

Department for Education Children in Need Review

Call for evidence submission from the Disabled Children's Partnership

The Disabled Children's Partnership is a coalition of more than 60 charities campaigning for improved health and social care services for disabled children and their families.

We welcome the Department undertaking a review of support for children in need. We are pleased that the review includes support for disabled children. We are grateful for the engagement we have already had with officials about the review and look forward to this engagement continuing.

We do, however, have two significant concerns about the review.

First, we are concerned that limiting the review to educational outcomes fails to recognise the importance of other outcomes for disabled children and their families. For example, research¹ into short breaks shows a range of benefits for children and their families, including improved mental well-being of both the child and their family; reduced isolation for children (including siblings) and their parents; reduction in carers' relationship breakdowns; and improved financial wellbeing for families. Whilst it may be possible to show an impact of improved outcomes in these areas and improved educational outcomes, this is not necessarily the direct outcome or benefit of the service. As a result, limiting the outcomes under review risks the review failing to recognise and address the crisis in social care for disabled children. We have growing evidence^{2&3} of cuts to health and social care services, such as short breaks, and are concerned that these vital services will be further de-prioritised if there is a sole focus on educational outcomes.

Second, it is important that the review encompasses all children in need, not just those currently in receipt of services. This is particularly important for disabled children. The Children Act 1989 is explicit that all disabled children are children in need. The latest research⁴ shows there are now 1.1 million disabled children in the UK, which equates to over 900,000 in England (based on relative populations of England and the UK). Yet the Department's own data⁵ shows that the child's disability or illness was the primary need for only 36,790 children in need as at 31 March 2017. Any review of outcomes for children in need must consider the impact on disabled children of not being assessed or receiving services under the Children Act.

¹Eg [The impact of short breaks on families with a disabled child](#) – Department for Education, 2010; [Hospice care for life-limited children helps parents stay together](#) – Julia's House/Bournemouth University

² [Short breaks in 2015: An uncertain future](#) – Every Disabled Child Matters

³ [Changes in quality of health and social care services for disabled children and their families](#) – Disabled Children's Partnership, June 2018

⁴ ["Government ignores 300,000 'invisible' disabled children official: more disabled children in the UK than ever before"](#) – Newlife Charity, April 2018

⁵ [Characteristics of children in need: 2016 to 2017](#) – Department for Education, November 2017