

## ***Response to the SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan***

**20 March 2023**

**There are an estimated 33,500 children of school age in the UK with physical disability, the majority of whom have cerebral palsy, a lifelong and fluctuating neurological condition which affects posture and movement and has an impact on many interrelated areas of health, learning and communication. Approximately 1 in 400 children born each year will be diagnosed with the condition.**

Despite the prevalence of children with physical disability, there is no mention of the needs of these children within the Improvement Plan. Whilst there is reference to learning disability, early language delay, autism, behavioural challenges and sensory impairment and with substantial additional training resources being directed to these needs, there is not, apparently, to physical impairment or cerebral palsy.

Action Cerebral Palsy (Action CP) welcomes the Government's commitment to work alongside children, young people and their families and those who work across every part of the SEND system to deliver improvements to the SEND and AP system. We welcome the plan's principles of early identification of needs, targeted support to address individual needs and timely access to specialist services and support including specialist placements when appropriate. We call upon the Government to work with Action CP, children and young people with cerebral palsy and their families and a coalition of expert specialist in neurological and physical disability to address the following areas within the Improvement Plan:

- ⊙ **National Standards which take account of condition-specific needs:** Action Cerebral Palsy welcomes the requirements for national standards, but for these standards to truly aspire to meet individual needs, they must be set by a board of individuals and agencies which have an in depth understanding of SEND conditions including cerebral palsy, the impact of the condition on access to the curriculum and educational attainment and the educational pathways and provision necessary to meet the full range of needs.
- ⊙ **Access at the point of identification of need to SEND partnerships that include the voluntary sector:** Action Cerebral Palsy also welcomes the proposal for SEND Partnerships. Effective SEND partnerships which work collaboratively to develop a local inclusion plan will enable swift decision making and delivery of effective and high-quality provision. A critical aspect of the work of SEND partnerships should be the ability to commission early assessment and intervention services **at the point of identification of need and throughout the EHCP assessment process** rather than at the point of issuing the final EHCP which can be some time after the initial identification of special need. The vital importance of early therapeutic and

educational intervention to harness the high level of neuroplasticity in the early years for children with signs of neuro disability is well documented but too often such children have to wait too long for formal diagnosis and the correct level of intervention and the support which follows resulting in a lasting impact on their educational progress and future potential. The SEND partnerships must include partners from the charity and voluntary sectors (who are often able to provide rapid and targeted support) and parent groups including those with children with cerebral palsy who should be seen as equal partners at every level.

- ⊙ **Funding for Condition Specialist Expertise:** Action Cerebral Palsy welcomes the proposal to increase the capacity of specialists including SENCOs, educational psychologists and speech and language therapists. However, there is a worrying shortfall in the specialist expertise available to pupils with cerebral palsy and the schools they attend, and many pupils experience inadequate levels of support from suitably trained specialist teachers and paediatric therapists whose direct input is so vital to ensure full access to the curriculum and school life.
- ⊙ **Improved workforce training in AT and AAC:** Many children with cerebral palsy will experience difficulties with speech and communication and some will be non-verbal in addition to having a motor impairment. Whilst there is mention of early language support in the Improvement Plan, there is also a need for increased expertise in the early years and school workforce of high and low tech augmentative and alternative communication strategies (AAC) and assistive technologies (AT) which are vital skills for children with speech and language and motor impairments to acquire and should be introduced as early as possible.
- ⊙ **Standardised EHCP template must facilitate true integration of education, health and care provision and not just education AND must be fit for purpose for CYP with complex needs:** Action Cerebral Palsy welcomes the proposal of a standardised and digitalised EHCP, however it is important that such standardised EHCP templates allow for sufficient detail to make them fit for purpose for a child with cerebral palsy whose educational and health needs may be highly interconnected. For these reasons, national standardised EHCPs must provide exemplar templates to be used for children with specific conditions such as cerebral palsy. This will allow for the documentation of more granular detail and information about the child's interrelated motor, cognitive, communication, sensory, perceptual, social and health needs, how these affect learning and development, and the cross-sector and trans-disciplinary provision required to meet the child's unique and holistic needs. This model will provide a truly useful working tool to be used as a baseline and to monitor and record progress and changing needs throughout the child's growing years. The APPG on Cerebral Palsy report on Best Practice in EHCPs, Teaching and Learning for Children with Cerebral Palsy <https://actioncp.org/wp-content/uploads/EHCP-report-APPG-on-Cerebral-Palsy-October-2021.pdf> recommended *"the creation of a single national template and process for EHCPs to*

*be produced by experts in cerebral palsy, with increased routes for input from families and relevant professionals”.*

- © **Independent special schools and specialist voluntary providers are an invaluable advisory resource and source of expertise:** The proposal to re-examine the state’s relationship with independent special schools is of interest. Whilst many children with cerebral palsy thrive in mainstream schools which are able to meet their specific needs, independent residential (and day) special schools for children with complex motor, health, education and communication needs such as those experienced by some children and young people with complex CP, offer a very inclusive, effective and joined up education, health and care solution for these children and their families and thus should be valued and protected. Moreover, the teaching and therapy staff at these schools have a very high level of expertise in meeting the complex educational, communication, therapy and health needs of pupils with severe and complex disability and so should be regarded as an invaluable advisory resource which should be utilised via commissioning arrangements between the independent, state and MAT sectors. Similarly, charities which offer services to children with complex needs should also be utilised as a resource to supplement the availability of workforce skills.
- © **Key Worker Support for CYP with Complex Physical Disability:** The proposal to provide key worker support for children with learning disabilities and autism should be extended to children with complex physical disability. This is especially important for children who receive input from multiple agencies.
- © **Supported Routes To Employment for Young People with Physical Disabilities:** Action Cerebral Palsy welcomes the Plan’s aspirations for successful transitions and preparation for adulthood. Of the 1.5 million people in the UK with learning disabilities, almost 95% of these are unemployed. Although there are national statistics about the employment rates for people with a learning disability, no such statistics exist for those with a physical disability such as cerebral palsy. Likewise, whilst there are local, council funded partnerships and national charities helping young people with learning disabilities to acquire skills and build confidence to find or stay in employment, there are no such charities or government initiatives to support young people with physical disabilities into work. The Government’s Disability Confident scheme is a good, tiered system, but lacks teeth and is therefore more guidance rather than mandatory for employers, and so does not provide any guaranteed route into employment for a disabled person. A greater focus on developing the attitudes, knowledge and skillsets in those responsible for supporting young people with physical disabilities into and through traineeships and further education together with funding for all necessary adaptations and adjustments is needed. Strategic targets should be set to drive improvement in preparing young people with physical disabilities for the world of work.

## Conclusion

The SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan sets out a broad and ambitious strategy for improvement, but with the detail and implementation very much to be worked on via review of current practice, further research, exploration and consultation. We feel, however, that our community of children and young people with cerebral palsy and others with complex physical disabilities have largely been forgotten within this plan. ***Action*** ***Cerebral Palsy and our stakeholders would therefore welcome the opportunity to assist the Government in further developing the SEND and AP Improvement Plan to ensure that all children with cerebral palsy and their families receive the education and support they need to lead happy, productive and fulfilled lives.***