



Patron: Lady Stevenson DL

Early Years 30 hours Childcare Provision - Sufficiency for children with SEND

Catherine McLeod MBE, Dingley's Promise

Context

In September 2017 the government will introduce the 30 hour free early years allowance for working parents. The SEND Reforms of 2014 are based on the principle that children with SEND have a right to the same educational opportunities as all 3- and 4-year olds. Therefore, it is vital that we ensure that all children – including children with SEND – are able to access their full 30 hours if they are eligible.

The new funding formula, introduced in December 2016 includes two specific funds to enable children with SEND to access childcare – the Access Fund and the Inclusion Fund. Research by the Department of Education found that currently in mainstream settings there was 'an average gap between SEND-related costs and SEND-related funding of just over £4 per hour.'

Caroline Dineage MP has responded to our concerns about the effect of the 30 hours on children with SEND raised by local MPs Rob Wilson, Richard Benyon, John Redwood and Maria Miller on our behalf by asserting that 'we are encouraging innovative approaches to providing flexible childcare for working parents who have children with SEND' and highlighted the two new funds as key in enabling settings to cater to the needs of children with SEND.

The Family and Childcare Trust recently published new research entitled 'No shortcuts: quality and the free childcare extension', which states that 'one of the impacts of the 30 hour offer might be to make it harder for children with SEND... to access the benefits of quality childcare.' There were 'concerns that the policy would raise new barriers further restricting their access to childcare places.'

Demand and Sufficiency

With only 60% of 3- and 4-year olds with SEND currently accessing their 15 hours free provision compared to 96% of mainstream children, there is **potential for a huge increase in demand among this group** when the 30 hours is introduced. Our own research carried out across our centres in Reading, Wokingham and Newbury suggests that we will see a 190% increase in demand due to families planning to go back to work when the 30 hours is available.

Dingley's Promise depends on relationships with mainstream providers to transition the children we work with from specialist early intervention to inclusive provision. As the implementation of the 30 hours approaches, we have **very real concerns about the number of mainstream providers that will be able to offer more places for children with SEND** without further support and training.

Councils have figures to show their childcare sufficiency in preparation for the 30 hours, but **what we have not been able to access from local councils is the childcare sufficiency for children with SEND**. It is said that all settings should be inclusive and accept all children with SEND, but in practice numerous nurseries have told us that they don't feel they can accept more children with SEND.





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Local Sufficiency Survey

We conducted a survey in Berkshire and 38 nurseries serving 2065 local children responded. These settings provide 76 places for children with SEND, and feel they could offer a further 28 places if needed when the 30 hours comes in. However, with extra support, this figure rose to an extra 75 places – or a 50% increase in available provision. In order to make this increase possible, settings identified the following needs:

1. As stated in the 'Levelling the Playing Field' report, 'unless sufficient funding is made available and structural reforms are made, the 30 hour provision will exclude and disadvantage children with disabilities in relation to their non-disabled peers.' Our research shows that **74% of settings felt that the funds being introduced would help them to provide support for more children with SEND**. However, while this funding is vital, there were also concerns that the paperwork involved in accessing funding is very lengthy so doing this every term for several children could be a big issue in terms of time constraint'. The **government must ensure that the systems to access the new funding are simpler and more streamlined than previous processes**, or mainstream settings simply will not be able to invest their time to apply.
2. Furthermore **68% of settings felt that tailored support and advice was important** for them in order to accept more children with SEND, but in recent years local government cuts have seen these services reduce in many areas.
3. Finally, **63% of settings felt that training – both generic and specialist – was vital for their staff** to ensure they could give the right support to children with SEND.

These needs must be met in order to ensure that all children with SEND eligible for the 30 hours have the opportunity to access their hours, as **without the active participation of a large number of mainstream settings there simply will not be the capacity to provide all the hours**.

Quality of inclusive provision

While it is vital to ensure that children with SEND can access their 30 hours, a further concern that has been expressed by a number of professionals, is what the quality of that provision might be. The Family and Childcare Trust's research found that a third of local authorities surveyed thought that the 30 hours would lead to a reduction of quality in early years provision.

For many mainstream settings, the availability of 1:1 support for children with SEND is seen to be the answer to coping with demand. However, this does not necessarily mean that there will be meaningful inclusion, as in many cases this leads to the child being isolated in the classroom rather than included in classroom activities with their peers. **If settings cope with the increase in demand by simply employing 1:1 support for children rather than actively helping the child engage with the whole class through changes to the culture of the setting and knowledge of the whole staff team, then inclusion will not be meaningful**. Again, high quality training and support is vital to ensure this does not happen.





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Summary

The new funds allocated for children with SEND in the early years are a good first step in recognising the extra costs and demands on settings of supporting children with SEND effectively and helping with those costs.

However, in order to ensure that children with SEND are given their 30 hours, and given high quality meaningful inclusive support, there must be structured support and training for practitioners in mainstream nurseries.

Without this, mainstream settings will not be able to accept the number of children who will need places, and children with SEND will not be able to share in the 30 hours entitlement simply because of their additional needs and disabilities.

Recommendation

We appeal to local authorities to **consider the sufficiency of places for children with SEND** rather than only overall sufficiency. While there may be a policy of inclusion in some areas, many mainstream settings say that they want to keep a balance in their settings and have a level of children with SEND that they do not want to exceed. Further support and training is vital in ensuring these concerns can be overcome by using truly inclusive strategies.

We also recommend that the government **develops more specialist support and training services** to build the knowledge and capacity of mainstream settings. This should include general training to give practitioners a base knowledge, specialist training where staff need specific knowledge, and tailored support and advice so that settings can address specific needs on an ongoing basis.

Dingley's Promise Response

In response to this information and demands from our partners, Dingley's Promise are currently **developing a training programme** for our partner settings and **already provide support and advice on an ongoing basis for local settings** who feel in need of extra information and support in order to work with children with SEND.

We are **actively engaging with other providers to strengthen partnerships** in advance of September 2017 so that we are able to transition more children into mainstream settings to enable them to receive high quality support for their 30 hours.

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