COUNCIL FOR DISABLED CHILDREN

CDC Digest

Winter 2024

Dear all,

It continues to be both a challenging and an exciting time in the world of SEND. What is being said about the policy direction is encouraging. Being part of the Ofsted Expert Reference Groups, inputting to their thinking on the new inspection framework, is encouraging. The fact that there is a curriculum and assessment review gives hope that we will end up with a system which works well for all students, or at least better for most.

Whilst in such challenging times it will not have felt enough to schools and local authority leaders, there was an additional £ 1billion in the budget for High Needs Funding and a 3.4% increase overall in DfE's allocation. Not bad in a budget which saw some Government Departments receiving real-term reductions.

I know many people were heartened about the news of Dame Christine Lenehan's appointment as Strategic Adviser on SEND. Knowing that someone so committed to improving the outcomes and experiences of disabled children and young people and those with SEN, and their families, is working closely with government is a real boost in confidence to those concerned about what reform may be coming.

We've also had:

- The appointment of Tom Rees (CEO of Ormiston Academy) to lead a new expert panel which will oversee reforms to make mainstream schools more inclusive
- The commitment to tackle speech and language delay and to increase the numbers of children reaching school age with a 'Good Level of Development'.
- An announcement of more capital funding to support the development of more resourced provision in mainstream schools.
- Confirmation that no further safety valve agreements will be made with local authorities
- The announcement of the Neurodivergence Task and Finish Group.

As the government creates more specialist provision within mainstream schools, we at CDC will be keen to examine detailed guidance on its implementation to ensure that it does not lead to segregation within the mainstream and will be encouraging policymakers to look at some of the excellent practice that currently exists in this area. If you are some of that excellent practice then do shout up.

Despite all of this, given the scale of the problem, we are clear that this sense of hope may not be being felt by many children and young people or their parents yet. Many of the changes, even those that are in train won't start to impact until the autumn term next year (new Ofsted framework). Equally, while the increase in capital funding is really welcome, the government will also need to address issues of expertise. We have to ensure that the workforce has the skills it needs to effectively respond to the needs of disabled children and young people and children and young people with SEN.

That's one of the reasons that we are so delighted to be sharing some of the learning generated from the SEND and AP Change Programme test-and-learn approach and What Works in SEND Programme. These are things happening now, that are starting to have a positive impact on the lives of children, young people and their families.

The REACh consortium has hosted a series of activities with Change Programme Partnerships (CPPs), ensuring that policy decisions are informed by evidence of what is and isn't working for local areas on the Change Programme. This has included a series of focus groups with CPPs to refine evidence and key insights, as well as delivering regular Practice Sharing Forums - bringing CPPs together to share their learning supported by REACh Subject Matter Experts.

We also delivered two What Works in SEND learning seminars disseminating findings from What Works in SEND research focusing on enablers and improvement cycles in local SEND systems, and sharing leadership for SEND system improvement. The What Works in SEND Programme recently published three reports including *'Inclusion of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities in schools – how can local areas support schools?'* - published at a crucial time with the new Government setting out their intention to ensure that schools, both MATs and maintained, should be welcoming and inclusive spaces for all pupils. If you would like to learn more about this research you can register for the *'Inclusive Practice and Exploring the Effectiveness of Outreach Services'* learning seminar in January. If you would like to be informed about future What Works in SEND events please do subscribe to the newsletter here.

We look forward to working with you in 2025 and keeping you up to date on all things SEND in what promises, with the Spending Review, to be a critical year.

Best wishes,

Amanda Allard

Contents

Council for Disabled Children Updates

Health- Innovation and Support

We have been supporting a local area in London to develop a Working Together Promise and a SEND Outcomes Framework. The Promise is intended to act as the guiding vision for how the Local Authority and relevant professionals will work and engage with children, young people and families on all future projects. The SEND Outcomes Framework involves identifying outcomes (or goals) that are relevant and meaningful for children and young people with SEND that live or attend an education setting in the local area, and pairing this with data indicators (measures) that will let the Local Authority know whether the outcomes are being achieved or not. Both projects have involved engaging with children, young people and parents and carers.

Following on from our work in the custodial settings in the East Midlands, we are now supporting the non-custodial settings to better their knowledge and awareness of SEND. We will be providing a range of services with resources for children and young people on 'what autism and learning disabilities are' and how to access support. We're also developing a 2-tier e-learning for professionals that will cover what Special Educational Needs and Disabilities are, the law surrounding SEND and children and young people's mental health, as well as behaviour and trauma in relation to youth justice.

Health- Systems Improvement

In RISE we welcomed over 200 attendees to one of our two annual National Events: Approaches to Inclusion and Collaboration. Colleagues heard from practitioners and services around the country on their approaches, including sessions on Supporting Migrant Families of Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities and What Makes a Good Neurodevelopmental Pathway. Our second National Event takes place on the 6th of February and registrations will go live soon, keep an eye here.

We also saw the publication of a significant report in what good looks like for Inclusion of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities in schools through our What Works in SEND website. It offers an important look at the key ingredient to facilitate meaningful inclusion. For more information or any queries, you can contact us at RISE@NCB.org.uk

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 which included convening the first Ministerial Roundtable with the new Minister of State for School Standards, Minister McKinnell and facilitating a national reflection and learning event for the Short Breaks Innovation Programme. In November, we held our second Parent Carer SEND Stakeholder meeting of the year, bringing together over 30 parent carers to talk about the Law Commission's review on disabled children's social care law.

Under the RISE programme, we have published a number of case studies, which are examples of effective practice from the work of local SEND systems that have met the What Works in SEND (WWiS) evidence standards. We have also hosted two virtual learning seminars focused on sharing the learning from WWiS. The learning seminars focused on 'Sharing leadership for SEND System Improvement' and 'SEND system enablers and improvement cycles'.

In REACh, we have completed our most recent practice notes on Ordinarily Available Provision. These resources summarise key findings about implementing this area of the SEND & AP reforms.

We have also been developing more of our traded income work, in particular supporting local authorities with their short breaks strategies and delivering safeguarding disabled children training. If you want to find out more, email us at cdc@ncb.org.uk.

Special Educational Consortium

The Special Educational Consortium (SEC) continued to be busy in the last quarter, with the new Government now established and setting out their direction for SEND and education. We held meetings in September and October, attended by the Isos Partnership and the Local Government Association (LGA) to discuss their recent report on an effective and financially sustainable approach to SEND in England. SEC members agreed that better inclusion in mainstream must be a priority but raised some concerns over the language used and proposals to change the legal routes of redress in the report. We continue to have a positive dialogue with the representatives from the Isos Partnership and LGA to work towards effective solutions.

SEC has also convened a working group to formulate our response to the curriculum and assessment review call for evidence, announced in late September. In October, we met with Gary Aubin, the representative for SEND on the curriculum review panel, to share our initial consensus positions. SEC will be submitting a full response to the call for evidence by the November deadline, asking for greater flexibility in the curriculum to support the needs of disabled learners and those with SEN.

Early Years SEND (EYSEND)

The EYSEND Partnership have had a very busy quarter, packed with training, seminars and a regional event. All six members of the partnership have met several times since the last CDC Digest edition, focusing on sharing progress with strategic support and training. The Partnership have just delivered our most recent regional event, which this year is being held online, and focused on the Northeast of England. We were joined by two inspiring speakers, Hazel Newstead and Vic Knowland (a recording will be uploaded to our website soon, so keep an eye out for it). All Partners continue to deliver a wide range of training for both practitioners and parents and carers; including topics such as the home learning environment, sensory processing differences, toilet training, speech and language challenges, transitions, and meeting the needs of every child.

If you would like more information on upcoming events and training, please sign up to our EYSEND Partnership newsletter.

IASSN

This quarter the IASSN have focused on direct work with SENDIAS services, planning our Autumn training and data collection activities, and planning our resource delivery for the year. Because quarter two includes the six-week school holidays, during which many SENDIASs staff take leave, the IASSN tends to deliver a lot less training and events during this period. Instead, we make sure we're touching base with as many different service managers as we can, as well as using the time to plan our delivery for the rest of the year - including our training, resources and our reporting. This includes using feedback from the IASSN workshops run in May and June to develop an action plan, developing a new resource list, running resource refresher sessions and requesting and sharing case studies. We also planned ten training sessions on Helpline and Vicarious Trauma for SENDIASs staff starting in October, kicked off data collection for our data report and minimum standards report, and planned three further resources that SENDIASs staff have requested. Around those school holidays we ran one of each of the IPSEA levels 1-3 and an IPSEA refresher for 80 staff total and two Osted Webinars for 129 staff.

Participation

The Participation Team have been busy over the last quarter with various pieces of delivery and engagement work. As part of Making Participation Work, our young SEND advisory group to the Department for Education, FLARE, met twice. The sessions explored a variety of topics, with a focus on the SEND reforms and Change Programme. In terms of our work with professionals, we have continued to host coffee mornings for participation and engagement practitioners. This quarter, we explored how we can work with young people who aren't in education, employment or training and how we can work positively with parent carers.

If you'd like to stay up to date on our work and receive updates from other participation practitioners, please join the Making Ourselves Heard Forum.

The European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education: A postcard from Warsaw

Dr Daniel Stavrou

The European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education held its second Biannual meeting of 2024 in Warsaw over two days in November. There was a slightly reflective mood throughout as this was the last Biannual to be led by the departing Director, Cor Meijer. His replacement was announced in September and was also in attendance.

Our first exercise of the conference involved reflections on the current Thematic Country Cluster Activities (TCCA). Our seminar had, as you'd expect, a lengthy title with an associated acronym: Monitoring and Evaluation Systems in Inclusive Education Policy (MESIEP). Alongside the representatives of Croatia, Malta and Ireland, we mapped out monitoring and evaluation systems in each country. We categorised these: national; regional; school-level; parent / carer and pupil. Then, we (physically, using notes, paper arrows and stickers...) charted the relationships between the different elements.

To give you an idea of the outcome, imagine a line running from the Education and Public Accounts Select Committees via DfE, encompassing the legislative framework (Equality Act and Children and Family Act and the associated SEND CoP) to local authorities. Another line runs between Ofsted and schools, bringing in parent/carers and pupils as well. Other actors included CQC, the Children's Commissioner, and the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. These agencies are linked by data and activities such as inspections (our arrows).

A couple of interesting, comparable themes emerged across countries:

There seems to be a shared challenge in drawing on lessons from inspection frameworks, specifically between schools. So, when schools receive inspection reports, we asked how can these be effectively and meaningfully disseminated amongst relevant peer schools? It is also worth asking in the English context: are Local Area SEND Inspections and Ofsted school inspections working in concert to learn lessons and distil relevant data into action on inclusion?

Another shared feature was the importance of third sector actors in the field of monitoring and evaluation, and I'd add, accountability. The overall sentiment in the room was that third sector and independent organisations, play a vital role in shedding light on the detail of systemic challenges. While they do not typically play a formal role in the structures we set out, they have a significant influence on discourse, practice and policy.

Data generated by third sector and independent organisations in England is key to exposing the numbers behind some of the challenges we see in our schools and amongst our children and young people. Here are a couple of recent examples:

A report on lost learning, setting out in a nuanced fashion some of the undertheorized and unrecognised aspects of what is usually termed the crisis in school attendance. And from the Children's Commissioner, this report laying bare the delays and inequalities facing children and young people with neurodevelopmental conditions.

These reports give substance to what children, young people, parent/carers and professionals intuitively know. And, crucially, they provide the hard data which is required to gain the attention of policy makers and inform their priorities.

There were of course differences between countries as well, the main one being that many other European countries are more centralised. When setting out the English monitoring and evaluation map, one more thing became visibly apparent: there is a gap between local authorities and schools and colleges. It is likely a result of the erosion of resources available at local authority level and the emergence of academies. There are some signs that policy might begin addressing some of these gaps in local oversight: the move to enforce the National Curriculum in academies (as set out in the Curriculum and Assessment Review); the proposed register of children out of school and obliging academies to co-operate with local authorities on admissions (the latter two in the proposed children's wellbeing bill).

The TCCA work continued the following week with a Planned Learning Activity in Dublin, focusing on the role of inspectorates. While I wasn't part of that exchange, Ireland shared their approach to inspection of inclusive practice in schools, including reflections on how they had changed the culture of the inspectorate to be more supportive and less adversarial. Key to lessons learned was that having the time to explain the context of a setting and respecting the practice that an inspector can share from having seen a huge range of schools leads to an enhanced sense of fairness.

We know that Ofsted are considering increased oversight of inclusion on the back of the Big Listen Report. Ofsted are also engaged in work to better understand and articulate the concept of vulnerability, commissioned to NCB. To my mind, this is an important step towards gaining a more nuanced, multi layered conceptualisation of who are we trying to include when we speak of inclusion?

The last session of the conference was led by the Polish Ministry of National Education and consisted of a set of seminars entitled 'Implementation of high-quality inclusive education. Resources, working trends and progress towards outcomes. Opened by the Polish Minister of Education, the significance of the occasion was clear: the session was to feed into Poland's upcoming presidency of the Council of the EU, where the Minister assured us, Inclusion will be on the agenda.

This was an international conversation considering ways to translate ethical intentions into policy and practice. Delegates were divided into groups and guided by questions set by the Polish Ministry. The seminar I attended was titled 'Effective work in diverse groups' and was focussed on the approaches and resources across Europe which support inclusive pedagogy.

It struck me, that in the conversation which followed, practically all speakers began by stating that the key resource needed for inclusion are teachers. And by that, they meant teachers who have not only been trained and hold the necessary skills for differentiation, but also ***feel they are able*** to be inclusive. This is a point that is both fundamental to the challenges we face in England (coupled, of course, with the woefully inadequate training in SEND) and under-recognised.

It relates to the concept of efficacy, written about a while back by a friend of the Education Team at CDC, Prof. Simon Gibbs: *Teachers' perceptions of efficacy: Beliefs that may support inclusion or segregation.* The crux of his argument, and I hope Simon will forgive the simplification, is that a sense of teacher self-efficacy is an important pillar of inclusive practice, and that in turn, this can (and must) be supported by a collective sense of efficacy amongst the school staff community.

The Portuguese representative shared information about the support schools in Portugal have in place. It is based on school clusters, each cluster and individual school having a multidisciplinary team which includes *the assistant of the school director, one special education teacher, three members of the pedagogical council and the school psychologist*. My Portuguese colleague wished to clarify: '*we are focused on a whole school approach, that is, all members of the school community (school leaders, teaching and non-teaching staff, learners, parents and families) are responsible and play an active role in promoting inclusion and in helping students to reach their maximum potential'*. As for the special education teachers, they are teachers who have chosen to take a post-graduation course, master's degree or PhD in special education. This is the latest OECD report on Portugal's journey towards inclusion (there are of course difficulties, for example allocating these specialist roles when there is pressure because of recruitment and retention challenges).

We know the new(ish) Government has indicated that increasing inclusion in mainstream is the direction of travel; might we consider such a set-up here as well to support this approach?

We were all treated to a cultural evening out visiting the Royal Castle in Warsaw, where we had a tour of the building, which was reconstructed in the 1970s after being largely ruined during WWII. This was followed by a moving recital from the renowned pianist Pawel Kowalski, and a fit-for-royalty dinner. The photo below shows Agency representatives in the grandeur of the castle. Dziękuję, Poland!

The Research and Improvement for SEND Excellence programme: a blog from Sam Gomarsall

One key element of the Research and Improvement for SEND Excellence (RISE) programme, which aims to provide continued support for embedding the SEND reforms, is 'targeted interventions' to local areas. Through this strand of the RISE work, we support local authorities and their key partners (including health, parent carer representative groups and the voluntary sector) as they look to address a specific challenge. We use a host of different methods to help the area through the problem. For example, we might review their current strategies and policies (ie their SEND Strategy, neurodiversity pathway documents or data dashboards) and provide some guidance based on best practice elsewhere. We might also support local areas to understand more about the problem by running focus groups with parent carers, practitioners and children or offer training on some of the key themes of work - from Education, Health and Care Plans's (EHCPs) to the Equality Act.

However, perhaps most fundamentally, we deliver workshops which help local area SEND Partnerships to map the systems and processes they have by bringing the key stakeholders (from various agencies) together. When asked the best thing about the RISE support, two local authority leaders said: "Bringing together different stakeholders to having open conversations about how we collectively move forward" and being able to have "honest discussions amongst all partners on strengths and weaknesses". In practice, this might mean helping the Local Area SEND Partnership to develop and embed an integrated strategic outcomes framework. These encourage local areas to ask themselves whether they are making a real impact on the things that children and families have told them matter most of all. Local areas see real value in promoting the holistic view of the child, as the focus then becomes about supporting children and families to live fulfilling lives rather than focusing on specific conditions or disabilities. With an integrated outcomes framework in place, we then often work with them to utilise their data more effectively and explore how it can transform the way they commission services. It might mean strengthening engagement and 'co-production' with children, young people and their families. It is our view that: "if you want to know how the shoe fits, ask the person who is wearing it, not the one who made it (or even the person who paid for it)" and we often use this quote as an analogy for the importance of 'co-production'. We support areas to develop ways of hearing and using the voice of children, young people and families to inform their practices and to design services which more aptly meet the needs of their communities. As many might also expect, we look at improving the quality of EHCP's and their timeliness, as well as trying to support more agencies to be fully embedded in all elements of the ECHP process. In this and other areas of our work we try and support local areas to have a clearer (and crucially, shared) vision for their professionals.

We think it's vital that professionals can see their role as part of the bigger picture in children's lives and we know that this leads to a more motivated workforce as well as one in which communication and joint working improves.

We work across other themes of work including Preparation for Adulthood (a particular focus for our partner organisation, NDTi, who work with us on the RISE programme) and working with local authorities as they look to build inclusivity at the heart of their mainstream educational settings.

In everything we do, our aim is to bring key stakeholders together. We see daily how the SEND system, on both a national and local footing, is highly complex and fragmented. We see our role, as the RISE programme team, as trying to provide a space for the key stakeholders in each local area to build consensus on some of their trickiest issues, building a shared vision for improving the outcomes of the children and young people in their communities.

If you want to know more about the RISE Targeted Interventions, please contact Sam Gomarsall (sgomarsall@ncb.org.uk)

Research and Improvement for SEND Excellence training: The Role of Social Care in the EHC Needs Assessment and Planning Process

The RISE contract, which is funded by the Department for Education and the Council for Disabled Children (CDC), will be running 'The Role of Social Care in EHC Needs Assessment and Planning' training between January- March 2025.

The training is designed to increase knowledge and understanding of the role of social care in the Education, Health and Care (EHC) needs assessment and planning process, and discuss examples of social care needs and how to identify these.

This training is intended for social care practitioners, including social workers who are working with disabled children and young people and those with special educational needs

Objectives

- Understand the Education, Health and Care plan process and related social care legislation and case law.
- Understand the purpose of EHC plans in supporting disabled children and young people and those with SEN and their families.
- Understand the key stages of social care involvement in the EHC assessment and planning process and discuss examples of social care advice and information.

Dates and registration details

We are running this training once in each region, please register for your region below. The password for all of these is: **risetraining**

- East of England– Thursday 9th January, 10.00-13:00 - Register **here**
- South East- Tuesday 14th January 10:00-13:00 - Register **here**
- South West- Tuesday 21st January, 9.30-12.30 - Register **here**
- London - Thursday 30th January 10.00-13:00 - Register **here**
- North West- Friday 7th February 10:00-13.00 - Register **here**
- North East- Tuesday11th February, 10.00-13.00 - Register **here**
- East Midlands- Thursday 27th February 10:00-13.00 - Register **here**
- West Midlands- Tuesday 4th March, 10:00-13:00 - Register **here**
- Yorkshire and Humber– Thursday 13th March, 10:00-13:00 - Register **here**

If you have any questions, please contact the RISE team on RISE@ncb.org.uk

Council for Disabled Children: The Healthiest Generation of Children Ever- A Roadmap for the Health System

The National Children's Bureau, Council for Disabled Children and the Children and Young People's Health Policy Influencing Group have created a roadmap to call for children to be a central pillar of forthcoming health plans, such as the NHS Ten Year Plan, with children advising directly on health policy that affects them. It calls for equitable funding for children, which was lacking in the recent Budget, in particular children with palliative care, long-term conditions, and special educational needs and disabilities, and it calls for Integrated Care Systems (ICSs) to be made accountable for improving set child health outcomes. It is ambitious and yet clear that there are significant, impactful, low-cost steps that the government can take to shift the dial on child health and guarantee that children are not an afterthought when it comes to health policy.

Babies, children and young people make up around 25% of the population, yet they only account for 11% of NHS expenditure. Children have their own developmental and health needs, separate from those of adults, that are met through a distinct set of services, staffed by a specialised workforce and underpinned by specific legislation. Yet, they have never been treated equitably in national or local decision-making.

We must have leadership from the very top that prioritises childhood. The first step will be making babies, children and young people a central pillar of the Health Mission and the forthcoming Ten Year Plan. This must be followed by a greater and more equitable share of health service funding being allocated to children in the multi-year Spending Review in the Spring. Nothing less than this will do.

Find out more here:

Roadmap in Brief

HPIG: A roadmap for the health system

Council for Disabled Children: National Event

We're excited to announce that next CDC National Online Event will take place on Thursday 6 February 2025, 09.30 - 13.00.

Registration is now open and you can register here (full link to copy and paste into your browser if the link doesn't work for you here (https://forms.office.com/e/fxhXchTYgt).

This event is aimed at 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.

The agenda is yet to be announced but the event will consist of a main plenary session, and a range of workshop choices (attendees will be given the chance to sign up to 2x workshops, details on workshop content and how to sign up will be circulated nearer the time.

If you have any ideas for workshops, or you would like to present at a workshop yourself, please contact Macey-Rae Gowing or Joe Fautley on RISE@ncb.org.uk.

Closer to the event, you will receive an email with information on how to sign up for workshops. You will also receive Teams invites for all the sessions. We will contact you through the email address you've provided to register so please make sure you enter the correct email address. You should receive a confirmation email after registering, if you haven't received one, please email RISE@ncb.org.uk.

Please also let us know whether you have any specific requirements or adjustments to be able to attend this virtual event, or which you would like us to be aware of. Please mention any needs you might have in the form when you sign up or email RISE@ncb.org.uk to let us know if there is anything we can do to support you.

Council for Disabled Children: Shining the Spotlight on The Feeding Trust

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 members The Feeding Trust.

How it works

We are the UK charity for Paediatric Feeding Disorders (PFD), empowering families and communities through advocacy, specialist treatment, training, education and research. Across the world, on average, about 25% of children will struggle with feeding at some point during the first 10 years of life. Studies show that about 10% of children will go on to experience significant challenges with feeding. This figure rises significantly for children with medical, developmental or learning differences.

What has been achieved?

Launched in 2023, our charity has developed:

- A dedicated team of feeding therapists, who run a specialist feeding clinic for children with feeding difficulties.
- An advice, support and educational service for families and their extended networks.
- Education and training materials for early years and SEN staff, to support children with feeding difficulties in their educational settings.
- A website with advice, training and education for families and professionals working with children with feeding difficulties.
- Training courses for health professionals.
- Research programmes to further develop our understanding of PFD in the UK.
- Links with the NHS to look at services for children with feeding difficulties and how health inequalities can be reduced.
- Links with Universities and professional bodies to raise awareness of feeding difficulties across the health service.

Next steps

Our charity has brought together experts from across Medical, Nutritional, Skill based and Psychosocial fields to form a Community of Participation (CoP) to facilitate a more focused and efficient discussion to support appropriate identification, assessment, and management of Paediatric Feeding Disorder (PFD). There is a lack of awareness about PFD, and this is a significant barrier as it affects access to the right care for children, young people and families.

From this CoP, the consensus participants will publish consensus statements that will support the field to better assess and diagnose children and young people with accurate diagnosis. In addition to these publications, we will be gathering communities together to better support guidelines, resources and treatment across the UK.

More information

Website: www.feedingtrust.org

Instagram: @thefeedingtrust

Facebook: The Feeding Trust

Council for Disabled Children: Apply for CDC Membership

At CDC we know that we are stronger and have a bigger voice if we are together. The CDC membership is a collection of over 400 voluntary or community organisations that represent the various facets of the SEND and Alternative Provision sector.

By becoming a member, organisations will have the opportunity to actively participate in shaping policies, sharing best practices, and advocating for positive changes that directly impact the lives of disabled children and young people and those with SEN. CDC membership is free and provides access to a network of over 400 organisations across the sector, as well as resources and opportunities for collaboration and learning.

Benefits of becoming a CDC member include:

• Access to the CDC members online forum which provides the opportunity for peer-to-peer support on challenges and solutions, best practice, and information and resource sharing.

• Networking opportunities to connect with professionals, policymakers, and other organisations in the field.

• Policy Influencing by actively participating in discussions and initiatives aimed at influencing policies.

• Access to a wealth of resources including a monthly newsletter, quarterly digest and news alerts.

• Direct updates from the Department for Education.

• Invitations to join CDC working groups.

To become a CDC member your organisation must be:

• A registered charity or Community Interest Company with a special interest in disabled children and young people and those with SEN, and/or a provider of Alternative Provision;

• Based in England; and

• Committed to the CDC values and our policy on inclusion.

To apply to become a CDC member please click here.

Disabled Children's Partnership: New SEND Toolkit

Last year the Disabled Children's Partnership set to work on developing a SEND Toolkit for Members of Parliament. The Toolkit provides advice for MPs on how to approach SEND specific casework, including the legal basis of the system, their role as MPs, topics parents want MPs to consider and a collection of online resources. We developed the Toolkit in collaboration with our coalition members, parent carers and young people. We have been sharing the Toolkit with MPs since September, but formally launched it in November with a drop-in event at Portcullis House.

The dual purpose of our event was to promote the Toolkit with MPs, and to introduce a broad coalition of new and returning MPs to the work of the DCP. The event was also an opportunity for MPs to hear directly from young people about their experiences of the SEND system as we were joined by four young people, and colleagues from Kids and Contact.

Currently we don't know when the Children's Wellbeing Bill will be introduced, nor do we know what 'reform' of the SEND system will look like under the new Government. Now is the time to develop strong MP relationships to ensure that we can continue to influence any changes that may present themselves in the coming months.

Given that we are in somewhat of a 'review phase' of the new Government, any chance to speak directly to policy makers is welcome while we await several Government responses to ongoing reviews (Curriculum Review, Law Commission, NHS, Public Accounts Committee).

How did the event go?

The event itself was very successful, with there being many positive conversations, and a buzzy atmosphere in the room. More than 50 MPs either came themselves or sent a member of their staff – which means we reached around one in ten of the English constituencies in Parliament.

It was fantastic to see the MPs engage with the young people; they were eager to know about their experiences and to discuss issues that the young people thought were important. Alongside our Toolkit, MPs filled in an 'All About Me' note for the young people, explaining how they came to politics and what they were interested in. Following the event, the young people were invited to go on a tour of Parliament with an MP – an opportunity usually reserved for constituents. Massive thanks to Jen Craft MP for this impromptu invite.

The makeup of the new Parliament means that many of the conversations we have about SEND, and about disabled children in general have a different tone. Many of the new MPs across the political spectrum are parent carers, and there are currently more teachers in Parliament than ever before. We are hopeful that means that there are more people that are willing to fight for disabled children across the country, and we are looking forward to working with them. Thanks to everyone who used our action to invite their MP, to all the MPs and staff members who attended, to Kids and Contact for their help organising and running the event, and most importantly of all to the young people who shared their experiences with politicians.

ADASS New Report: Autism and Parental Blame: Blamed Instead of Helped

The Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS) have released their latest report 'Autism and Parental Blame: Blamed Instead of Helped' as part of their wider Autism and Parental Blame Project, which seeks to understand how parents of autistic children experience parental blame when they approach health, education, and care services for support.

The report is intended for professionals, policymakers, researchers and anyone who is interested in improving the lives of autistic children, young people and their families.

ADASS West Midlands has launched a further phase of this research to investigate the perspective of professionals working with autistic children and their parents in order to explore the systems, practices and challenges which may underpin the issue of parental blame by professionals.

From early 2025, a second phase of this project will deliver a series of webinars for professionals in education, health and social care. A webinar will also be offered to parents to present the findings.

If you would like to be kept updated, please register interest at APB@wm-adass.org.uk

The Law Commission is Seeking Views on Disabled Children's Social Care Law

The Law Commission has published a consultation paper on disabled children's social care law and whether it meets the needs of disabled children and their families. The Commission is seeking views from young people, families, local authorities and social workers, and anyone else with an interest in or awareness of the area. The consultation is part of a review into the law to ensure that it is fairer, simpler and more up to date.

"Disabled children's social care law" is the body of legal rules covering:

- whether a disabled child can get help from social services to meet their needs;
- what help they can get; and
- how they get it.

The consultation asks a number of questions including:

- whether there should be a new legal framework for disabled children's social care, taking disabled children out of section 17 of the Children Act 1989;
- whether there should be national eligibility criteria for disabled children's social care;
- how we should define disability;
- what remedies should be available for children and families when things go wrong?

During the consultation period the Law Commission will be holding a range of events. These include online discussion groups for parents and carers (facilitated by NNPCF, CDC, DCP, Contact and others in the charity sector) as well as targeted events for local authorities and social workers. In addition, they are holding a series of in-person events across the country, as well as two online events, which are open to all. Anyone with an interest in, or experience of disabled children's social care, is welcome to attend these events. This includes: parents and carers; social workers, managers and directors at local authorities; charities; health and education professionals; lawyers; and academics. **Please click the following links for more information and to register**:

- Online public event (evening): 16 December, 7:30pm-9:00pm
- Online public event (lunch time): 6 January, 12:30pm-2:00pm
- Bristol, in-person public event: 18 December, 10am-12pm
- London, in-person public event: 19 December, 11am-1pm
- Sheffield, in-person public event: 8 January, 11am-1pm
- Birmingham, in-person public event: 10 January, 12:30pm-2:30pm
- Manchester, in-person public event: 13 January, 11am-1pm

There is also a separate dedicated sessions for children and young people. Any children and young people's groups wishing to contribute are encouraged get in touch. Our email address is dcsc@lawcommission.gov.uk.

The consultation is open until 20 January 2025. Future details on the project, full consultation paper and a summary are available here.

Caroline Coady, Deputy Director of CDC said:

"CDC have worked with the sector to explore the opportunity to improve outcomes for children and families through needs-led eligibility approaches and embedding the role of the Designated Social Care Officer (DSCO) for SEND. We welcome the opportunity to explore the significance of these elements in improving outcomes for children and families through more accessible provision and better integration between social care, education and health partners. We will be supporting the growing community of practice of DSCOs across England, alongside parent carers, children and young people and VCS, to inform the consultation as well as sharing the most up to date evidence of impact from our work."

Contact: Benefit changes announced in the government's Autumn Budget explained

At the end of October, the Chancellor set out a number of changes to the benefits system. Contact's benefits experts have broken down what these changes will mean for families with disabled children.

Carer's Allowance earnings limit

The biggest news story for carers was the announcement that the Carer's Allowance earnings limit will increase to £196 per week from April 2025. This is the equivalent to working 16 hours at National Living Wage. The earnings limit is the maximum amount a carer can earn without losing entitlement to Carer's Allowance. The increase of around £45 on the current earnings limit is the biggest increase since Carer's Allowance began back in 1976 and is welcome news. The government has also committed to align future National Living Wage and earnings limit increases.

Universal Credit announcements

Alongside this, the budget also included a number of announcements about Universal Credit:

- Confirming that the managed migration of people on income-related Employment and Support Allowance will be brought forward. This will now start from September 2024, and complete during 2026.
- Capping the maximum amount that can be deducted from a Universal Credit award to repay a debt or loan. The maximum deduction will drop from 25% to 15% of that claimant's standard allowance. This allows Universal Credit claimants to repay debts or loans by making smaller payments over a longer period of time.
- Amending the Universal Credit severe disability premium transitional protection rules to better support those moving from supported or temporary accommodation into rented housing.

Find out more about other changes announced.

Contact's website has lots of information for families with disabled children about benefits and tax credits, sources of financial support, help with extra costs and dealing with debt.

This includes advice about DLA and Child Disability Payment to help families claim. Take a look at Contact's comprehensive DLA parent guide, check out their top tips and expert videos to help parent carers complete the DLA form, or watch Contact's introductory DLA videos to learn more about this important benefit.

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


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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

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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.