

Family and Childcare Trust response to GLA Education Panel investigation into special educational needs and disabilities

We welcome the Education Panel's review of Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) provision in London. We would urge the panel to consider in particular the challenges that exist in accessing early education and childcare, which can often be overlooked in favour of school education. The Family and Childcare Trust is responding to the consultation to provide evidence on three key points we believe the review should consider:

- Access to early education for children with SEND
- Access to childcare for children with SEND to enable parents to work
- Access to wraparound and holiday childcare for school age children with SEND to enable parents to work

It is important that this investigation considers these aspects as access to early education and childcare can have a significant positive impact on children's outcomes. High quality early education can boost children's development and help to narrow the gap between disadvantaged children and their more affluent peers. Childcare enables parents to work, increasing family incomes, which also in turn can have a positive impact on children's outcomes. The poverty risk increases significantly for families with a disabled child (Households Below Average Income): better access to childcare could help parents to move into work, reducing the poverty risk.

The Family and Childcare Trust holds considerable expertise in these areas. Each year we publish the [Childcare Survey](#) and [Holiday Childcare Survey](#). These track the cost and availability of childcare across Britain, including looking at sufficiency of childcare for disabled children. We have also published a number of our research reports that we draw on for evidence here:

- [Parliamentary inquiry into childcare for disabled children](#)
- [Social mix in London early years provision](#)
- [Driving High Quality Childcare: the role of local authorities](#)

Issues with access to early education and childcare for children with SEND

As part of the *Parliamentary inquiry into childcare for disabled children* (2014), parents with disabled children were surveyed about their use of childcare. 41 per cent of parent carers who responded said their children did not access the full 15 hours of the free entitlement for early education for three and four year olds, and 92 per cent of parent carers said finding childcare for disabled children is more difficult than for non-disabled children. Around three-quarters of parents had cut their working hours or left jobs because of problems accessing appropriate childcare.

There are several factors that can make it more difficult for disabled children to access childcare and early education. Firstly, there is simply not enough suitable childcare available. Our Childcare Survey and Holiday Childcare Survey asks local authorities whether there is enough childcare for disabled children in their local area. There are consistently considerable shortfalls in sufficiency. In 2017:

- In England, only 18 per cent of local authorities reported that they have enough childcare for disabled children in all parts of their local area, a small increase from 15 per cent in 2016.

- ✦ In London, this drops to just nine per cent of local authorities in Inner London reporting that they have enough childcare for disabled children, and five per cent in Outer London.
- ✦ For holiday childcare, 13 per cent of local authorities in England report they have enough holiday childcare for disabled children in all parts of their local areas, a small decrease from 17 per cent.
- ✦ In London, this drops to 10 per cent in Inner London and six per cent in Outer London.

Secondly, families may face higher costs for paid childcare, outside of their free entitlement to early education. 86 per cent of parent carers who responded to the parent survey as part of the parliamentary inquiry reported paying £5 or more per hour, with 38 per cent paying £11-20 and five per cent paying more than £20. This compares to the national averages of around £3.50 – £4.50 per hour.

Finally, childcare settings may struggle to make the necessary adjustments to meet children's additional needs. 33 per cent of parent carers say that the lack of experienced staff was the reason for not accessing childcare. Childcare providers may also struggle to fund the adjustments or equipment needed to make their setting accessible.

Where do children with SEND attend childcare and early education in London?

The Family and Childcare Trust were commissioned by the Greater London Authority (GLA) to investigate whether children in London are attending early years settings with a diverse mix of other children, and whether there are links between the quality of the setting and the characteristics of children who attend it. We found that children with SEND are more likely to attend the maintained sector (normally school based) than their peers: children with SEND make up 7.3 per cent of children attending maintained providers, 5.5 per cent of voluntary providers, 2.5 per cent of private providers, and 1.1 per cent of independent providers.

Although often higher quality, maintained settings typically offer less flexibility on hours of childcare, often only offering morning and afternoon sessions (for example, 9am to 12 noon), which can be problematic for working parents.

Children with SEND were more likely to attend outstanding settings than their peers. In part this is because Ofsted ratings are generally higher for maintained settings than for non-maintained settings and children with SEND are more likely to attend those school settings. However, within both types of settings, children with a special educational need or disability are more likely to receive an education in an 'outstanding' setting than their peers, although the likelihood of being 'outstanding' and 'good' settings combined is similar for both groups. Our report raised concerns that the overrepresentation in maintained sector may be due to children with disabilities struggling to access private, voluntary and independent providers. This can mean that families with disabled children do not have the choice of providers that other families have, meaning they may not be able to find a provider who meets their needs.

Supporting childcare providers to improve access

There are a range of barriers that prevent families from being able to access early education and childcare for children with SEND:

- ✦ Insufficient training and knowledge among mainstream providers to meet a child's additional needs.
- ✦ A dependence on a small number of maintained settings, which are often overstretched and cannot offer full 15 hour places to all eligible children with SEND.
- ✦ Insufficient or delayed additional funding for PVI providers to deliver one-to-one care where appropriate, purchase equipment or materials, or access specialist training.

- ✚ A lack of clarity for both parents and providers regarding the legal duty to make 'reasonable adjustments' to meet a child's needs and to what extent any additional costs should be absorbed by a provider.
- ✚ Limits to specialist advice and support available to early years providers from local authority early years services, particularly through qualified SENCOs, driven in part by local authority funding pressures.

In April 2017, a new funding system was introduced for early education, including the Disability Access Fund which is a lump sum that all providers caring for a child eligible for Disability Living Allowance receive. It also introduced a responsibility on all local authorities to set up their own Inclusion Fund to help them work with providers to address the needs of individual children with SEND. These could both make significant progress in improving access to early education and the GLA could play an important role in supporting local authorities in sharing best practice and challenges to help these new funding streams achieve their full potential.

Our research also highlighted the significant role that local authorities have and can play in supporting local quality and access improvements. Local authorities typically provide support through area SENCOs providing specialist inclusion advice to PVI settings. Area SENCOs have a critical role in assessing the needs of children, training and advising staff and coordinating support packages. A scarcity of area SENCOs contributes to delays in assessment and limited support, training and guidance for non-specialist staff and ultimately a lack of access to care for children with SEND. SENCOs may also provide training to early years staff so that they are able to support children with SEND. The new funding formula limits the amounts of money that local authorities can retain centrally which has often been used to support this work. Given the funding pressures local authorities are currently facing, budgets are likely to continue to be squeezed.

In order to improve access to childcare and early education, the GLA can work with the Department for Education and local authorities to:

- ✚ Monitor the attendance of children with SEND to use this information to drive improvements.
- ✚ Support maintained providers to offer flexible, full day provision to enable parents to work through developing mixed model provision with other providers.
- ✚ Support providers, in particular private and voluntary providers, to make their settings accessible, in particular looking at spreading best practice from the maintained sector.
- ✚ Make sure the availability of specialist advice and training to early years' providers through qualified early years special educational needs coordinators (SENCO).
- ✚ Support local authorities in the development of their Inclusion Funds by collating and sharing of best practice and supporting local authorities where there are access issues.
- ✚ Provide a widely accessible training offer designed to build the capability and confidence of non-specialist early years professionals to identify and meet the needs of children with SEND.

Supporting schools to improve wraparound and holiday childcare

School age children with disabilities are also likely to struggle to access wraparound and holiday childcare that enables parents to work. Extended school services childcare (normally breakfast clubs and after school clubs) also has the opportunity to boost children's learning through providing access to extracurricular activities. Provision in mainstream schools may not be able to meet the additional needs of children with SEND, and at special schools,

which are normally much smaller, demand may not be high enough to enable schools to run regular wraparound childcare services.

In September 2016, the Government introduced a new 'Right to request wraparound and holiday childcare' with the aim of increasing the supply of school based childcare to meet demand. Under this policy parents and childcare providers can ask schools to start providing childcare, and if the school receives enough requests, they are recommended to investigate the feasibility of offering childcare. The right to request policy states that schools should make sure that wraparound or holiday childcare providers consider the needs of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) when planning their activities to prevent discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and foster positive relations. This policy is still new and is yet to achieve its potential in increasing the supply of school age childcare.

There is an opportunity for the GLA to work with schools and local authorities to help improve access to these wraparound services by:

-  Promote this right to request to parents and childcare providers to encourage them to make requests.
-  Support schools to develop inclusive provision through sharing examples of best practice and supporting the development of new, inclusive provision.

Case study: Sutton Opportunity Pre-School

The Sutton Opportunity Pre-School is a 42 place nursery in South London, offering morning and afternoon sessions. A lunch club is available for children who attend for the full day, or for children wishing to extend either the morning or afternoon session. About half of children who attend have additional needs and children's levels and types of need vary considerably. It was founded as a charity 25 years ago and currently operates from a council-owned building. It has been rated 'outstanding' at its last three Ofsted inspections.

The pre-school has an ethos of full inclusivity: 'everyone is involved in everything'. They believe that children with additional needs have a right to be educated alongside their peers, and that all children benefit from learning about differences between people. All children use Signalong (a type of sign-supported communication) for some activities, including singing and rhyme time. Regardless of their needs, all children go on external trips, for example to a children's farm.

The pre-school has a sensory room with comfortable places to sit or lie down, and gently moving lights and images - it is usually used by one member of staff and one child at a time. This is particularly important for some children with additional needs, but staff reports that it can be helpful for all children when they are upset. The building is on the edge of a large park and has an attractive outdoor space for play. A play service run by the council is located on the same site.

Provision for children with additional needs is necessarily expensive: staff costs are high as a significant proportion of children need one-to-one care, and staff often need to be trained to respond to specific health needs of individual children. This additional support is generally funded through children's Education Health and Care Plans, but the process is bureaucratic and slow, and staff spend a considerable amount of time preparing documentation to submit to the decision-making panel. All local parents can apply for a place at the nursery, but children with additional needs are often referred by the portage service.

Staff at Sutton Opportunity Pre-School report that their inclusive approach has wider benefits for families, reducing prejudice which is based on fear and helping parents to feel more comfortable interacting with disabled people. Children with more severe needs often go on to attend special schools for their primary and secondary education, so the pre-school is an important opportunity for them to form friendships with non-disabled peers.