

**Embargoed: 06.00 Tuesday July 8<sup>th</sup> 2008**

## **Bercow Review claims improving communication skills is the key to raising education standards**

Large numbers of children and young people are failing to learn basic speech, language and communication skills and this is radically affecting their life chances according to a new report\* published today by John Bercow MP.

Up to 50 per cent of children in some areas of Britain are identified in the Bercow Review as growing up with significant speech, language and communication needs (SLCN). Without the help these children require to develop important communication skills during their school lives, the risks are multiple and lead, in many cases to: lower educational attainment; behavioural problems; emotional and psychological difficulties; poor employment prospects, challenges to mental health and, in some cases, a descent into criminality.

In addition:

- Approximately 7 per cent of 5 year-olds or nearly 40,000 children going into school in 2007 in England had significant difficulties with speech and/or language.
- Approximately 1 per cent of 5 year-olds or more than 5,500 children going into school in 2007 in England had the most severe and complex speech, language and communication needs.
- 60 per cent of approximately 7000 children and young people aged under 18 who pass through Young Offender's Institutions (YOI's) are estimated to have difficulties with speech, language and communication.
- A DfES paper estimates that each child who becomes NEET (not in education, employment or training) costs the UK taxpayer some £97,000.

The Bercow Review makes several wide-ranging recommendations to address SLCN, including:

- The regular monitoring of children at important stages of their school lives in order to identify potential speech, language and communication problems as early as possible in a child's life.
- Setting up a series of local pathfinder projects around the country which will assess speech, language and communication needs, decide which services are

required and start to provide them. The intention would be to learn from them and spread best practice.

- Parents to be given ongoing information about their child's development and needs throughout their school life. This extends the principle of the 'red book' (Personal Child Health Record).
- The appointment of a 'communication champion' to raise the profile of speech, language and communications within schools and oversee the implementation of the pathfinders.

John Bercow MP said:

"The ability to communicate is an essential life skill for all children and young people in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is at the core of all social interaction. With strong communication skills, children can engage and thrive. Without them children will struggle to learn, achieve, make friends and interact with the world around them.

"Our review has found that these essential life skills are too low a priority in education and the health service. This is severely hampering children's ability to learn, achieve, participate in and contribute to society. Furthermore, speech and language impairments (SLI) were not always distinguished from the far more prevalent speech and language delays which resulted in either no intervention taking place or the wrong help being provided. This affects not only the individual child, but also his or her family, peers, teachers, communities and society as a whole."

Parents contributing to the review spoke of a postcode lottery in service provision. In some areas, there is evidence of difficulty accessing services, shortages across services and inadequate provision.

Bercow continued:

"Many parents and professionals contributing to the review spoke of a 'postcode lottery' in the availability of services. No two areas of the country commission and deliver the same level of services to children and young people with SLCN and this inconsistency rankled with parents. This is why one of our key recommendations is for a stronger emphasis on performance monitoring in local areas."

Ends.

For further information please contact Will Dingli (consultant to John Bercow) on 020 7925 6484 or 07710 454 213. Email: [will@dingli.fsworld.co.uk](mailto:will@dingli.fsworld.co.uk). Ed Hawkesworth (DCSF Press Office) on 020 7925 5999.

## Notes to Editors

\* The Bercow Review's full title is: *Bercow review of services for children and young people (0-19) with speech, language and communication needs.*

The review was commissioned in August 2007 by the Secretary of State for health, Alan Johnson MP and the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, Ed Balls MP. John Bercow MP was asked to lead the review. John Bercow submitted an interim report in March 2008. This is the final report.

Evidence for the review was obtained in three ways:

- a consultation questionnaire sent out in October 2007 which received over 2,000 responses.
- A series of consultation groups which involved parents, children and young people in locations across the country, and;
- Visits to Children's Centres, nurseries, primary schools and secondary schools throughout the country.

The Review's Advisory Group members are:

Virginia Beardshaw, Chief Executive, I CAN.

Trevor Daniels, Head of Special Educational Needs, Sth Gloucs Council

Kamini Gadhok, Chief Executive, Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists.

Brian Lamb, Chair of the Special Educational Consortium and Executive Director of Communication, Royal National Institute for Deaf People.

Linda Lascelles, Chief Executive, Afasic.

Norbert Lieckfeldt, Chief executive, British Stammering Association.

Michelle Morris, Head of Speech and Language Therapy, Salford Primary Care Trust and professional adviser on speech and language therapy to DoH.

Alice Sluckin, Chair, Selective Mutism Information and research Association

Associate Members:

Dr Gillian Baird, Consultant Developmental Paediatrician and Honorary Professor in Neurodisability at Guy's Hospital, London.

Dr Vicky Slonims, Clinical Lead Speech and Language Therapist and Honorary Lecturer at King's College, London.