

CDC Digest

Winter 2023

Dear all,

It has been a really exciting autumn, particularly for me as I navigate my way through new paths. I have now had the opportunity to meet with a number of member CEOs and policy leads which has been incredibly useful as I understand what members want from CDC and think through the role that CDC needs to play going forward. If you have not been one of those people and would like to be then do get in touch.

Throughout my 15 years at CDC I have always overseen our participation work, so it was a real thrill when FLARE, the group of disabled young people we support to advise government – won a Children and Young People Now Award. If you have time do have a look at some of their [blogs](#), which are incredibly thought provoking.

In other Autumn news, the team have been supporting local Change Programme areas as they start to think through the piloting of the reforms set out in the Improvement Plan. It is really energising to see the level of enthusiasm amongst local areas for trialling new approaches. As ever, good leadership and sufficient capacity to support proactivity seem to be key, as is a shared understanding of the challenges.

We are very aware that Strengthened Mediation and Advisory Tailored Lists continue to cause some concern in terms of possible unintended consequences and we will work closely with the Department to try and ensure that any and all are clearly identified and monitored.

We are currently awaiting the Government response to the National Safeguarding Panel's review into the abuse at the Hesley Doncaster schools. It is the topic I most frequently get asked to present on, and last week was part of a workshop at the National Children and Adult Services conference. So it is good to see that it is still front and centre in the minds of service leaders. Our message is that we have to plan for this group of children on an ICB or regional footprint. Incidence is too low to enable effective planning at a local authority level, and this approach would minimise the distance away from home. CDC has been working with the London Innovation and Improvement Alliance to look at how they might develop a regional model that would enable them to do just that.

I have set myself just a small task as the NHS gets taken over by concerns over winter pressures and the frail elderly – how do we make that system prioritise children so that disabled children and young people and those with SEN get the support that they need that will enable them to reach their potential? It will require a fundamental rethink of the health service approach. Anyone up for a challenge?

I know you will all be as ready as we at CDC are for a break over Christmas so here's wishing you a properly relaxing and de-stressing time.

Best wishes,

Amanda Allard





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Council for Disabled Children Updates

Health – Innovation and Support

The newly named Innovation and Support Team have been busy working on a wide variety of projects, including:

- Supporting Staffordshire and Stoke with the development of their neurodevelopmental pathways, ensuring that the most recent research on what works and effective practice from other areas feeds in and shapes the models.
- A piece of research investigating the factors that influence prescribers' decisions for treating sleep issues in autistic children and young people and those with a learning disability. In November we submitted our final report to NHS England, who will be taking our recommendations forward to influence policy and training opportunities for health staff.
- A review of the operation of the Keyworking Service in Staffordshire and Stoke, including recommendations on potential areas for improvement.

Hopefully this snapshot illustrates the wide range of projects the team can be commissioned to do – if you are interested in commissioning a piece of work with us, please email Andrew (afellowes@ncb.org.uk).

Health – Systems Improvement

CDC continues to support the Change Programme by providing on the ground support for testing the reforms to 32 Local Areas across England. The support entails providing clarity around the asks from the DfE to test various reforms, developing Local Area Inclusion Plans and establishing a detailed workplan for the next two years. With all the ongoing work, CDC continues to shine light on how the work will improve children, young people and families'

outcomes as that is the ultimate aim.

The Research and Improvement for SEND Excellence (RISE) Partnership continues to work to offer bespoke support to local areas, strengthening of SEND practice and processes at the strategic and operational levels. One example of the way we've done this in the last few months is by supporting local area partnerships to develop [data dashboards](#).

Another section of RISE is delivering a programme of national training. We have held a national event titled: "[The Future of SEND System Improvement](#)" attended by 287 people (with 12 workshops on a variety of topics), a national webinar on "[Emerging Practice for SEN Casework Teams](#)" attended by 110 people, featuring research from Dr Tracy Laverick & Dr Richard Bacon from Leeds Trinity University & 9 "Regional SEN Case Team Manager" workshops attended by 196 people.

Social Care

The Social Care team continues to deliver on a series of flex day projects through our SRP contract with DfE. This has included activity on developing guidance for parent carers on mediation, delivering a roundtable on complex commissioning with senior stakeholders across the SEND system, and continuing to work with Year 2 partners of the Short Break Innovation Fund.

Under the RISE programme, funded by the Department for Education, the Council for Disabled Children (CDC) conducted a SEND workforce survey, designed to understand workforce learning needs and identify key content for new training. One of the themes identified in the survey was "A Local Offer for social care and SEND: from Short Breaks to Family Hubs". We are looking forward to delivering this training

in the coming months, more details of what this training will cover and how to sign-up are included in this digest.

Special Educational Consortium (SEC)

The Special Educational Consortium (SEC) have held two workshops this quarter with the team at the Department for Education who discussed the Change Programme and the specialist workforce. These workshops led to detailed discussions and Q&A follow up with DfE officials highlighting key areas of focus for disabled children and young people and children and young people with special educational needs. SEC also met with the DfE Early Years teams to discuss our concerns around proposed EY Regulation changes, a consultation response we submitted in [July 2023](#). We are pleased that the DfE did not pursue two major regulatory changes that SEC were opposed to. SEC continue to have regular dialogue with the DfE EY team.

SEC were also approached by the Behaviour policy team at the DfE to discuss proposed guidance on a Mobile phone ban in schools, where SEC shared a detailed response to a series of questions, followed up with a meeting with DfE officials to further highlight our views.

On the parliamentary front, Dr Daniel Stavrou was invited to represent SEC at an APPG on Exclusions and AP in October. Daniel highlighted the nature of inclusion as a guiding principle of policy and the need for better specific support to help reduce waitlists and provide the help our pupils need.

SEC also submitted a response to the consultation on the Disability Action Plan 23-24. Following this response, we connected a policy advisor in the Cabinet Office with the Participation team based at CDC to get support on how to involve disabled children and young people and children and young people with special educational needs within the action plan.

Early Years SEND

EYSEND is delighted to announce that we are being funded by the Department for Education to continue our important work through the EYSEND Partnership. This time around the Partnership will be focusing on supporting family hubs with their SEN and Disabilities strategic planning in the early years. We are also looking to reach more seldom heard communities and those families less likely to access the support from local areas on offer. The work officially began in November 2023 and we will be offering training, events and strategic support to local areas until March 2025. You can find out more by signing up to our [EYSEND newsletter](#).

The Information, Advice and Support Services Network (IASSN)

The IASSN have been focused on training delivery, report writing and resource development. We have commissioned Two IPSEA Legal Trainings sessions, Eight Helpline Trainings on Managing Difficult Conversations and Vicarious Trauma, Two Webinars on SEND Law, and an Induction Session. In total we offered 355 training spaces to SENDIASs staff. Feedback for these sessions has been excellent with 96% of those attending rating the session as good or excellent and only 0.4% rating the training as not meeting expectations.

We have finalised our minimum standards benchmarking [report](#). We have also collected all the data for the data report and are currently in the process of analysis. These reports enable us to present a national picture of SENDIASs, their challenges and success.

We have also been meeting regularly with our Children and Young People's Steering Group and our information working group to develop resources and information for SENDIAS service staff.

Participation

The Participation team have been busy in the last few months delivering a variety of engagement work and events. In August and September, we completed our final interviews and case studies with young people and parents/carers accessing the NHS keyworking service. This has been part of a national evaluation of the service and ensured that children, young people, and their families had the opportunity to share their thoughts and opinions. We have also been planning and delivering focus groups with autistic young people, gathering their views on annual health checks. We have spoken to 36 children and young people in total and have two upcoming focus groups with parents/carers scheduled.

Members of our advisory group to the Department for Education, [FLARE](#), met with the newly appointed Children & Families Minister, David Johnston, to speak about their experiences of education. Three members also presented to the Permanent Secretary at the Department for Education, Susan Acland-Hood, on FLARE's achievements and activities to date and to provide an overview of some of their work on the education system. The group has also taken part in two in-person meetings which explored a variety of topics relating to the Change Programme. In addition to this, our wider engagement partnership groups also participated in these same discussions through their own schools or youth groups, involving approximately 50 more children and young people in FLARE's advisory work.

The tenth episode of our youth-led podcast programme, Our Turn to Talk, is now available for streaming and download. [Listen to the episode](#) to hear more about young people's thoughts on the language we should use when speaking to, and about, disabled children and young people and children and young people with special educational needs.

Postcard from a Virtual Meeting

Daniel Stavrou

This year, the Autumn meeting of the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education was a virtual one. So, not so much the excitement of meeting colleagues face-to-face in an intriguing European destination; in my case, I was settling down to a long day of sessions in a very cold spare room in North London.

In my virtual postcard today, I'd like to focus on two aspects of the Agency's work which echo some of the preoccupations in the SEND sector in England.

The first relates to the Agency's project [Legislative Definitions around Learners Vulnerable to Exclusion](#). Granted, this is not the catchiest of titles, and in fact the project concluded in 2022. However, it touches upon a growing recognition across all member countries that those of our children and young people who face barriers to learning are not always easily, or effectively identified and supported. The project report is a lengthy and complex document but allows us to consider the way countries identify in policy this group of pupils vulnerable to exclusion; and what this might mean to inclusive practice and approaches.



The term vulnerable to exclusion is useful as it captures a diverse group of pupils, many of whom will be, in the English context, labelled as 'having SEND', but not all. Increasingly, it appears that the SEND label might be too one-dimensional. To be clear, the intention here is not to discuss solely those who are excluded from school as an intervention or disciplinary step; 'exclusion' here denotes the risk of being unable to access education.

Some obvious examples from the English context are the close to 25,000 children defined '[children missing education](#)' in Spring 2023; the increasing numbers of pupils [persistently and severely absent from school](#); permanent exclusion figures which disproportionately affect groups such as those with SEND and FSM; and the increasing numbers of [children and young people reporting struggles with mental health challenges](#).

This project set out to answer these questions:

- How do countries identify and label learners based on their needs and which legal definitions are being used?
- What may these definitions indicate in terms of an underlying approach to inclusive education systems?

So, what has been learned?

Looking at policies identifying learners vulnerable to exclusion, England is within the majority of countries which specify pupils in the 'category' of disabilities, special needs and learning difficulties as a risk factor. However, we do not identify other groups vulnerable to exclusion, such as addiction and substance abuse (as in Austria and Scotland); experience of crisis or trauma (Bulgaria, Croatia, Lithuania, Poland, Serbia, Slovenia); or living in remote, rural or disadvantaged areas (Croatia, Denmark, Greece). These are just a sample of

the subgroups which feature in other countries' policies and inform the way the risk – the vulnerability to – exclusion is registered.

This speaks to a factor which is increasingly recognised as a necessary element in discussions around SEND and disadvantage: intersectionality. The lived experiences of disadvantaged pupils are multi-layered and complex, and to adequately assess and address barriers to learning, we need to consider (not an exhaustive list):

gender, remoteness, wealth, disability, ethnicity, language, migration, displacement, incarceration, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, religion and other beliefs and attitudes (UNESCO, 2020: p. 4).

The Agency's research shows that only 6 countries mention intersectionality in their policies, and England is not among them. The complex and intersecting factors which contribute to disadvantage and disengagement probably merit a reassessment: are we doing enough to reflect these complexities in policy?

The second thing emerging clearly from this study is, that most member countries still rely heavily on the categorisation of learners to inform policy and law. The European Agency is a strong proponent of the inclusive model of education, advocating for "a move away from categorising learners, towards a conceptualisation and approach that focus on the barriers some learners experience within the education system that may lead to their marginalisation and exclusion from learning opportunities." In tune with this approach, the Agency used the term 'learning needs' to denote the suite of requirements for educational provision and support, rather than 'special needs'. But there remains a significant gap between the approach advocated for by the Agency, and policy in member countries, where typically definitions are still reliant on a 'categorical approach' – labelling type of need, as deficit to be addressed.

It is, of course, a labyrinthine debate, associated with what's often referred to as the 'recognition / redistribution dilemma' (Fraser, 2020): (in very simplistic terms) to remedy the disadvantage of particular groups we need to categorise them, hence potentially further stigmatising and 'othering' them.

The definition of SEN is socially constructed, and relative; a child will be appropriately labelled as having SEN if the resources needed to enable them to successfully participate are beyond those ordinarily available in the school context (and compared to their peers). Children and young people might fall either side of this definition depending on what provision is generally made in mainstream context – and in effect, to what extent learning environments are inclusive.

The SEND and AP Improvement Plan, and the associated Change Programme have inclusion at their stated heart. This project raises a second question: should we be considering a move towards an inclusive approach which 'moves away from categorising learners – potentially based on medical models – and having an overall focus on all learners vulnerable to exclusion from education'? or, put another way, is our system too preoccupied with labelling our pupils at the expense of enhancing inclusion?

In a show of Anglo-Irish cooperation, I had the privilege of co-chairing the National Co-ordinator session with my Irish counterpart. The session looked at teacher training across Europe and how it equips (or otherwise) the teaching workforce to support disabled pupils and those with SEN. Many members shared what might sound like a familiar challenge: the pressures of day-to-day classroom teaching leading some teachers to consider the labour involved in supporting disabled pupils and those with SEN outside of their remit. I shared the well-rehearsed refrain that every teacher is a teacher of SEN; but acknowledged that concerns around capacity, know-how, increase of need and models of deploying support staff all create challenges.

There was a shared feeling round the virtual table, that teacher training across Europe does not yet well enough equip teachers to support all pupils, and we discussed initiatives to remedy this. One of them is a recent Policy Statement in the Republic of Ireland making it compulsory to have a period of experience in a special needs context during teacher training. I should point out that DfE / DHSC's Improvement Plan recommends 'appropriate use of special schools for ITT placements' (DfE, 2023: 55).

Another conversation interrogated the nature of the 'specialist knowledge' teachers require: should this be based around categories of diagnosis such as autism, or focussed on inclusive practice as a pedagogy? The European Agency have developed a very interesting tool attempting to set out the skills necessary to the latter approach: [Teacher Professional Learning for Inclusion](#).

The Improvement Plan promises a review of our Initial Teacher Training: indeed, Ofsted's recently published [Annual Report](#) comments on teacher development needs in the context of SEND that 'new and experienced teachers want more training on how to teach pupils with SEND'. And more concerning, that teacher education is variable; in some cases, 'training is limited to one-off sessions on SEND, with no opportunity to consolidate any learning in special school settings'. So, certainly more to be done.

I am hopeful that by the EA's Spring Meeting, I will be able to report on some progress on these matters – and if so, I should be able to do so in the reportedly charming surroundings of Tallin, capital of Estonia....

References

Fraser, N. (2020). From redistribution to recognition?: Dilemmas of justice in a 'postsocialist' age. In *The new social theory reader* (pp. 188-196). Routledge.

UNESCO, Global Education Monitoring Report 2020: Inclusion and education: All means all. Paris: p. 4.

Council for Disabled Children: Making Participation Work Practitioner's Conference October 2023

As part of the Department for Education funded [Making Participation Work](#) programme, we deliver three national conferences annually which bring together Participation and Co-production practitioners and strategic managers who are designing and delivering participation and co-production at a strategic level across children and young people's health, education, and social care.

In October we held the second Making Participation Work Practitioner's Conference of the year. Whilst all the practitioner's conferences focus on youth voice and meaningful participation, this event focused on children and young people's voices and the varied engagement work that is happening across England at local, regional, and national levels. We invited participation programmes, youth groups, local authorities (and many more), to deliver interactive workshops about their projects and programmes from a young person's perspective.

The event included workshops on young people's experiences of being in advisory groups, youth action projects run by disabled young people, how young people can feed into local authorities' work, and how those who have severe or profound and multiple learning disabilities can be engaged in participation.

Feedback on the day included:

- "I feel better equipped to move forward with establishing a youth forum and developing a co-production toolkit for my local authority."
- "Very insightful, informative, and lovely to hear directly from other young people."
- "Really interesting presentations, good networking [opportunities], and conversations."

If you would like to receive updates on our future events, please register for the Making Ourselves Heard Forum [here](#).

Department for Education: An update on the Change Programme

The Change Programme commenced on the 19th September 2023 after a successful Launch Event held at Church House, Westminster. Since then, our Change Programme Partnerships (CPPs), which comprise of local authorities (LAs) and their partners – including health, schools, and families – have made great progress in generating a starting point to begin testing the system reforms set out in the [SEND and Alternative Provision Green Paper Improvement Plan](#). Our 32 chosen LAs are outlined in the below Annex 1.

An iterative approach to the Change Programme has been encouraged from the outset. We expect the CPPs to have a robust approach to co-production that fully involves parent and young people groups, along with other key partners such as multi-academy trusts, special and alternative provision schools, early years and post-16 leaders, and the Integrated Care Board, for the lifetime of the Programme.

We are working hard to establish and maintain positive relationships with all of our stakeholders who are key to the success of this programme. We are integrating their varied expertise into our work to ensure that we can deliver the best quality results for all. We want an active and honest approach to our Programme, with transparency and shared learning across the system, every step of the way.

The Department for Education (DfE) is working closely with CDC and the other REACH Delivery Partners (Olive Academies, IMPOWER and PA Consulting) to support our CPPs whilst they begin to hold their regular steering group workshops across the nine geographic regions. Steering groups have been developed to engage stakeholders, such as The National Network of Parents Carer Forums (NNPCF), Special Needs Action Panel Parent Carer Forum (SNAP PCF), and representatives from early years, primary, secondary, post-18, and virtual schools. These will help us begin to further understand some of the real-world challenges and pressure points in the system.

We have grasped every opportunity to talk widely about the Change Programme. During the summer, members of the DfE Change Programme team worked with KIDS Collective to gain a wider perspective on our policy reforms. More recently, we have promoted the positive impacts that the Change Programme aims to have during the next 18-months at conferences hosted by The Council for the Disabled Children, NNPCF, and by The National Association for Special Educational Needs. Just last week, we accepted an invitation alongside Melland Local Governor, and the Local Authority SEND Lead to visit The Bright Futures Educational Trust, in Manchester, to hear about the great work they are doing, and to speak with parents, carers and families of pupils there.

We want to iterate that those involved in the Change Programme will not be required to surrender any of their statutory rights to take part in any testing of the reforms. Some of the reforms published in the Improvement Plan cannot be made mandatory under the current legislative framework.

What does this mean for you?

CPPs have worked hard to complete and return their Strategic Delivery Plans to us. These plans set out how partners across Change Programme Partnerships are preparing to test the proposed suite of SEND and AP reforms. In CPP steering group meetings, PCF representatives are playing a vital role in ensuring all voices are heard. From their participation so far, we have learnt of the lack of family-friendly guidance, and we are committed to changing this. We are working with NNPCF and will soon be releasing material on the Change Programme and the reforms we are testing across the next 18-months that is much more user friendly.

CPPs are taking the time to consider what it is they want to do differently and so, how often and in what way they will need to engage with key stakeholders (such as parents and carers and families, and health, care and education practitioners and voluntary and community organisations including those from AP Children's Hospital Schools to SEND Complex Case workers and to Educational Psychologists) in order to get this right.

In parallel, DfE have conducted (and will continue to hold) reform policy specific information sessions inviting local area, health colleagues and Parent, Carer and Family representatives to gain a better understanding of, and to ask questions about, the proposed reforms. So far, there have been sessions on Local Area Partnerships, Plans and the Dashboards, and EHCP Standardised Templates. The next two sessions will cover Advisory Tailored Lists and will take place in January 2024. Several workshops on the production of Local Area Inclusion Plans (LAIPs) will also be take place across multiple LAs in February 2024.

In the New Year, REACh will begin formally collecting and sharing feedback from the CPPs and key stakeholders they are engaging with. However, it goes without saying, that the feedback we have received over the past 3 months of the set-up phase is also valuable to us. We have relayed feedback gathered from steering groups and meetings to the relevant Policy teams at DfE, who have taken this on board and will look to implement this in future iterations of their products and proposals.

We look forward to working with you over the next 18-months of the Change Programme. We are committed to getting this right, and we are determined to pave the way for a national system which improves the lives of disabled children and young people and children and young people with special educational needs across the country.

For further information on the Change Programme and about REACh, our Delivery Partner, please click [here](#).

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.

Annex 1 – The Change Programme Local Authorities

Region	Lead LA	Supporting LAs
North East	Hartlepool	Gateshead, Durham, Stockton on Tees
North West	Manchester	Oldham, Rochdale, Trafford
Yorkshire & Humber	Wakefield	Bradford, Calderdale, Leeds
West Midlands	Telford & Wrekin	Shropshire, Herefordshire, Worcestershire
East England	Bedford	Central Bedfordshire, Luton
South East	Portsmouth	West Sussex, Brighton and Hove, East Sussex
South West	Shared Leadership Model	Swindon, Gloucestershire
London	Barnet	Camden, Enfield, Islington
East Midlands	Shared Leadership Model	Leicester, Leicestershire, Rutland

Those outside of areas where our CPPs are operating will receive further information and learning of good practice next year. For now, those within selected local areas are being invited to participate in testing the reforms.

RISE: SEND Workforce Training

We are excited to launch our Research & Improvement for SEND Excellence partnership (RISE) SEND Workforce series of training for professionals working across the SEND workforce.

Under the RISE programme, funded by the Department for Education, the Council for Disabled Children and NDTi have conducted a workforce survey to identify learning needs across the SEND System.

We will be running 50 virtual training sessions from January until March 2024, on the following 6 themes:

- Introduction to Health – This training is designed for and aimed at professionals working in the SEND system who would like to increase their knowledge of Health in the context of SEND. Please note: not suitable for DCOs.
- Understanding the Equality Act (2010) for Senior Leaders – This training is designed for professionals working in the SEND system who would like to increase their knowledge of the importance of children, young people and families playing an active part in the commissioning cycle, and how their input should inform strategic decisions.
- Understanding the Equality Act (2010) for Practitioners – This training is suitable for education practitioners who want to understand more about the Equality Act and other key legislation and what they need to do to meet the requirements of such legislation.
- Person-Centred EHC Processes – This training is designed for and aimed at professionals working in the SEND system who would like to increase their knowledge of EHCPs, e.g. Senior Leaders, Practitioners, SEN Teams, Education Teams.
- A local offer for social care and SEND: from Short Breaks to Family Hubs Training Outline – This training is aimed at professionals working in the SEND system who would like to increase their knowledge of how early help and the local offer for social care and SEND can be applied to effectively support disabled children and young people and children and young people with special educational needs.
- Data, Voice and Commissioning – This training is designed for professionals working in the SEND system who would like to increase their knowledge of the importance of children, young people and families playing an active part in the commissioning cycle, and how their input should inform strategic decisions.

For more information, dates, and how to book, please visit our [Events and Training Calendar](#).

Council for Disabled Children: Department for Education funding secured for continuing our work with EYSEND Partnership

The Council for Disabled Children is delighted to announce that we are being funded by the Department for Education to continue our important work through the EYSEND Partnership. The Partnership is a group of six organisations passionate about increasing access and inclusion for disabled children and children with special educational needs (SEN) in the early years. This takes the form of freely available training and strategic support for family hub practitioners, local area partners, parent carers and families.

Click [here](#) to access our training calendar and find out more about what is available.

Our Partners include [nasen](#), [Speech and Language UK](#), [Contact](#), [Dingley's Promise](#), and the [Early Childhood Unit](#) (ECU) at the National Children's Bureau. Providing support across 9 English regions, the partners each bring specific expertise to the project, and work on different aspects of early years, SEN and Disability.

Take a look at our training offer to find out some of the ways the different Partners can help you to:

- Create a welcoming environment for disabled young children and young children with SEN and their families;
- Reach underserved or seldom heard communities;
- Embed inclusive practice within the workforce;
- Develop speech, language, communication (SLC) pathways and train practitioners in SLC needs;
- Understand how statutory duties and responsibilities apply to working with disabled young children and children with SEN;
- Build relationships between families and practitioners for effective and comfortable transitions;
- Provide tools and strategies to enable practitioners to provide positive behavioural support for young children;
- Train practitioners and parent carers in the home learning environment;
- Train parent carers to support disabled children and children with SEN in areas such as toileting and anxiety;
- Share examples of success and challenges in your local environments to disseminate learning and ways to solve problems at a local and national level.

Council for Disabled Children: FLARE win at the Children and Young People Now Awards

At the Children and Young People Now Awards 2023, FLARE won the Children's Achievement Award! The Children and Young People Now Awards celebrate the people and organisations working with children, young people and families, and the award provides recognition for those working to improve the lives of children and families.

FLARE are a group of disabled children and young people, and children and young people with special educational needs, who advise the Department for Education on policy design and development relating to the SEND system. Through their work they challenge stereotyping and assumptions about disabled children and those with special educational needs.

Over the last 7 and a half years FLARE have been passionately advocating for children and young people to have an equal say in the policies and practices that affect them and their families. The group plays a key role in ensuring children and young people's voices and experiences are fully included in our, and other organisations', work.

Judge Carol Homden praised the project for delivering "evidence of progress for the individuals as well as the group".

You can view more about all the CYP Now Award Winners [here](#).

To find out more about the FLARE group you can click [here](#), and for more on the Making Participation Work programme click [here](#).

National Children's Bureau: Children at the Table Policy Report

As a coalition, the National Children's Bureau have published a joint report including research they commissioned with Alma Economics and the Institute for Government highlighting many of the challenges children are facing right across the UK today. They want to ensure that political leaders prioritise the needs of babies, children and young people and their report details why.

Babies, children and young people have been overlooked by policy makers for too long and the impact is clear: more children are living in poverty, they face a growing mental health crisis, and are waiting too long to receive urgently needed support.

This is the stark picture presented in a [new report](#) from the National Children's Bureau and a coalition of leading children's charities including Barnardo's, Action for Children, NSPCC and The Children's Society.

It includes new research commissioned with Alma Economics and the Institute for Government highlighting the alarming challenges children and families are facing right across the UK today.

There are rising numbers of children persistently absent from school, more children being impacted by abuse, exploitation and online harm, and a greater number of children being taken into care due to reaching a crisis point in their lives.

A lack of political vision and ambition to improve childhoods is holding the next generation back from reaching their potential.

A few weeks ago, our coalition came together at Party Conferences to call for change – so babies and children growing up in the UK today and tomorrow are happier, safer and each have the chance to reach their potential.

Today, we want to ensure that political leaders prioritise the needs of babies, children and young people by detailing why this is a political necessity and how change can be brought about.

We want to see urgent action to:

- Committing to an ambitious cross-Government strategy and outcomes framework to drive improvements for babies, children and young people.
- A new approach to decision-making that places children's needs, wishes and outcomes at its heart, involving children and young people every step of the way.
- Investing more of our national wealth in improving the lives of babies, children and young people and spending strategically on early intervention and prevention.

To sign-up and read the report click [here](#).

National Children's Bureau: A new home for the Early Years Stronger Practice Hubs

A new website has launched to support regional networks of early years practitioners in England to share knowledge, effective practice and evidence-based approaches.

The Early Years Stronger Practice Hubs programme is part of the Department for Education (DfE)'s £180m [Early Years Education Covid-19 Recovery Package](#) and is delivered on behalf of the DfE by the [National Children's Bureau](#) (NCB).

The 18 Hubs (two in each of the government office regions in England) provide advice, share good practice and offer evidence-based professional development for early years practitioners.

The new site will allow early years practitioners to find their local Hub from a drop-down list or by navigating a clickable map of England and access the latest information from that Hub on upcoming events, development programmes as well as tried and tested resources and approaches.

The site will also feature information about the programme itself as well as access to other related DfE programmes and the [Early Years Evidence Store](#) created by the DfE's evidence partner on this programme, the [Education Endowment Foundation](#) (EEF).

Click [here](#) to visit the site.

Council for Disabled Children

Resources and Events

Learning from local areas on the challenges and opportunities to developing effective SEND Systems

This resource summarises learning from work in local areas under the RISE contract, as well as intelligence we have heard via national, regional and other local area work.

In addition to an articulation of the challenges local areas face, we have included examples of effective practice and examples of the interventions we deliver under the RISE contract. Themes align with those in the co-designed Effective Practice Evidence Framework.

View [here](#).

Role descriptor: Strategic Lead for SEND in Provider Organisations

This document provides an overview of what is needed for the role of: Strategic Lead for SEND in Provider Organisations.

This includes:

- The purpose of the role
- Knowledge and skills
- Key areas of work

View [here](#).

Role descriptor: Integrated Care Board (ICB) Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) for SEND

This document provides an overview of what is needed for the role of: Integrated Care Board (ICB) Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) for SEND.

This includes:

- The purpose of the role
- Knowledge and skills
- Key areas of work

View [here](#).

Minimum Standards Benchmarking Report 2023

This National Minimum Standards Benchmarking Report gives a snapshot of SENDIAS services current ability to be compliant with the minimum standards. This report, read alongside the Data Report and the Service User feedback report, helps to ensure we can see and understand the national picture of SENDIAS services and the trends within the services.

View [here](#).

CDC National Event – 08 February 2024

We're excited to announce that the next CDC National Online Event will be on the theme of SEND and Alternative Provision Systems Improvement.

The event is called 'Learning from and for SEND and AP Systems Improvement' and will take place on Thursday 8 February 2024, 09:30–13:00.

This event is aimed at Local Authority and Health SEND Leads, Commissioners, DSCOs, DMOs and DCOs – we would also welcome attendance from Parent Carer Forum regional representatives. Priority will be given to these roles.

You can register [here](#) with the password 'nationalevent'.

E-learning

Register to complete our free e-learning courses. Our training catalogue includes:

- Social Care and SEND
- Delivering Quality Annual Reviews
- Ordinarily Available Provision: Thresholds and Expectation of Schools and Settings

View our e-learning courses [here](#).

Equality and Human Rights Commission: Disabled Children and the Equality Act 2010 – What Early Years providers need to know and do

Abigail Hamer, Legal Principal at the Equality and Human Rights Commission, reflects on the [Equality Act Guide for Early Years](#), recently published by the Council for Disabled Children, and the importance of making reasonable adjustments for disabled children from their very earliest days.

The purpose of the Equality Act 2010 is to promote equality and combat the discrimination experienced by people with protected characteristics, including the protected characteristic of disability. In the Equality Act 2010, disability is treated differently to the other protected characteristics. This is because the Act was specifically drafted to allow employers, service providers and schools to treat disabled people more favourably than they would non-disabled people, in recognition that disabled people can be a particularly vulnerable group.

More relevant than ever

Disabled children are especially vulnerable, given the combination of their young age and their disabilities. More young children are receiving Education, Health and Care Plans. In England, more than 66,000 new plans were issued in 2022, an increase of 7% on the year before, [as shown by Government statistics](#). It is crucial that the law works to protect these children. The Council for Disabled Children's [new Guide](#) does an excellent job of explaining how the law seeks to do that.

The Equality Act and education providers

The Guide sets out that although private nurseries and schools are covered by different parts of the Equality Act, they are both still subject to the duties contained within the Act, as are independent education providers.

The Upper Tribunal made this clear in the case of [The Proprietor of Ashdown House School v JKL and MNP \[2019\] UKUT 259 \(AAC\)](#) which held that the SEND Tribunal can insist that private schools reinstate pupils who have been excluded, where the school is found to have discriminated against them. In that case, a young boy with ADHD, a sensory processing difficulty and other emotional and social difficulties, was excluded for being aggressive towards peers. Although protecting the health and safety of other children was found to be a legitimate aim for the school, the Upper Tribunal found that there were more proportionate steps that could have been taken for him.

Making adjustments early on

In many cases with children displaying challenging behaviour, if adjustments are made for children at an early stage, the provider can manage behaviour and stronger sanctions are less likely to be needed. These adjustments may be relatively simple steps like making sure the child has a chance to participate quickly in activities or have access to a quiet area where they can calm down.

This is why the duty to make reasonable adjustments is so crucial. It is an anticipatory duty, which means that providers have to think about, and put into place, adjustments which could help a disabled child who wants to join their provision. It is also continuing, meaning that adjustments should be kept under review and amended or improved where appropriate.

Requirements of the reasonable adjustments duty

In early years provision, the first and third requirements of the reasonable adjustments duty apply to all providers, whether they are private nurseries, independent schools or local authority establishments.

The first requirement involves altering or adjusting "provisions, criteria or practices" – namely policies, procedures and the way things are done within settings.

The third requirement is to provide "auxiliary aids and services", and includes the provision of equipment, advice or support. This might include support from a one-to-one member of staff.

The second requirement does not apply to schools but would apply to private nurseries. It is a duty to make reasonable adjustments to physical features of buildings for example a ramp, signs or lighting.

What are reasonable adjustments?

Many of the reasonable adjustments that Early Years Foundation Stage providers might want to make are relatively low cost to implement. For example, simply re-arranging furniture so that it helps children with visual, hearing or sensory disorders can be a reasonable adjustment. Children with neurodivergent conditions may benefit from being allowed to move around more, or from being given specific jobs to do, as well as quiet spaces and regular breaks.

Communication with children, their families and between staff members is key when making reasonable adjustments. In an ideal world with no resource constraints, daily one-to-one supervision would be a common reasonable adjustment. In reality, the reasonable adjustment is perhaps to provide one-to-one support where there is a risk that a particular task or activity might lead to a child becoming unwell, distressed or dysregulated.

A recent case involving a young child touched on whether making adjustments could have avoided a permanent exclusion from school. In this case, the young child (aged 7 at the time of the events) was being assessed by an educational psychologist and attending a nurture provision placement for part of his time and his local primary school for the other part of his time. The school was aware that unstructured times were challenging for the child. He has since been diagnosed with Autistic Spectrum Disorder. The child and his class were attending a forest school outdoor activity, with more than 20 children in the care of 3 adults, when the child became

dysregulated and aggressive. The member of staff who was tasked with "keeping an eye" on the child was also leading the activity. The school's decision to permanently exclude the child for the protection of other children was initially found to be reasonable. However, on appeal, it was held that there were a number of other steps which could have been taken first to avoid such a strong step being taken. The appeal decision did not comment on reasonable adjustments, but looking at the facts of the case, if financial resources allowed, it seems clear that a reasonable adjustment to provide the child with one-to-one support during unstructured activities may have avoided the incident.

Keeping children in education

Early years providers having strategies that work enables children to participate fully in a number of ways.

Firstly, the child will have a positive educational experience from the beginning. They will hopefully enjoy their early years, which should lay the groundwork for the same further along in their education.

Secondly, the provider will be able to share successful strategies with the child's school which will help maintain a consistent approach when the child moves on.

And perhaps most importantly, [theory and research](#) both suggest that if you intervene early, the outcomes for children are improved. I hope this Guide will help providers understand how the law works in order that young disabled children are able to enjoy the best possible start.

nasen: Autism lived experience

Joe Fautley, an advocate for autism and neurodiversity at the National Children's Bureau, speaks about his personal experiences and shares tips for making education more accessible and comfortable for students with autism.

It's essential for everyone in society to understand that people with autism face many extensive challenges because the social world is not designed for us. We are not broken, we are unique. We have many important strengths and great potential to succeed through our own personal talents with the right support from people who take the time to listen and understand our own individual needs.

For me and many others with autism, the world we live in is often unpredictable and confusing. We find it difficult to process information at a fast pace. Although everyone on the autism spectrum is unique and has varying levels of support needs, we all face many challenges. These include challenges communicating and interacting with others, managing sensory processing and fatigue, coping with often extreme anxiety and adapting to changes in routine and unfamiliar environments.

It's helpful to view the autistic spectrum through four key areas of difference: understanding and using language, thinking flexibly, understanding / getting on with others and sensory processing. To a greater or lesser extent, we are all impacted by these key areas, and it is vital that staff have the tools to ensure students with autism are supported throughout their education. Here is my advice:

Don't underestimate anxiety

Anxiety is a powerful emotion and should never be underestimated. Personally, I encounter anxiety on a daily basis and this impacts on my everyday life. People with autism are more likely to experience higher

levels of anxiety daily as they must navigate a complicated and often confusing sensory and social world.

Anxiety can be triggered by a variety of factors which include difficulties with communication and social interactions and finding it hard to predict or adapt to certain sensory situations. For me, extreme anxiety often leads to what I call 'zoning out'. This is my brain's coping mechanism for dealing with stress, which makes me switch off from what is happening around me. It's important for students with autism to have access to a dedicated quiet space where they can de-stress.

Having a 'time out card' to alert staff that they need to have some time out of the room when their anxiety increases is a useful idea. Not all people with autism may be able to speak or articulate how they are feeling when their anxiety becomes too high. It's important to make the most of visual tools such as alert cards to describe different emotions.

Give time to process information

People with autism have difficulties with interpreting both verbal and non-verbal language like gestures or tone of voice. We also have difficulty 'reading' other people – recognising or understanding others' feelings and intentions – and expressing our own emotions. It's essential that you give plenty of time for students with autism to process information. We find it difficult to filter out all that is being said to us. Too much information can lead to 'sensory overload'. It's important to be aware of the sensory environment when you are speaking to your students as sensory differences may be affecting how much someone can process. For example, is it too crowded? Is there lots of background noise? When giving information to students, it helps to speak slowly, not ask too many questions at once and pause between words and phrases to give them time to process what you've said,

and to give them a chance to think of a response.

"No one person is the same, so it's important to take time to listen and find out what reasonable adjustments they might need. Understanding what works best for your students as individuals is essential."

Don't forget autistic fatigue

Fatigue, and then subsequent burnout, can happen to anybody. People with autism, however, can find both more challenging. This is due to the pressures of everyday life, having to navigate social situations and sensory overload. Trying to cope with these pressures can lead to exhaustion (autistic fatigue) and, over time, this can lead to autistic burnout. For me personally, managing fatigue can be a difficult process especially when I have had a stressful day. Extreme fatigue can be caused by a variety of factors including sensory overload and dealing with social situations. To support your students, it really helps to allow time for rest breaks and encourage different ways for them to de-stress including, for example, mindfulness and breathing exercises. Ensuring time for activities or interests that re-energise and promote relaxation is key. You can help them to plan and balance their activities and energy over a day or week to try and manage stress limits.

Avoid making assumptions

A student with autism who is academically successful may still have significant needs impacting on their daily life. No one person is the same, so it's important to take time to listen and find out what reasonable adjustments they might need. Understanding what works best for your students as individuals is essential. For example, an adjustment could be to enable the student to leave the room slightly earlier so they can avoid the crowds. Small changes to your environment can make a big difference!

Bio: Joe Fautley

Joe is an autistic and neurodiverse advocate who works at the National Children's Bureau. He has many years of experience in SEND advocacy work, including co-delivering training across England and presenting at conferences. For more information, watch this short [YouTube video](#) from the NHS in which Joe talks openly about his personal experiences.

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

The Healthy Parent Carers programme aims to improve health and wellbeing among parents of disabled children and young people and children and young people with special educational needs through:

- Promoting greater empowerment, resilience and confidence of parent carers;
- Taking small steps that are associated with better health and wellbeing;
- Encouraging setting achievable goals and taking a problem-solving approach.

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 parent carers face. Training is all online, and the programme can be delivered either online or face-to-face.

"This course has literally changed my life – my outlook, my understanding, and my response to difficult situations. Thank you so much!" – Fiona, Exmouth.

"I have improved so much during the course that by the end of it I was even brave enough to offer to volunteer for the Parent Carer Forum!!" – Patricia, Sunderland.

For more information about the training, please click [here](#).

Contact: Update

Benefit changes announced in Autumn Statement

Last month, Chancellor Jeremy Hunt set out the government's plans for the economy in his Autumn Statement. Read [Contact's response](#).

To help make sense of the changes relevant to families with disabled children, Contact has [outlined the main benefit changes](#) which included an uprating of working age benefits and disability benefits next year in line with consumer price inflation of 6.7% and the introduction of a new 'Back to Work Plan' targeting jobseekers who 'disengage' via a stronger sanction regime and more intensive work coach support.

Take a look at Contact's information and advice about [benefits and tax credits](#) and [money and debt](#) for parent carers.

21% increase in calls to Contact's helpline about exclusion of disabled children from school

In the last 12 months there has been a 21% increase in calls to Contact's helpline about exclusions of disabled children from schools. Of particular concern is that younger children with an additional need are facing exclusion – some aged just four and five. Contact's Head of Policy Una Summerson was recently [interviewed on Sky News](#) about the situation.

Disabled children have always been disproportionately affected by exclusions. But as schools struggle with budget cuts there is less access to specialists such as Speech and Language Therapists and Educational Psychologists. In addition, there are fewer special school places and there are long waiting times for assessments. This has led to the situation getting worse. There are lots of schools who do everything possible to avoid exclusion,

ensuring children get assessed and using reasonable adjustments, such as providing a safe space or allowing the use of ear defenders. But in some cases, schools aren't following their own behaviour policy or government guidance. Some are excluding children illegally, asking a parent to collect their child at lunchtime because they are having a bad day or telling a child not to attend a particular activity.

Anna Bird, Chief Executive of disability charity Contact, said: "The impact of exclusion can be devastating on a disabled child. It makes them feel isolated and affects their confidence and attendance, as they don't feel like they belong in the school environment. Parents are often unable to work. Exclusion of a disabled child should only be used as a last resort. There is a legal requirement for schools to make reasonable adjustments for disabled children, such as providing a quiet space or teaching in a small group. We know that exclusions often happen due to lack of support. We'd like to see government invest more in SEN support in schools. There needs to be a strong focus on the specialist workforce and support is needed within schools to make disabled pupils feel welcome and included in the school environment."

Contact has [information and advice](#) to help families affected by school exclusions.

Disabled Children's Partnership: Update

#ThisIsSocialCare Campaign

The DCP is proud to share its latest campaign #ThisIsSocialCare, which launched earlier this month. The aim of this social media campaign is to raise understanding amongst new audiences about the vital role social care should be playing in supporting families with disabled children, by telling their real-life stories and showing their lived experience with the care sector and how they navigate it.

The content we have shared so far highlights the difference that the right support from social care can have to fulfil and improve the lives of disabled children and their families.

Public perception of the children's social care system is currently centred on child protection, children at risk and children being taken into care. The role that children's social care can play – and should be playing – in supporting families with disabled children is less well understood. The campaign aims to address that – and in doing so help make the case for more support.

The campaign has got off to a great start. The first video has had more than 3,000 views on Facebook; more than 7,000 on Twitter and more than 2,000 on Instagram. And what is especially good is that 80% of the accounts that have engaged with content on Instagram and Facebook aren't DCP followers – meaning that we're engaging with people that may not know much about the lives of disabled children and their families – which is the aim of the campaign as a whole!

We would really appreciate the same amount of support for the content that has followed the first video of Dylan. Please do share the content across your platforms and with your audiences.

Twitter: [@DCPCampaign](#)

Facebook: [@DisabledChildrensPartnership](#)

Instagram: [@DisabledChildrensPartnership](#)

Children and Young People Survey

The Disabled Children's Partnership recently launched a new survey for young people. This is an important new step for the DCP as we have previously only surveyed parent carers and the broader community that care for disabled children, rather than hearing directly from disabled children themselves.

For the survey we want to hear from as many 11-25 year olds across England as possible. We are sharing the survey with members of the DCP and with our campaigners in the hope that we can develop research that is influenced directly by the young people we campaign for.

We are planning to close the survey in January with an aim of publishing a report in March 2024.

To complete the survey or to share the survey with young people, please click [here](#).

To keep up to date with the work of the DCP, sign up to our [mailing list](#), and keep an eye on our [website](#).

Shining the Spotlight: PWSA UK

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 the [PWSA UK](#) (Prader-Willi Syndrome Association UK).

How it works

PWSA UK is a small charity providing lifelong support to all those affected by Prader-Willi syndrome (PWS). PWS is a rare genetic condition causing an overwhelming and uncontrollable drive to eat that can be life-limiting, as well as learning and physical disabilities. We provide a dedicated helpline a comprehensive information hub, a regional network of peer support groups with a varied programme of community events, training for professionals working with those with PWS, and support for vital research. Our aim is to help our amazing community overcome the challenges and live life to the full with PWS.

What has been achieved?

PWSA UK makes a difference by:

- Improving understanding about PWS
- Reducing loneliness and isolation
- Increasing knowledge of rights and entitlements to financial support and helping people to access better support from external organisations
- Increasing mental wellbeing (Adults surveyed had higher mental wellbeing than the general population of people with learning disabilities).

Next steps

- More age-appropriate support and social activities for adults with PWS, including people over 40, and their families
- Expanding our information hub, showcasing success stories in the community and increasing communications about research that is in progress
- Improving our events and providing financial support so that families that need it can attend
- Increasing our geographical reach
- Training more professionals and partnering strategically with external services.

More information

Website: www.pwsa.co.uk

Twitter: [@PWSAUK](https://twitter.com/PWSAUK)

Facebook: [@PWSAUK](https://www.facebook.com/PWSAUK)

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](https://twitter.com/CDC_tweets)



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



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FOR DISABLED
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Part of the family



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

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NATIONAL CHILDREN'S BUREAU

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