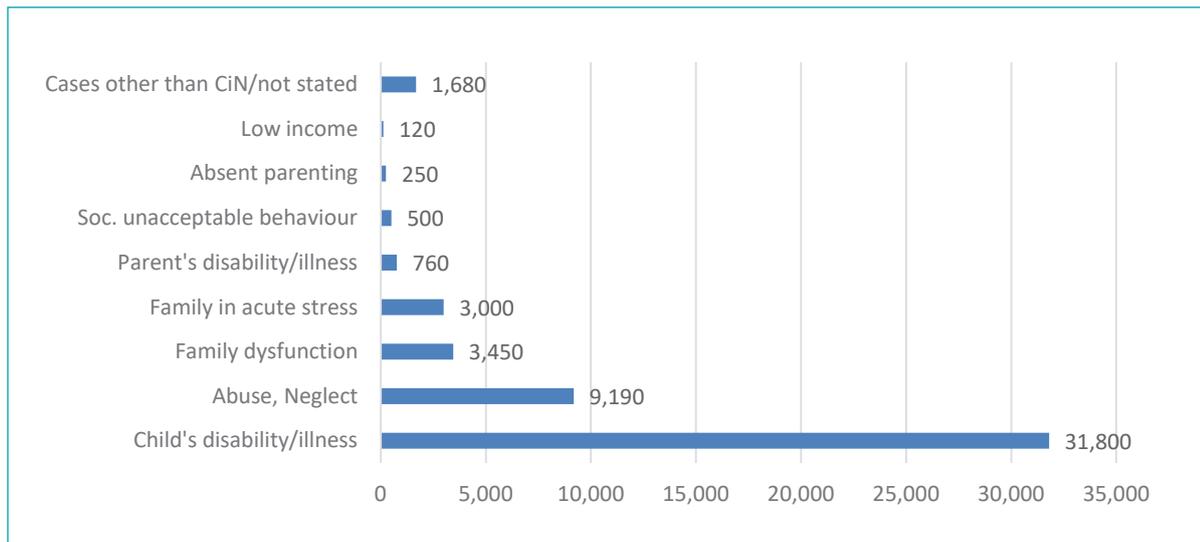
To help understand the overlap between disability and other social care needs, we requested a breakdown of the main reason why disabled children were assessed as in need of services i.e. their primary need at assessment.

50,770 children in need had a disability recorded, 50,750 of whom had a primary social care need recorded. Disability or illness was the main social care need for the majority (63%) of these children. The other main reasons for needing support from social services were:

	White	Mixed	Asian/Asian British	Black/Black British	Other ethnic group	Total (known ethnicity)
All CiN	75%	8%	7%	8%	2%	100%
Disabled CiN	78%	6%	8%	7%	2%	100%

Notes: Ethnicity was recorded for 95% of CiN and 99% of disabled CiN. This breakdown excludes those with no recorded ethnicity.

Primary need at assessment for children with a disability (N=50,750)



- Abuse or neglect, for nearly one in five (18%, 9,190 children) children in need with a disability
- Family difficulties: 13% were children in need because their family was in acute stress (6%, 3,000 children) or due to family dysfunction (7%, 3,450 children).

What do we know about children in need's disabilities?⁸

The children in need census allows one or more disabilities to be recorded from each child, from a list of twelve (definitions included at the end of this bulletin) or else 'no disability'. Analysis of the national figures show that:

- 'Learning' is by far the most common disability recorded, for 46% of children in need with a disability, with a broad definition of 'having special educational needs etc.'
- Autism/Asperger syndrome (more tightly defined, requiring a medical diagnosis⁹) is the second most common, for 31% of this cohort.
- The next most common disabilities are

communication (24%), behaviour (23%) and mobility (22%).

Multiple disabilities can be recorded, so in considering the table overleaf, it is important to bear in mind that children with complex needs may be counted several times.

Number of disabilities recorded – complex needs¹⁰

To help interpret children in need census data on children's disabilities and in particular, the extent of complex disabilities, we requested a breakdown of the number of disabilities recorded for each child.

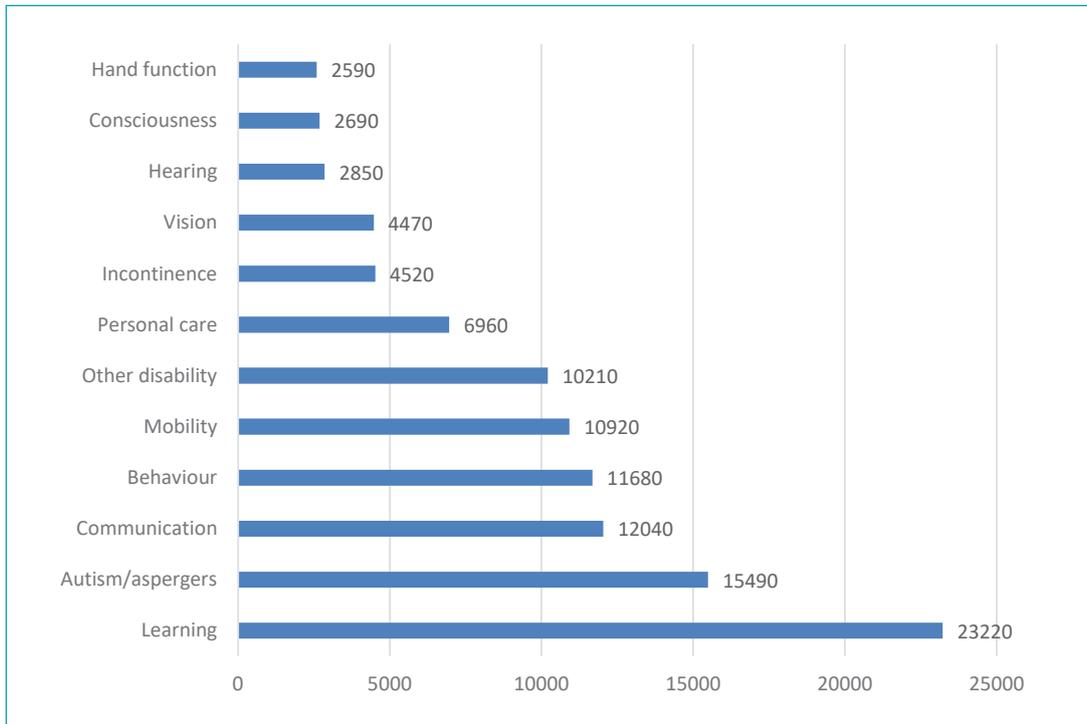
This shows that for over half (56%) of this group, only one disability is recorded and for almost three quarters (73%) only one or two disabilities are recorded.

This is surprising, given the low numbers of children in need with a disability: if only a small proportion of disabled children are supported by children's services as children in need, one would expect them to include those

⁸ These data are published annually at national and local authority level (table B2, SFR41-2015).

⁹ The definition states that autism or Asperger Syndrome should have been diagnosed by a qualified medical practitioner and not to include children 'merely identified as having an ASD eg by their school' which can be associated with the learning or behaviour categories.

No. of CiN by disability recorded in 2015 (note: as many disabilities can be recorded as are relevant). N=50,800



Note: Totals calculated based on N x % breakdown provided in table B2 of the national tables, and rounded to nearest 10.

with the most complex needs. We do not know if this reflects the way data are recorded (similar to SEN, usually only recording a primary need) or the actual profile of the cohort being worked with; local research would be required to understand this.

Variations at local authority level¹¹

Local authority data on the disabilities recorded for children in need indicate much variation in local practice.

For example, the proportion of children in need with a disability recorded as having autism/Asperger syndrome ranged from 60% in Bury to zero in Rotherham, with a median of around one third (31%). Six local authorities reported that over 50% of the children in need with a disability they work with have autism or Asperger syndrome.

Sixteen others reported that less than 20% have this disability.

Disabilities which were reported as affecting more than 80% of disabled children in need in some local authorities included:

- Behaviour: for 81% of disabled children in need in one authority (median=20%)
- Communication: for 90% of disabled children in need in one authority (median=23%)
- Learning: for 89% of disabled children in need in one authority (median=46%)
- Personal care: for 94% of disabled children in need in one authority (median=10%)

It is highly likely that these figures reflect local eligibility criteria and the way local

¹⁰ Special request to DfE

¹¹ Table B2, SFR41-2015. Please note that these ranges exclude the 10 local authorities whose data had the lowest confidence rating.

Number of disabilities recorded	Number of children with a disability at 31 March 2015	% of children with a disability at 31 March 2015 with the number of disabilities
1	28,290	56
12	8,830	17
3	4,900	10
4	3,170	6
5	2,160	4
6	1,570	3
7	940	2
8	540	1
9	260	<1
10	90	<1
11	20	<1
12	0	0
Total	50,770	100%

Source: Children in Need Census, special request to DfE. Figures rounded to nearest ten, percentage figures to nearest whole percentage point.

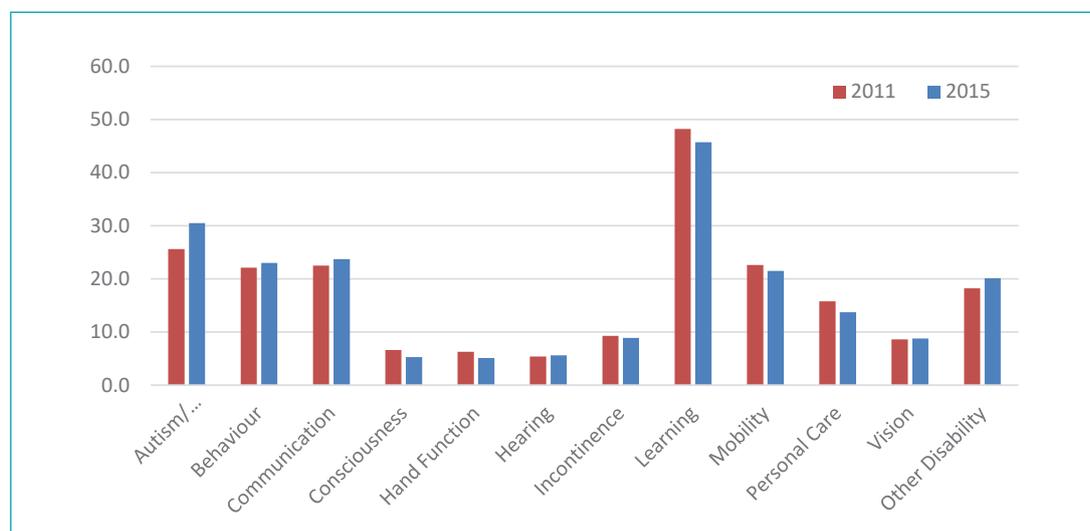
services are organised (e.g. with Early Support targeted at certain groups) more than variations in the prevalence of children’s disabilities in local areas.

Trends in disabilities over time¹²

We explored how the profile of disabilities reported for children in need has changed over the past five years, from 2011 to 2015 inclusive.

Over this period, the greatest increase in the proportion of children in need with a disability was in respect of autism/Asperger syndrome, up from 26% of the cohort to 31%. This echoes the clearest trend in the special educational needs (SEN) data. Meanwhile the greatest fall was in Learning (from 48% to 46%), a broad category related to having SEN; and Personal Care, from 16% to 14%.

Percentage of CiN with a disability, by type of disability reported, in 2011 and 2015.



¹² Analysis of national data (table B2 in SFR 41-2015 and equivalent in previous years) published at <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-children-in-need>. Older data were collected and presented on a different basis so could not readily be included in our analysis.

Children in Need Census disability terms and descriptions (guidance 2015-16)

Mobility	Getting about the house and beyond
Hand function	Holding and touching
Personal care	Eating, washing, going to the toilet, dressing, etc.
Incontinence	Controlling the passage of urine or faeces
Communication	Speaking and/or understanding others
Learning	Having special educational needs, etc.
Hearing/Vision	
Behaviour	A condition entailing behavioural difficulties, includes attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)
Consciousness	Seizures
ASD	Diagnosed by a qualified medical practitioner as having classical autism or Asperger syndrome
Other DDA	One or more of the child's disabilities under the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 does not fall into above categories.





**Data bulletin of an exploratory analysis
commissioned by the Council for Disabled Children
and the True Colours Trust.**

by Anne Pinney

The full report and in-depth data bulletins can be found at
www.councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk/helpresources/data-report