



## **The Childcare Bill – making the new entitlement work for the families of disabled children**

Second Reading - House of Commons  
Wednesday 25 November

### **Background**

*"The Early Years Minister, Sam Gyimah, and I... are aware that families with disabled children too often experience challenges and financial pressures in getting the childcare services they need."*

**Edward Timpson, Minister of State for Children and Families, June 2015**

Our organisations welcome the intention of the Childcare Bill to support families with the costs of childcare, and the extension of free childcare to 30 hours a week for working families. However, there is overwhelming evidence that parents of disabled children cannot access the *current* entitlement to free childcare:

- Only 21% of local authorities say that there is sufficient childcare for disabled children in their area<sup>i</sup>;
- Research commissioned by the Department for Education found that only 40% of parent carers believe that childcare providers in their area can cater for their child's disability<sup>ii</sup>; and
- A recent survey found that only 60% of parents with disabled children were able to fully access the current entitlement to 15 hours free childcare. This is compared to 96% of parents as a whole<sup>iii</sup>.

*"Disabled children are being denied the same opportunities for positive educational and social development... Parents are denied the same opportunities to choose to return to work".*

**Parliamentary Inquiry into childcare for disabled children, 2014**

The Government must address the fundamental challenges currently facing the families of disabled children if they are to have the same opportunities as other parents to access 30 hours free childcare. We believe the Government will be unable to fulfil its pledge to ensure equal access to the new entitlement unless it commits to addressing the systemic problems in accessing childcare currently faced by the parents of disabled children.

### **The workforce is not suitably qualified and trained to deliver high-quality care to disabled children**

The Parliamentary Inquiry into childcare for disabled children found a consensus across parent carers, local authorities and provider associations that the childcare workforce lacks sufficient knowledge of the skills required to include disabled children. It found that the lack of staff skill and confidence was often the reason for parents 'being subtly discouraged or simply turned away by a provider<sup>iv</sup>'.

Effective early years provision relies on staff with the skills and confidence to identify and respond to the needs of disabled children. The recent reforms to special educational needs and disability in the Children and Families Act 2014 rely on a skilled workforce that is able to identify needs early and respond effectively.

We believe that local authorities should be required to produce a local childcare inclusion plan that sets out how disabled children will be assisted to access early year settings. Staff training should be central to this plan, and local authorities should support settings by providing area SEN coordinators to provide more specialist advice.

### **The current funding system does not take the additional costs of supporting disabled children into account**

In evidence to the Parliamentary Inquiry into childcare for disabled children, providers repeatedly argued that a lack of additional funding was preventing them from developing inclusive childcare. Meeting the

additional needs of disabled children has a cost implication. Local authorities are able to provide top-up funding to childcare providers from their 'high needs block' of funding or provide support services which provide expert advice. However, the Inquiry concluded that "the availability of additional funding is inconsistent and is not always adequate to enable a disabled child's participation in a setting"<sup>v</sup>.

If the Government is to secure equal access to the new childcare entitlement, we believe that the Comprehensive Spending Review must recognise the funding implications of creating equal access for disabled children to the childcare offer. This requires explicit consideration of whether additional funding needs to be provided to local authorities to allow them to support childcare providers.

We believe the government should commit to providing sufficient financial support to local authorities so that all childcare providers can offer places to disabled children. Additional funding should be made available to local authorities via the High Needs Block, to ensure adequate funding is available for all disabled children in the early years.

### **For more information**

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<sup>i</sup> Family and Childcare Trust (2015) *Access denied*

<sup>ii</sup> Department for Education (2014), *Childcare and early years survey of parents 2012-14*

<sup>iii</sup> Contact a Family, *Levelling the Playing Field* (2015)

<sup>iv</sup> *Parliamentary Inquiry into childcare for disabled children* (2014)

<sup>v</sup> *Parliamentary Inquiry into childcare for disabled children* (2014)