

Embargoed 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2017, 00.01

## HEALTH VISITORS REPORT INCREASE IN CHILDREN'S COMMUNICATION DIFFICULTIES

Evidence submitted to the *Bercow: Ten Years On* review into children and young people's speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) from the Institute of Health Visiting (iHV)<sup>1</sup> has revealed an 8% rise in health visitors reporting that they are seeing higher numbers of children with delayed language, with the number increasing from 64% in 2015 to 72% in 2016.

The iHV evidence shows that nearly three quarters (72%) of health visitors that responded to the 2016 survey reported an increase in children with delayed speech and communication development. This means they may use simpler sentences, fewer words and struggle to understand the same instructions as their peers.

This evidence submission coincides with the launch of the parent and carer consultation for *Bercow: Ten Years On* – an independent review into the state of provision for children and young people's SLCN run by I CAN and the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT).

The final report and recommendations will be published in 2018, marking 10 years since the Government published *The Bercow Report: a Review of Services for Children and Young People (0-19) with Speech, Language and Communication Needs*.

Jean Gross, Chair of *Bercow: Ten Years On* and former government Communication Champion for children, said: "In 2008, the original Bercow Review showed that around two-thirds of parents and carers that responded felt that information about support for children was not easily available, and nearly 40% said that the quality of information was poor. That was damning evidence that things needed to improve. But have they? That is what we need to find out.

"The Institute of Health Visiting's evidence highlights a worrying trend in health visitors reporting a rise in children with delayed language. Now is the time to find out how parents and carers really feel about the reality of the SLCN support they have received for their child so we can understand what, if anything, has changed over the past decade. We are asking them to speak out so we can ensure that the *Bercow: Ten Years On* recommendations about information and provision are firmly rooted in their experience."

Elizabeth Stanley, National Rep for the National Network of Parent Carer Forums (NNPCF), said: "Ensuring that parents and families have a good understanding of how best to support their child's development is vitally important in improving outcomes for children and young people. Being able to communicate is an essential part of life; we need parents, carers, professionals and organisations to listen to each other and work together in a collaborative way to improve the lives of our children.

---

<sup>1</sup> Institute of Health Visiting (iHV) survey of 1251 health visitors in 2016 and 1413 in 2015

“*Bercow: Ten Years On* needs to learn from those families receiving good support for their child as well as those who feel it is not so good. This will ensure that recommendations can include ways to replicate best practice. It is therefore imperative that parents and carers use the survey as a platform to share their experiences and contribute to the evidence base.”

The iHV statistics follow the recent announcement that health visitor checks will remain mandatory in the early years, which includes checks to identify language difficulties in children at a young age.

Parents and carers can directly take part in *Bercow: Ten Years On* by completing a short survey online (closing June 2017). In addition, practitioners can access early-years, primary and secondary activity packs that can be carried out with parents and carers in local settings.

Further information is available at [www.ican.org.uk/Bercowsurvey](http://www.ican.org.uk/Bercowsurvey).

Find out more about *Bercow: Ten Years On* visit [www.ican.org.uk/Bercow](http://www.ican.org.uk/Bercow) or follow #Bercow10years on social media.

For more information, interviews or pictures, please contact Laura Smith or Lisa Church at Consilium Communications on [lsmith@consiliumcommunications.co.uk](mailto:lsmith@consiliumcommunications.co.uk) / 07467 945848 or [lchurch@consiliumcommunications.co.uk](mailto:lchurch@consiliumcommunications.co.uk) / 07467 945661.

## Notes to Editors

### About *Bercow: Ten Years On*:

- *Bercow: Ten Years On* is a national review of the state of provision for children with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) in England run by I CAN, the children’s communication charity, and the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT).
- A report will be published in early 2018, which will bring together the outputs of the review and include strong local and national recommendations.
- The original Bercow review in 2008 made recommendations under five key themes – communication is crucial; early identification and intervention are essential; a continuum of services designed around the family is needed; joint working is critical; and the current system is characterised by high variability and a lack of equity.
- Further information on *Bercow: Ten Years On* is available at [www.ican.org.uk/Bercow](http://www.ican.org.uk/Bercow).

### About I CAN:

- I CAN is the children’s communication charity - [www.ican.org.uk](http://www.ican.org.uk) or [www.talkingpoint.org.uk](http://www.talkingpoint.org.uk).
- We are experts in helping children develop the speech, language and communication skills they need to thrive in a 21<sup>st</sup> 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. We do this through:
  - Sharing our expertise and knowledge to increase awareness of communication difficulties and inform policy making.
  - Providing resources and information for parents, families and people who work with children.
  - Providing assessments for children so that their families know what support will meet their needs.
  - Giving teachers and professionals working with children the skills to help children who struggle through our evidence-based programmes.
- At the very heart of I CAN are our two ‘Outstanding’ special schools that give expert care and education to children with problems so severe their needs cannot be met elsewhere.

### 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 more than 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 visit [www.rcslt.org](http://www.rcslt.org).