

NHS is failing to support vulnerable young people, says children's minister ^[1]

speech therapy and basic equipment for children with special needs has become a 'postcode lottery'

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EXCERPTS

The children and families minister has attacked the health service for failing some of the country's most vulnerable young people.

Sarah Teather said the chance of a child receiving much-needed speech and language therapy was "between low and nil", while the wait for a wheelchair could be "really long".

Teather, who spent most of her own secondary school days in a wheelchair after suffering from a viral infection, said the health service "has not always been good at doing its fair share for children in this position". Families were often left as the "piggy in the middle", she said in an interview with the Guardian.

Health workers often agreed with parents that a child needed a wheelchair, incontinence pads or a form of therapy, but "nobody pays for it" and it fails to arrive, she said. This could severely impair a child's chances in the future, she warned: "A six-month wait for speech and language therapy can be critical; an 18-month wait can be really critical."

In some cases, by the time a wheelchair arrives, a child has grown too big for it, she said, adding that it was a "postcode lottery" to get basic equipment.

Government proposals, published in a green paper in March, would improve life for children with special needs and disabilities and their families, she said.

At the moment, children with severe or multiple health and learning disabilities receive a statement from their local authority. This covers only the services that schools are expected to give children, rather than those they need from the health service or social services.

The green paper proposes to replace the existing statement of special educational needs with a single care plan covering schooling, health and social services from birth to the age of 25. This would mean a child's educational, social and health needs would be dealt with together. The plan would reflect a family's needs and ambitions for the child's future and would be continually reviewed.

The green paper also set out plans to give parents a personal budget to spend on services such as one-to-one tuition, laptops and wheelchairs.

"Rather than a family having to go to the council trying to bang down their door to get something, [the council] are coming to you saying, this is what we normally provide. The family then has a conversation about whether it is appropriate," Teather said.

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- reprinted from the Guardian

Region: Europe ^[2]

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