



UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL 00:01 ON 20 MARCH 2018

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THE TRUTH BEHIND THE SILENT GENERATION

How the system is failing our children's communication needs

I CAN and The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists have today (20 March), published *Bercow: Ten Years On* – an uncompromising review of support for children with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) in England. It highlights how a disjointed system, both at national and local level is failing thousands of children and young people by not identifying their needs early enough or providing adequate levels of support – ultimately affecting their future success.

Over 2,500 people* responded to a consultation during the review to produce the first all-encompassing update to the original 2008 Bercow Report: *A Review of Services for Children and Young People (0-19) with Speech, Language and Communication Needs*, chaired by House of Commons Speaker, Rt Hon John Bercow MP.

New research undertaken via surveys revealed the constant struggle which parents and carers are facing to get their children's needs met:

- Only 29% of parents and carers felt involved in how their child's support was planned.
- Just 23% of people felt information about speech, language and communication was easily available.
- Over 50% of parents and carers had to wait more than six months for their child to get the help they needed.
- Only 12% of parents knew their child was struggling to communicate because a professional, for example, an early years worker, a teacher or a GP, told them.
- 42% of parents and carers said their child's needs were not picked up early enough.
- Just 15% of survey respondents felt speech and language therapy was available as required.

In his foreword to the report, **Rt Hon John Bercow MP, Speaker of The House of Commons**, says: *"It is my hope that this report will act as a call to action to all those involved in supporting children and young people, to come together and do what is needed to make a difference to the lives of those for whom communication is more difficult."*

Whilst some things have improved during the last 10 years, a plethora of issues remain including:

- Children and young people's needs must be identified early and then supported appropriately.
- Systemic change is needed – SLCN must form a core part of national and local plans.

- Services must be equitable. Currently, there is far too much variation in the support children and young people receive for their SLCN across the country. The notion of a 'postcode lottery' is in fact a reality.
- Communication is crucial, yet awareness of children and young people's SLCN is not sufficient.
- Support must make a difference and be based on the evidence of what works.

The *Bercow: Ten Years On* report makes a number of recommendations, and challenges both central and local government to act on them before another generation of people, whose communication needs aren't being met, become lost within society.

RCSLT Chief Executive Officer Kamini Gadhok MBE comments: *"Speech and language therapists are passionate about improving the lives of people with communication needs. Yet, continuing funding cuts hamper the support they can provide. Throughout this review, we've heard of the relentless and, often emotionally-exhausting, struggle parents and carers face in getting their children's SLCN supported. They shouldn't have to fight. The government needs to focus and prioritise children's language and commit to implementing the recommendations in our report."*

I CAN's Chief Executive Bob Reitemeier CBE adds: *"Too many children with SLCN are being missed by the system and this is a national disgrace. The evidence from Bercow: Ten Years On highlights that after more than a decade we continue to see fragmented services which aren't fit for purpose and unless something is done now we face losing a generation of children without the life skill of communication. We know that if we get the right support and help to these children they can live the lives they choose, but we need to act now!"*

For more information on *Bercow: Ten Years On* please visit bercow10yearson.com

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For further information please contact Matt Geer, Press Officer on 020 7843 2539 or 07824 446 989 (out of office requests) or email mgeer@ican.org.uk.

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Notes to Editors:

- *Views of parents and carers, children and young people, practitioners, employers, commissioners and other local leaders were gathered.
- In addition to I CAN and the RCSLT, a panel of leading figures from across the fields of education, health, the voluntary sector, parenting, special education needs, children's services, academics and business undertook the *Bercow: Ten Years On* Review. The panel was chaired by Jean Gross CBE, formerly the government's Communication Champion for Children.

For more information please visit bercow10yearson.com or search [#Bercow10](https://twitter.com/Bercow10).

About I CAN

I CAN is the children's communication charity. The charity specialises in helping children develop the speech, language and communication skills they need to thrive in a 21st-century world. Children and young people can fail to reach their potential because communication difficulties are not visible, often mistaken for something else, or not noticed at all. I CAN's mission is that no child should be left out or left behind because of a difficulty speaking or understanding. For further information on I CAN's work visit www.ican.org.uk or follow on Twitter [@icancharity](https://twitter.com/icancharity)

About the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists

The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) is the professional body for speech and language therapists in the UK, representing over 17,000 members. It facilitates and promotes research into the field of speech and language therapy – the care for individuals with communication, swallowing, eating and drinking difficulties. It promotes better education and training of speech and language therapists and is responsible for setting and maintaining high standards in education, clinical practice and ethical conduct. For more information on RCSLT and its Giving Voice campaign visit www.rcslt.org and www.givingvoiceuk.org