COUNCIL FOR DISABLED CHILDREN

CDC Digest

Spring 2024

Dear all,

In writing this I've been reflecting on the last 8 months since it was announced I would be taking over as CDC Director from Dame Christine Lenehan. It's a fabulous job which means you get to spend time with amazing people and young people, and it's a journey and one I expect I will be on for a little while. I am driven by my passion for improving outcomes for disabled children and families through improving the integration of systems. Doing so across the evolving landscape of Integrated Care Systems, Local Authorities and education settings, and in the context of the learning emerging from the Department for Education (DfE) SEND and AP Change Programme and the What Works in SEND programme is definitely keeping me busy.

Also keeping me busy is the thought of a general election, anticipated in the coming months, and the critical importance of ensuring the needs of disabled children and/or children with special educational needs, and their families, are front and centre in manifesto activity. CDC will be proactively working with our partners in the Disabled Children's Partnership, the Special Educational Consortium, and the Health Policy Influencing Group to ensure that as a sector we are able to make the most of the opportunities; fully informed by our understanding of what works (and what doesn't) in relation to the SEND system and what it is that underpins the delivery of effective and timely support for children and families.

We are also now seeing the challenge, and opportunity of the recommendations from a myriad of cross-sector reviews, including the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel report on Disabled Children in Residential Settings and the Law Commission Review of Disabled Children's Social Care Legislation. As well as the outcomes from programmes such as the Short Breaks Innovation Fund and the learning from the SEND and AP Change Programme which is testing proposed reforms set out in the SEND and AP Improvement Plan.

The next step will be to bring the evidence and learning, from all of these, together to better understand their cumulative ability to improve outcomes for disabled children. Ensuring, in parallel, that we do not lose sight of the urgent needs of children and families battling with our current systems and infrastructure despite the best intentions of practitioners.

We are really supportive of the test-and-learn approach to developing new ways of working embedded in the DfE Change Programme. Alongside our partners in the REACh consortium, we are committed to supporting the department's work to take the feedback and learning from the Change Programme Partnerships alongside evidence from the wider sector and that generated through What Works in SEND, to inform system transformation that will have a positive impact on the lives of children, young people and their families.

For further information on the Change Programme there is a great opportunity to hear more at the upcoming 'The journey so far' conferences. I look forward to seeing you there.

Best wishes,

Amanda Allard

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Council for Disabled Children Updates

Health – Innovation and Support

We have been working with Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent ICB to support two local NHS Foundation Trusts in the redevelopment and improvement on their neurodevelopmental pathways. This work has involved national and international research and engagement work with local children, young people and parents and carers into what makes neurodevelopmental pathways effective. We have also been working with Kent City Council to develop and deliver training on positive approaches to challenging conversations between professionals and parent/carers. We have worked with professionals to understand what makes certain conversations challenging, and what skills and approaches are needed to manage these effectively. We have developed a train-the-trainer model with managers across SEND, as this will enable them to train their teams going forward.

Health – Systems Improvement

REACh, the delivery partners for the Change Programme, continue to support 32 Local Areas to test the SEND and AP reforms. We have now completed the set-up phase and entered the second phase which is focusing on testing of the reforms. REACh have organised several webinars and workshops to provide bespoke support to the LAs on various topics such as, features of effective partnerships, effective alternative provision systems, power and purpose of a practice-led ordinarily available provision framework and others. Some of these sessions will be delivered by subject matter experts including Dame Christine Lenehan and will bring together multi-agency professionals involved in the Change Programme. REACh are continuing to collect robust feedback from the local areas through surveys, focus groups and one-to-one interviews and providing concrete recommendations to the policy teams at the DfE. You can continue keeping up to date with Change Programme's progress by signing up to the newsletter here.

In the Research and Improvement for SEND Excellence (RISE) Partnership, the final training sessions of a series of national training sessions concluded. Across the year over 1150 people attended these training sessions, reaching every region of England and covering topics from the Equality Act 2010, to Data, an Introduction to Health as well as national events, and webinars.

Social Care

The Social Care team have been busy delivering a variety of projects through our Strategic Reform Partner contract with the Department for Education, spanning work as the learning facilitation partner on the Short Breaks Innovation Fund, to convening a roundtable on the future of commissioning for children and young people with complex health and behavioural needs.

We also had the privilege of hosting our first Parent Carer SEND Stakeholder Meeting in January, convening 86 parents to talk about their views on National Standards. Further meetings are being planned for later this year.

In March, we delivered two events focused on the Designated Social Care Officer (DSCO) role. This included a national learning event where we shared emerging learning on the role and policy updates. CDC continues to work closely with DfE to share evidence of the impact of the role. Under the RISE programme, we have been delivering regional training focused on the Local Offer for Social Care and SEND virtually.

Special Educational Consortium (SEC)

The Special Educational Consortium (SEC) have successfully launched their manifesto, which lists our three priorities for the next government to ensure support for disabled children and young people and those with SEN. SEC held an online launch event and heard from Brian Lamb OBE and young people with special educational needs who shared their experiences of the education system. Our manifesto has gained traction within social media and will be disseminated amongst cabinet members, parliamentarians and official bodies to ensure our key priorities are heard ahead of the election.

SEC have also submitted two consultation responses this quarter; one reviewing the Elective Home Education guidance for the DfE and a call for evidence on children's social care for the Education Select Committee, both submissions can be read here. SEC were also approached by the DfE to discuss the proposed changes to wraparound care. We shared our concerns on the lack of support available for disabled children and young people and those with SEN, and how more resource will be needed to ensure wraparound care is successful and effective for all.

Early Years SEND (EYSEND)

We have spent the past quarter delivering training, national seminars, and regional events as part of the Early Years SEND Partnership, a coalition of organisations committed to improving access and inclusion in the early years. The highlight has to be our regional events, held in London, Birmingham and Manchester, attracting 200+ practitioners, parents/carers and other professionals in the sector. We had some excellent guest speakers from the Education Policy Institute, Coram and the Anna Freud Centre, who presented on fascinating topics ranging from family hubs to inequalities in provision for disabled young children and those with SEN. If you were unable to attend and are interested in watching the presentations, you can view some of the sessions here.

As part of the EYSEND Partnership, we also provide strategic support to local areas with their local inclusion planning. CDC supported Doncaster, Durham, Nottingham City, Plymouth and Salford over the past few months on topics ranging from early identification of need to ordinarily available provision. On the topic of ordinarily available provision, we held a very well-attended and well-received seminar on this topic on 19th February. A representative from Cumberland County Council presented about their journey developing their ordinarily available provision in the early years, supported by CDC in 2022–23. Cumberland reported that the document they produced has been positively received by practitioners across the sector and is driving better consistency in universal provision across the locality.

The EYSEND Partnership is funded for another year and we have plenty in store in the upcoming months. You can find out more about training and other events from all six Partners on our training calendar or by signing up to our EYSEND newsletter.

Information, Advice and Support Services Network (IASSN)

This quarter, the IASSN have been focused on our reporting and our training delivery.

In terms of reporting, we have finalised our data report and our service user feedback report. We have also written and are about to publish our year-end report, which can be found here when published.

In terms of training, we have commissioned 11 IPSEA Legal Trainings sessions, 4 Helpline Trainings on Managing Difficult Conversations and Vicarious Trauma and a new staff Induction Session. In total we offered 393 training spaces to SENDIAS service staff. Feedback for these sessions has been excellent with 95% of those attending rating the session as good or excellent and only 1% rating the training as not meeting expectations.

We have also been meeting with our Children and Young People's Steering Group who have written the Forewords for each of our reports, have fed into DfE about Annual Reviews and are currently writing resources. We also joined 8 regional managers meetings, including a two-day conference in Lancaster.

Participation

Spring has been full of activity for the Participation team. In February we hosted our sixth co-designed and co-delivered, Youth Voice Matters Conference as part of the Department for Education funded national programme Making Participation Work (more about this on page 9).

Through October to December, we ran and completed a project gathering the views of 36 autistic young people and of 15 parent carers of autistic young people, on Annual Health Checks that we then presented to NHSE. In December we also completed our final report for a national evaluation of the NHS Keyworking service, which involved the direct participation of parent carers and young people across the whole of England. 2024 brought with it a new project that we completed in March. This project involved running focus groups with 50 young people across all four nations of the United Kingdom, to find out about autistic young people's experiences and perspectives of online safety on behalf on NSPCC.

Reflections on the Five Nations Meeting

Daniel Stavrou

In September, representatives from the Five Nations met in London to discuss a number of topical issues in the SEND world. Amongst the topics, we discussed the increase of autism diagnoses. Across the nations, diagnoses are indeed increasing, while systems are grappling with an attempt (or aspiration, or the beginnings of an inclination) to move away from labelling as a means for accessing appropriate support.

The phenomenon is international. In the United States, the Centre of Disease Control and Prevention (also known as CDC...) has identified a marked increase in diagnoses, including amongst girls, and children under 4. CDC relate this growth to increased awareness as well as environmental factors. Similarly, a UK study from 2021 pointed to a clear and significant increase in diagnoses, citing 'increased reporting' as the driving factor, rather than 'growth in prevalence'.

In our session, we heard that all nations are facing a marked increase in diagnoses of autism, with Northern Ireland for example putting the prevalence amongst school aged children at 5%. As educationalists, diagnosis per se is not our natural terrain, but the issue is important as it raises two questions: what do we know that might help plan better for provision? And: is some of the increase in diagnoses linked to unmet need?

Regarding the first question, it is worth noting that autism is unique amongst 'primary types of need' in that a larger proportion of those diagnosed are in receipt of an EHCP than those on SEN Support (with the exceptions of PMLD and SLD which one would probably expect in our educational system) at a ratio of roughly 3:4. This demonstrates why understanding diagnosis trends is so important for resource planning; indeed, why autism is a policy preoccupation across the five nations. I think this statistic also speaks to the second question I posed: why are such a high proportion of those diagnosed with autism not having their needs met at the universal and targeted levels? Part of the answer might be in reports I hear (which are anecdotal, if persistent) of increase in acuity of need, and of frequent co-occurring mental health needs. It strikes me that we nonetheless need to explore how might we meet more of these needs as part of ordinarily available provision, or SEN Support.

The Improvement Plan aims to address these concerns, and on the 29 January the SOS confirmed in Parliament that the need to better equip teachers to understand autism is clear to policy makers and that practitioner standards for this are being developed.

In late January, the Welsh representative arranged a virtual session led by academics from across the nations, interrogating policy challenges. At the centre of the presentations and discussions was a study which set out to investigate differences in the way policy conceptualises and addresses inclusive practice.

Going back to the fundamental question 'what is inclusion' was a reminder for me, that in June it will be 30 years since the Salamanca Statement. The statement went some way to cementing a common understanding of, and commitment to, inclusive education. One of the characteristics of inclusive practice being: education systems should be designed and educational programmes implemented to take into account the wide diversity of (unique characteristics, interests, abilities and learning needs) these characteristics and needs.

Considering England's approach to inclusion and the nature of special needs, the study highlights a gap between some of the declarative language and the policy approach to inclusion and the identification of special needs. It characterises English policy as having a 'deficit approach': pointing out that the Code refers to 'areas of weakness / difficulty' and places a heavy accent on the need for specialists and 'expertise', including those external to schools, and commissioned as part of a 'business approach' to SEND. This carries the risk of 'othering' those with SEND and leaning towards a medical model of understanding SEND. On the other hand, the policy framework set out in the Code is explicit and ambitious in its commitment to equality: "Our vision for children with special educational needs and disabilities is the same as for all children and young people" (DfE/DoH,2015, p. 11). I would add that the same ambition is a recognisable tenet of the SENDAP Improvement Plan, going a step further and linking SEND policy with wider societal aspiration for change: "Our ambition is to create a society that celebrates, encourages and enables the success of all children and young people, including those with SEND" (DfE, 2023). The question is, then, how might policy makers match this welcome ambition with practical steps to move towards a truly inclusive future?

The findings on the curriculum are worth paying some attention to: the English curriculum is found to be the most prescriptive of the five nations in setting out what learners are expected to learn and achieve at every key stage, as exemplified in KS1 phonics screening checks and later timetables checks. There is some concern this system is too rigid to allow disabled children and young people and those with SEN to learn at a pace suitable to their progress, and experience success and recognition. Indeed, the authors of the study state that in "England's curriculum documentation there is little acknowledgement of adjustment or modification of these standards for learners with additional needs". In our session, we learned about the recent reforms of the Welsh system, where they are moving away from Key Stages all together in favour of a more flexible system which can adapt itself to a range of learning needs. On a conceptual level, this means that pedagogy is released from the shackles of a 'normative' approach, where all achievements are compared with a set, rigid, ideal of a learner.

Curriculum and assessment are complex and politically charged topics. But it is important to acknowledge that some policy makers are paying attention to the need to reconsider their current shape, for example the recent House of Lords report. While it doesn't explicitly relate to issues around SEND, it demonstrates a convergence of the utilitarian approach (what is best for all learners, what policies might be better suited to recent technological developments; what will support the economy and labour market) and the calls from the SEND sector. For example, the call for a wider, more varied curricular offer and a move away from the rigidity of high – stakes one-off examinations (see also the work of the Rethinking Assessment group). Could the Welsh model possibly be worth considering for our children and young people as well?

And turning back to inclusion: all the academics involved in the session pointed to the need for an agreed-upon definition of inclusion, and there seemed to be a consensus that Article 24 of the UNCRPD is a good place to start. I'd like to end by turning back to my days as a teacher, when I found that one of the most powerful inclusive instruments – a differentiation tool – was silence... affording what teachers call waiting time after every question presented to the class. This way, those with slower processing and those relying on support have a fair chance of giving a response in class. The reason I think this is an important example, is that it is practice which is inclusive without segregating, calling attention to, or 'othering' those with SEND; in fact, it is helpful for all learners. Florian and Beaton (2028) provide a definition of inclusion in the same vein, with which I will end:

Inclusive pedagogy... is a response to individual differences between pupils that avoids the marginalisation that can occur with differentiation strategies that are designed only with individual needs in mind.

References:

(Florian, L & Beaton, M (in press): Inclusive pedagogy in action: getting it right for every child, International Journal of Inclusive Education).

Council for Disabled Children: Youth Voice Matters Conference 2024

In February 2024, the Council for Disabled Children (CDC) hosted the sixth Youth Voice Matters Conference. Over 110 disabled children and young people, and children and young people with special educational needs, from across England came together to develop their participation skills and to recognise the impact they can have when taking part in strategic participation.

This event is held annually as part of the Department for Education funded national programme Making Participation Work. Youth Voice Matters is a conference with a difference – designed and delivered by young people for young people. Children and young people's right to participate is enshrined in law. Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child says that all children and young people have a right to be heard in decisions that affect them, and to take part in decision-making. Clause 19 of the Children and Families Act 2014 introduces principles around how disabled children and young people and/or those with special educational needs participate in decisions around their support and care. At CDC we believe children and young people's right to be heard and to take part in decision making about their lives should go even further than what the law outlines. The event was created to give young people a space to develop their confidence and their participation skills, to highlight the different ways to speak with decision-makers, and share examples of what can happen when young people realise their collective power.

This year the theme was Action, as decided by the children and young people's advisory group to the Department for Education, FLARE. Building upon previous events where workshops have explored what strategic participation can look like and about developing the skills young people need to have their voices heard, this year focused on how we can put learning into practice. FLARE have a key role in co-designing the day, from the activities on offer (including networking opportunities and a photobooth) to the workshops run.

You can find out more here.

To read a blog from FLARE member Jacob about the day, visit here.

Council for Disabled Children Resources

Needs-led Eligibility Framework

Through the Delivering Better Outcomes Together (DBOT) contract, funded by the Department for Education (DfE), the Council for Disabled Children (CDC) provided bespoke individual and collective support to local areas on a variety of topics related to SEND and Social Care. As part of this, we ran a series of accelerated working group sessions to 13 local areas focused on Eligibility, Thresholds and Short Breaks. As part of these sessions, we created outputs to support local areas to embed consistent offers for disabled children and young people and those with SEN and their families.

This Needs-led Eligibility Framework was co-designed with the local areas involved to map clear pathways to support for disabled children and young people which enables lawful, transparent and accessible pathways enabling families to access the right support at the right time. This framework has been built to fit within a broader model of what we know works in SEND and Social Care.

Read here.

Case Law Directory

The legal system can be an essential tool for disabled people and their families to challenge discrimination and ensure they receive the services to which they are entitled. There are a complex set of laws affecting disabled children and young people and those with SEN and their families, and CDC both supports parents to understand and use the law effectively and professionals to understand and meet their legal duties.

CDC's case law digest service provides an essential update on decisions affecting disabled children and young people and those with SEN. Our series of case law reviews on judgements relating to both SEN and disability are compiled by barrister Steve Broach from 39 Essex Chambers. Our digests provide a description of the case, the implications for children, young people and their families, and how professionals might need to change their practice as a result of the judgement. Case law updates include decisions on the following:

- Deprivation of Liberty
- EHC Plans
- Social Care
- Health
- Local Authority Duties

Read here.

EYSEND Seminar: Ordinarily Available Provision in the Early Years

A national seminar by EYSEND on Ordinarily Available Provision (OAP).

Topics covered in this OAP seminar include:

- What is OAP and how does it apply to early years
- Reflections from a LA: OAP in Cumbria
- What does OAP look like in different local areas?
- A discussion on understanding OAP within the wider sector and policy context

Watch the seminar here.

National Children's Bureau Strategy: Building Brighter Futures 2024–29

The National Children's Bureau (NCB) is thrilled to publish our new five-year strategy, United for a Better Childhood: Building Brighter Futures, which sets out the key areas of focus to support its mission to build better childhoods for every child.

For 60 years, NCB has united individuals and organisations across every area of children and young people's lives, combining cutting-edge research with the voices of lived experience to improve the complex, interconnected systems that support every child to thrive.

Our impact has been built on our ability to learn and evolve and this new strategy lays out how we will push further and do better, to respond to the unprecedented variety and scale of challenges children face today.

All parts of NCB, including our newest member, Research in Practice, share core values and ambitions for children and young people and the new strategy sets out how this larger NCB family will achieve them working in partnership with experts from across the sector.

Anna Feuchtwang, Chief Executive at the National Children's Bureau, said:

"At a time when too many children and young people in England and Northern Ireland face myriad challenges to their physical and mental wellbeing, the National Children's Bureau is setting out its vision for the next five years to build brighter futures for every child. Is our vision possible? Absolutely. Will it happen tomorrow? No. But that can never be an excuse not to push further and to do better for children. With NCB's approach to tackling seemingly intractable problems and a stronger voice for children themselves, change is truly possible. We know that because we've been proving it for 60 years."

To find out more about our plans and strategic goals for the next five years, click here or download a copy here.

Department for Education: Change Programme Update

The Change Programme Recap

The Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Alternative Provision (AP) Improvement Plan sets out three delivery priorities needed to improve the SEND and AP system:

1. Support and Stabilise – Through the Delivering Better Value and the Safety Valve programmes.
2. Increase Supply – Through Early Years Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCO) training, SENCO National Professional Qualifications, The Universal Services Programme, and additional Educational Psychologist training, and by investing into programmes such as Supported Internships, Short Breaks Innovation Fund and Partnerships for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools (PINS).
3. Design and Test – Through the Change Programme.

Delivering these priorities will enable us to create a more inclusive society through a new national SEND and AP system that is built around the right support at the right time and high aspirations for all children and young people. To realise this vision, the new system is intended to:

- Fulfil children's potential: disabled children and young people, and children and young people with special educational needs (or attending alternative provision) enjoy their childhood, achieve good outcomes and are well prepared for adulthood and employment;
- Build parents' trust: parents and carers experience a fairer, easily navigable system (across education, health and care) that restores their confidence that their children will get the right support, in the right place, at the right time;
- Provide financial sustainability: local leaders make the best use of investment in the high needs budget to meet children and young people's needs and improve outcomes, while placing local authorities on a stable financial footing.

The SEND and AP Change Programme is designed to:

- Test whether the system level reforms set out in the Improvement Plan can achieve the above outcomes;
- Understand what tools and support is required to enable local areas and their partners to deliver these changes;
- Identify any unintended consequences.

To test the reforms, we are working with 32 Local Areas, organised into 9 regional Change Programme Partnerships across England. Local areas are made up of local authorities and their partners – including health, schools, and families.

To help us deliver the Change Programme, we are working closely with our Delivery Partner, REACh (Reaching Excellence and Ambition for all Children). REACh is formed of four organisations, each with expertise in SEND, AP and system transformation: PA Consulting, IMPOWER, Council for Disabled Children and Olive Academies.

To measure the effectiveness of the Change Programme, we have appointed ICF Consulting Services to carry out an independent evaluation of the proposed SEND and AP policy reforms. They are working to capture perspectives of disabled children and young people and those with SEN, their families, LA staff, health professionals, and education providers.

We are gathering and sharing feedback and learning from our local areas as part of a 'feedback loop'. The feedback loop has been designed to give us an understanding of what is and is not working in the reforms. This includes the positives, the challenges, and any unintended consequences of the reforms that local areas find during testing.

Areas participating in the Change Programme include:

Change Programme Partnership region	**Lead Local Authority**	**Partner Local Authorities**	**Integrated Care Boards**
North East	Hartlepool Borough Council	Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council, Durham County Council, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council	North East, North Cumbria
North West	Manchester City Council	Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council, Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council, Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council[1]	Greater Manchester
Yorkshire and Humber	Wakefield Metropolitan District Council	Bradford Metropolitan District Council, Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council, Leeds City Council	West Yorkshire
West Midlands	Telford and Wrekin Council	Shropshire Council, Herefordshire Council, Worcestershire County Council	Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin
East of England	Bedford Borough Council	Central Bedfordshire Council, Luton Borough Council	Hertfordshire, West Essex
South East	Portsmouth City Council	West Sussex County Council, Brighton and Hove City Council, East Sussex County Council	Hampshire, Isle of Wight

South West	Shared between supporting local authorities	Swindon Borough Council, Gloucestershire County Council	Banes, Swindon and Wiltshire
London	London Borough of Barnet	London Borough of Camden, London Borough of Enfield, London Borough of Islington	North Central London
East Midlands	Shared between supporting local authorities	Leicester City Council, Leicestershire County Council, Rutland County Council	Leicester, Rutland, Leicestershire

For those who are interested in the Change Programme and what we are beginning to find, we are holding a series of conferences in July. These events, which are region specific, are free to sign up for, and will be delivered by local areas taking part in the Programme.

For regular monthly updates on the Change Programme, subscribe to our newsletter here.

The Change Programme Planned Events

In July 2024, we are holding three half-day virtual events. Each event will contain four distinct workshops.

These workshops will be led by our Change Programme Partnerships, who will share their localised experiences, early insights, and key takeaways from taking part in the Change Programme so far.

Through these events, we will communicate learning and insights to those outside of Change Programme areas. We want to invite people beyond Change Programme Partnerships to become a part of conversations and to seek their views on activity so far. Local Areas will share their examples of best practice in relation to the SEND and AP reforms the Change Programme is testing.

Themes of the workshops will include:

- Partnerships and Plans
- Inclusive Mainstream Practice
- Education, Health, and Care Plans (EHCPs)
- A background to the Improvement Paper, the Change Programme, and parent, carer and family co-production on the Change Programme

The half-day conferences will take place virtually, from 9:30am – 1pm on the following dates:

- North East, North West, Yorkshire and the Humber: Tuesday 2nd July
- East Midlands, West Midlands, East of England: Wednesday 3rd July
- South East, South West, London: Friday 5th July

You can sign up to these events here.

The Feedback loop and early findings from the Change Programme

As local areas have begun testing the SEND and AP reforms, REACh has worked to refine the 'system learning feedback loop'. This ongoing process of gathering views from across the Change Programme Partnerships about what is working and not working about the reforms, is intended to facilitate system learning using an approach called 'rapid cycle testing'.

Rapid cycle testing is an approach to providing timely feedback on a particular intervention. It supports continuous quality improvement and allows observations of changes over time. The process for each rapid cycle test consists of data collection, analysis, reflection, and reporting of key findings.

Since our Programme set-up phase finalised, REACh has gathered views on Plans and Partnerships in each local area to form the first cycle of the feedback loop. Partnerships and Plans are the reforms that focus on establishing the foundations to enable the SEND and AP system to work. They include:

- Local SEND and AP Partnerships
- Local Area Inclusion Plans

The Insight Guide on Local Area Inclusion Plans and Local SEND and AP Partnerships has been shared with our CPPs and it is clear that local areas across the Programme are all starting from different places, and we are gaining invaluable insights into what is needed to help support local partners to deliver the reforms.

Additionally, we are hearing back from all areas taking part in the Change Programme about the positives that working across the health, education and family sectors brings. It has been insightful for all involved to learn about what it really takes for local areas to work together and co-produce products. Having strong working relationships across health, education, local authorities, and families is key for accelerating progress across testing the SEND and AP reforms and creating a strong knowledge base ready for sharing into wider regions, ultimately accelerating the learning of what it takes to improve our SEND and AP system.

We will begin to share this learning later this year, starting at our Virtual Conferences.

What does this mean for parents, carers and families?

Since September 2023, when the Programme began the set-up phase, we have pushed for strong co-production and engagement between local areas and parents, carers and families.

Having Parent Carer Forum (PCF) representatives attend regular sessions with DfE and REACh has ensured their buy-in for the programme across multiple areas. So far, their knowledge and views have directly informed local area approaches to testing, resulting in positive feedback from all involved.

Each area of the Change Programme has it's own steering group, with representation from parent groups and forums, such as the National Network of Parent Carer Forums (NNPCF), representing families and making sure the voices of parents, carers and families are heard.

However, we remain conscious of those parents, carers and families whose voices may not be heard across our steering groups. This includes families whose children are on SEN support, or who are in AP, and children and young people themselves. We want to hear about any local opportunities taking place where we can engage with these parents, carers and families and children and young people to discuss their views and experiences taking part in the Programme.

If you have any queries or questions, please do not hesitate to contact us at: SENDAP.CHANGEPROGRAMME@education.gov.uk , where we'll be happy to hear from you.

Department for Education: National Professional Qualification for SENCOs

On 22 April 2024, the Department for Education (DfE) amended the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Regulations 2014. The changes come into effect from 1 September 2024. Changes to the Regulations include:

- Introducing the new National Professional Qualification for SEN Co-ordinators (NPQ for SENCOs) from 1 September 2024
- Defining the period by which Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs) undertaking the NASENCo must complete this to meet the statutory requirements for the role

Important information for SENCOs

In March 2023, the DfE announced that a new leadership level NPQ would be introduced as the new mandatory qualification for SENCOs. This will replace the existing National Award for SEN Co-ordination (NASENCo) qualification.

All mainstream schools (including Academies and Free Schools) must have a qualified teacher, or head teacher, designated as the SENCO. The new NPQ for SENCOs will become the mandatory qualification for SENCOs from September 2024, with teaching beginning in Autumn 2024.

The existing three-year window to complete the mandatory qualification upon taking up a SENCO post will remain following the introduction of the NPQ for SENCOs. Schools and SENCOs will need to ensure that, where necessary, they are enrolled on training that will allow them to meet this requirement.

We will continue to update the existing GOV.UK SENCO qualification page to ensure that schools and SENCOs understand the new statutory requirements. For more information about transition arrangements to the new statutory qualification please visit here.

Information for the new NPQ for SENCOs

- The introduction of the NPQ for SENCOs will play a key role in achieving our ambition to improve outcomes for disabled children and young people and those with SEN by ensuring SENCOs consistently receive high-quality, evidence-based training.
- NPQs are trusted, transferable qualifications designed to provide high-quality professional development, transform practice and provide the skills and knowledge needed to benefit pupils.
- The NPQ is underpinned by a new content framework which sets out what SENCOs need to know and be able to do to fulfil their role successfully and confidently. The full NPQ for SENCOs framework can found here.
- NPQ scholarship funding will be available to support participants undertaking the new mandatory NPQ for SENCOs in Autumn 2024.

Teachers and school leaders can sign up now to register their interest in taking the NPQ and will receive an email notification when the service opens (summer 2024). Please register your interest here.

For further details on the new NPQ for SENCOs please visit here.

Research in Practice: Understanding autism video learning resources

Research in Practice published a suite of video learning resources for World Autism Awareness Day and World Autism Acceptance Week this April. The new Research in Practice resources explore the importance of building a positive understanding of autism.

Having an informed understanding of autism is key to supporting people. In new videos, autistic author and researcher Kieran Rose (The Autistic Advocate) seeks to reframe the narrative around autism and provide up-to-date information, with a particular focus on autistic ways of being in childhood and adolescence. Keiran explores the importance of building an evidence-informed understanding of autism so that our work meets individual needs and promotes self-acceptance.

The films explore:

- How concepts such as monotropism help us to understand autistic experiences
- Using a neurodiversity approach to ensure our practice and systems promote children and young people's own capacity to be authentically themselves
- Autistic masking and burnout
- How we can change a person's environment, rather than asking them to change themselves

It is important that we work together to build a society in which autistic individuals are fully supported, championed and celebrated to create a brighter, more inclusive future.

Contact: Updated Guidance on Free School Meals

In a huge win for disabled children and the free school meal disability inclusion campaign, Contact is delighted to announce that the government has published its updated guidance on free school meals in England. The updated guidance – the result of a 3 year campaign led by parent carer Natalie Hay – now includes a section on making reasonable adjustments for disabled children, such as by offering a food voucher. It describes the duty to make reasonable adjustments as "anticipatory". Schools should be actively looking at which disabled pupils might be missing out on their school lunch and offering an alternative. The guidance also now includes a section on children with an education package called education otherwise than at school (EOTAS). This makes clear that local authorities should provide free school meals to eligible children unable to attend school due to their special educational needs and who have an EOTAS package.

Anna Bird, Chief Executive of Contact, says: "We welcome the updated guidance and its inclusion of the duty on schools to make reasonable adjustments. This will benefit more than 100,000 eligible disabled children up and down the country. They've been missing out on free school meal entitlement worth £570 a year. It's a question of fairness, and today the scales have tipped to a more equal position.

"The guidance makes clear that schools do have a duty to provide an alternative to disabled children who can't access their free school meal in the regular way. It comes on the back of a hard-fought campaign by parent carer Natalie Hay. She led and steered the campaign over three years, including launching a legal challenge that paved the way to today's outcome. We hope schools and councils are made aware of the guidance changes. We look forward to the Department for Education sharing how they are going to communicate the updated guidance with schools and councils across England."

Contact: New NHS continuing care web page

Contact has developed a new web page with information for families who think their child may be eligible for NHS Continuing Care funding.

Over coming months, they will be enriching their information for families with advice on transitioning to adult Continuing Health Care and parents' top tips on applying for an NHS funded care package.

They are keen to explore working with forums and families to secure improvements in the provision of this vital but hard-to-get health care support package. If you would like to share your story with them, please email amanda.elliot@contact.org.uk

Contact: Martin Lewis quizzes Minister on Child Trust Funds following debate

On 20 March MPs debated the issues around accessing savings locked in Child Trust Funds for more than 80,000 disabled youngsters. You can watch Westminster Hall debate back on Parliament TV. Or read full transcript of the debate in Hansard, the official report of all Parliamentary debates.

Sir Jeremy Quin MP introduced the debate, on behalf of parent campaigner Andrew Turner. He pushed his own government to talk to the finance industry about the simple process they have been using to help some families unlock their savings. There was a speech by Sir Ed Davey MP, leader of the Liberal Democrat. His disabled son John will also be unable to access his savings. Labour's shadow Justice minister, Alex Cunningham MP, said a Labour government will want to fix this injustice if they win the next election. He also included a statement from Contact's Campaign lead, Una Summerson. She says: *"implementing a less restrictive approach is in the best interests of disabled young people. Disabled young people must be allowed to enjoy their savings like everybody else. Continuing to promote actions that fail to address this issue will simply perpetuate injustice. There is an opportunity to bring common sense into the debate and to commit to a new approach".* Mike Freer MP, responding for the government, made a potentially valuable promise to talk to the Department for Work and Pensions about using the appointee scheme.

nasen: nominations for the nasen awards now open

nasen are thrilled to announce that nominations for the nasen Awards are now open! You can now submit your nomination to recognise excellence for inclusion across 15 categories.

Don't miss out on the chance to recognise the outstanding individuals, settings, or products making a significant impact in the SEND sector.

Nominations are open until 4pm, 24 May.

Submit your nomination here.

Exeter University Medical School: Healthy Parent Carer Programme 12-week training course for facilitators

Healthy Parent Carers is a great way to look after parent carers' health and wellbeing. The 12 week programme encourages parent carers to make small changes in their thinking and actions that have a significant impact on their health and wellbeing.

Rebecca from Bournemouth has recently finished the course: *"It was a great course; to be honest I did worry that it would be a bit preachy and pointless. But I couldn't have been more wrong. Big thanks to you and the team for taking the time to consider parent carers and for designing a space for us to take time to think about ourselves. I didn't honestly think anyone outside of 'what we do' even considered us for a moment. So it's much appreciated."*

We are currently training facilitators to run the programme in their locality. All trainers and facilitators are parent carers, so they have first-hand knowledge of the challenges and joys parent carers encounter. Training is all online, and the programme can be delivered either online or face to face.

If you would like to find out more then join us at our Online Information Event on June 11 2024. Book your place here or contact us at healthyparentcarers@exeter.ac.uk for a one to one meeting.

Sibs: New report "If Only You Knew" The school experiences of siblings of disabled children

On Monday 8 April 2024, Sibs published a new report into the school experiences of siblings of disabled children. Children and young people growing up with a disabled brother or sister often get less attention from parents and have more worries and responsibilities than their peers. Many siblings tell us that school would have been a very different experience for them if only their teachers had been aware of some of the challenges they faced. In childhood, the sibling experience can affect a child's attendance, educational attainment and impact on friendships and social life. Being a sibling is a unique experience that extends across the lifespan – it is a role that requires specialist attention and care.

Key statistics revealed

Sibs launched a survey for siblings aged 5–16 in September 2023. Over 200 young people responded.

- 66% of children had told a teacher about their sibling situation
- 75% had told a friend or friends about their disabled brother or sister
- 74% didn't receive any help from school to support them as a sibling

What young siblings said

- *"It's hard to feel good at the start of school because it's often difficult at home in the morning."*
- *"To be seen as me and not just my brother's sister."*
- *"Would maybe be good if my teachers approached me and asked if I needed any help as I find it hard to approach them."*
- *"To understand why I get tired and frustrated and how it affects my mood and ability to learn."*

To read the report please visit here.

Shining the Spotlight: Kidz to Adultz

We are really proud of our members and will jump at every chance to shout about them and their achievements! This is a dedicated place to showcase our members and to shine the spotlight on their projects. Keep scrolling to hear from our new member Kidz to Adultz.

How it works

Kidz to Adultz are free exhibitions dedicated to children and young adults with disabilities and additional needs, and the people who support them.

We make a positive lasting impact by bringing expertise and support to people, while creating connections and memorable moments.

Come along, try out the equipment and products, join in the fun and participate in the activities taking place throughout the day.

What has been achieved?

In 2023 we welcomed over 8,000 visitors to our 4 events, more than 400 companies and charities exhibited with us, and we hosted 40 CPD certified seminars. And that's not to mention all the amazing dancers, singers, magicians, workshop leaders, event hosters, accessible fitness instructors – and even Father Christmas – who joined us to help make magical moments.

We have brought people together to find the best solution for every situation, to help fulfil each person's potential, and to change lives.

More information

Website: www.kidzexhibitions.co.uk

Twitter: @KidztoAdultz

Facebook: @KidztoAdultsExhibitions

Newsletter: sign up to our magazine email updates here

About the digest

The CDC Digest is a quarterly round-up of all the essential policy, practice and other news involving disabled children and young people, and their families.

If you would like to be added to the list to receive this digest, please visit our website and tick 'CDC Digest'

About CDC

The Council for Disabled Children (CDC) is the umbrella body for the disabled children's sector in England, with links to other UK nations. We are the only national body that brings together the diverse range of organisations that work with and for disabled children to support the development and implementation of policy and practice. Our work impacts on over 800,000 disabled children and their families. CDC hosts Making Ourselves Heard, the IASS Network, the Special Educational Consortium and the Transition Information Network.

Find out more

councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk

facebook.com/councilfordisabledchildren

@CDC_tweets

linkedin.com/company/council-for-disabled-children/

INFORMATION, ADVICE & SUPPORT SERVICES NETWORK

TRANSITION INFORMATION NETWORK

MAKING OURSELVES HEARD

SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL CONSORTIUM

COUNCIL FOR DISABLED CHILDREN
Part of the family

COUNCIL FOR DISABLED CHILDREN

United for disabled children

The Council for Disabled Children brings people and organisations together to drive change in society and deliver a better childhood for disabled children the UK. We interrogate policy, uncover evidence and develop more effective ways of supporting disabled children and their families. Together with National Children's Bureau we are united for a better childhood.

Let's work together: 020 7843 6000 | cdc@ncb.org.uk

London: 23 Mentmore Terrace, London, E8 3PN

Part of the family
NATIONAL CHILDREN'S BUREAU

National Children's Bureau is registered charity number 258825 and a company limited by guarantee number 00952717. Registered office: 23 Mentmore Terrace, London E8 3PN.