

From:  
Open letter from a coalition of organisations (see below).  
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7 March 2019

Dear Prime Minister,

### **Children and young people with speech, language and communication needs**

We are writing to you as professionals and organisations concerned with the speech, language and communication of children and young people to urge you to do more to address the need for action.

We were pleased to hear you say at Prime Minister's Questions on 21 March 2018 that 'We do not want to see any child held back from achieving their potential, and that includes ensuring that children with speech, language and communication needs are given the support they need.'

In the year since there has been some encouraging action from government, including the Department for Education's focus on closing the word gap and the decision to recommission joint special educational needs and disability inspections from Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission.

However, there is much still to be done. There are five areas where urgent action is needed to improve the life chances of the 1.4 million children and young people with speech, language and communication needs in the UK.

First, **joint commissioning** based on a robust analysis of local need will be key to ending what is currently a postcode lottery for children and young people with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN). The establishment of the SEND System Leadership Board is a welcome first step. Given the extent to which SLCN cuts across education, health and social care, justice and other policy areas, we believe that there should be a commitment that commissioning for SLCN will be an explicit focus of the Board.

Second, the Government's ambition to improve social mobility by supporting early language development is clear, but more than 10% of children have speech, language and communication needs that will require **support well beyond the early years**. Measures to improve joint commissioning could improve access to specialist support, but need to be underpinned by an evidence-based pathway for school-age children and young people that also includes universal and targeted support. This could build on the pathway which Public Health England is developing for children aged 0-5.

Third, **teachers and teaching assistants** need to be supported to enable all children and young people to develop language and communication skills. This means being able to identify children and young people who may have speech, language and communication needs as early as possible and to support them effectively. This could be addressed both through the early career framework for new teachers, as well as through providing national programmes of training for all education staff.

Fourth, with increasing pressures on schools' time and budgets, it's essential that **schools are encouraged** from the top to give speech, language and communication the priority it deserves. This should include providing guidance to schools and other education settings on how they can use their pupil premium funding to develop language skills, as well as ensuring Ofsted inspections consider the way that teaching improves pupils' spoken language and supports pupils with speech, language and communication needs.

Lastly, some groups of **vulnerable children and young people** are much more likely to have speech, language and communication needs than their peers: those excluded from school, those who are looked after, in the justice system, and with mental health problems. Practitioners working in these settings need to be trained in how to recognise speech, language and communication needs and to respond effectively. They must also have access to specifically commissioned speech and language therapy services for those young people who need them.

The means to achieve this could be a cross-government strategy to ensure the join-up of education, health, justice and care. This could build on the very welcome cross-government working group on family support in the early years.

We hope that you will show the vision and leadership to ensure that the government builds on the work it has already done. Over a million children and young people with speech, language and communication needs, their parents and those who work with them are waiting anxiously to hear from you.

Yours sincerely,

Anna Reeves  
CEO, Ace Centre

Professor Sonia Blandford  
Founder and CEO, Achievement for All



Steven Gauge  
Chief Executive, Action for Stammering Children

Dr Roger Wicks  
Director of Policy & Campaigns,  
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A national charity since 1911

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**Ambitious  
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**Association of Speech and  
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Anita Grover  
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# AUTISTICA

Building brighter futures through autism research

Natasha Finlayson  
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# BECOME.

THE CHARITY FOR CHILDREN IN CARE  
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counselling  
changes lives

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The professional association for  
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the brain injury association

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Professionals supporting language  
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