

Parliamentary inquiry into childcare for disabled children: Levelling the playing field for families with disabled children and young people ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

Full report (pdf) ^[2]

Press release ^[3]

Related news article: "Parliamentary inquiry highlights childcare crisis for disabled children ^[4]"

EXCERPTS

Foreword from the Co-Chairs

We set up the Parliamentary Inquiry into Childcare for Disabled Children to look at the extent to which disabled children and young people are included and served by the childcare system. The findings of the Inquiry will be of interest not only to government and local authorities, but all those who work with children and young people.

The Inquiry heard from parent carers and young people that the current picture is troubling. All families face childcare challenges, but these problems increase dramatically for disabled children and young people. Whilst there are numerous examples of good practice and inclusive provision, many parent carers described being subtly discouraged or simply turned away by a provider. Some parents who wish to work succeeded in arranging suitable care often only after an exhausting battle. Parents can be, and responses to the Inquiry

We heard from childcare providers that many did not believe the current system ensures high quality care for disabled children and young people. Providers highlighted the frequent difficulties they had accessing inclusion support from local authorities, as well as the limited knowledge and capacity of the workforce and the inspectors charged with ensuring high standards around children that need more specialised or intensive care.

A further gap in Inquiry highlighted was in childcare for disabled young people. For non-disabled young people, holiday and out of school childcare activities are increasingly available, but disabled young people and their parents must navigate limited choices in an attempt to avoid exclusion from teenage life.

Children's rights, the challenge of eliminating poverty and basic fairness all demand that we take the task of achieving an inclusive childcare system seriously. No child's horizons and opportunities should be narrowed by their first encounters with education and activities outside the school system. No parent should be excluded from the opportunity to work. It makes no sense for disabled children to be included in mainstream education by excluded from mainstream childcare.

Inclusive childcare is also good policy. For example, one of the government's key education goals is to reduce the significant vocabulary gap between low and high income children by the time they are aged five. Children with special educational needs are over-represented in children experiencing language delay. This is why access to therapeutic support is critical in closing this gap and why access to the full early education entitlement so important for these children.

Childcare is increasingly central to modern life, but the childcare system is not serving families with disabled children well. We have set out a number of steps the government could take immediately to begin to address these problems. The Inquiry report also provides a platform and opportunity to ensure that inclusion is in future at the heart of childcare policy. The opportunity is one we believe the government must take.

Report includes key findings on:

- Affordability
 - Parent carers are often charged higher than average fees
- Availability and inclusion
 - 41% of parent carers who responded to the Inquiry's survey said their children did not access the full 15 hours of the free entitlement for

early education for three and four year olds

- Quality

- There is a significant shortfall of knowledge, skills, and confidence and worry in providing quality care and education to disabled children in the childcare and early years workforce.

- Access and information

- 92% of parent carers say finding childcare for disabled children is more difficult than for non-disabled children. Parents must often approach providers directly and negotiate a placement and fees, sometimes in a three-way dialogue with the local authority for additional support.

Overarching recommendation:

The Government should develop a cross-departmental action plan and funded programme to ensure that all disabled children and young people can access affordable, accessible and appropriate childcare.

The Inquiry is supported by Contact a Family, Every Disabled Child Matters, Family and Childcare Trust, and Working Families.

The Inquiry committee consisted of a cross-bench group of MPs and Peers including: Baroness Eaton; Lord Touhig; Sarah Champion MP; Alex Cunningham MP; Teresa Pearce MP; and David Ward MP.

Related link: Disabled children failed by childcare system at every step, says inquiry [5]

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