

Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill: Written evidence submitted by Sense for Bill Committee (CWSB118)

Summary

- Although we welcome the measures outlined in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, it does not go far enough in introducing measures to support disabled children's education and social care.
- We propose amendments to the following aspects of the Bill:
 - Single unique identifiers. The remit of this measure should be expanded for use in the care and support of disabled children, to improve multi-agency working
 - Universal breakfast clubs. There should be a clear requirement for schools to make reasonable adjustments to ensure breakfast clubs are inclusive, and guidance on extending reasonable adjustments. *This amendment has been developed alongside the [Disabled Children's Partnership](#) and the [Special Educational Consortium](#).*
- Alongside this, we recommend a review of the guidance around home education and school attendance, with a consideration of those families of disabled children who may have no choice but to home educate their child.
- Additionally, discussions around place planning and admissions must consider how this new duty will work when so many children still face delays in being awarded their Education Health Care (EHC) plan.

About Sense

Sense is a national disability charity that supports people with complex disabilities to be understood, connected, and valued. Sense supports children, young people, and adults in



their home and in the community. Sense campaigns passionately for the rights of the people it serves and offers practical help and support to families and carers, including information and advice, short breaks, and family events.

We welcome this opportunity to provide evidence to the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill Committee and urge them to reconsider the lack of support for disabled children included in the Bill. There are currently almost 318,339 children in the UK with complex disabilities, of which almost 4000 are deafblind, and it is vital they are not left out of this important piece of legislation.

We would particularly welcome the opportunity to meet with members of the committee to discuss our suggested amendment around information sharing and unique identifiers.

Detailed analysis

Information sharing and unique identifiers

- A single unique identifier will be useful in strengthening safeguarding measures and improving multi-agency cooperation. However, we believe the measure could go further and be used to strengthen multi-agency working across all children's services, including those that support disabled children.
- Many families Sense has spoken to tell us of the disconnect between various agencies when accessing education, social care, and healthcare services. Parents are often required to repeat information to several different agencies and go through the same processes numerous times. Polling by Sense has found that over half (57%) of parents went through multiple assessments before they could access support, and 20% of parents did not feel health, social care and education worked well together to support their disabled child¹.

¹ The research was conducted by Censuswide with a sample of 1,001 Parents/guardians of disabled children under 18. The survey fieldwork took place between 4, September, 2024 to 9, September, 2024.



- We believe using the single unique identifier in disabled children's care would remove a significant burden from parents, who currently face a stressful and unfair system. This would better promote a holistic provision of care and prevent children from falling between the gaps whilst being passed between services.

Recommended amendments

1. **The remit of the Single Unique Identifier should be expanded for use in the care of disabled children, to improve multi-agency working across education, health, and social care.**

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss this further and to help with drafting this amendment.

Breakfast clubs

- The introduction of universal free breakfast clubs is a positive step towards supporting the wellbeing of primary age children, and we appreciate the Bill's commitment to supporting schools that face barriers to implementing this provision.
- However, in its current form the Bill does not fulfil its promise of making sure breakfast clubs are available for all primary-age children. Many disabled children, particularly those with complex disabilities, face barriers to accessing breakfast clubs due to various factors including food provision, transport, and specialist support.
- Families of disabled children already face extra costs in many aspects of life such as higher energy bills², and 62% of parent carers have given up work or reduced hours, further impacting on their financial resilience³. Many families we support will really benefit from this provision, so it is important they are not excluded from it.

² Putting disabled people at the heart of the benefits system, Sense (2024) <https://www.sense.org.uk/about-us/policy-public-affairs-and-research/putting-disabled-people-at-the-heart-of-the-benefits-system/>

³ <https://contact.org.uk/about-contact/news-and-views/families-forced-out-of-labour-market-amid-rising-costs/#:~:text=62%25%20of%20parent%20carers%20have,an%20impossibly%20precarious%20financial%20situation.>



Recommended amendments

1. A clear requirement for schools to make reasonable adjustments to ensure breakfast clubs are inclusive of children with SEND, including specialist support staff.
2. Outline guidance on extending reasonable adjustments, such as food vouchers, to breakfast clubs for children unable to access the meals provided.
3. A duty for local authorities to cooperate with schools on delivering this provision, including ensuring that any home to school transport provided enables attendance at breakfast clubs, and that support needed to access this provision should be included in EHC plans.

Home Education and School Attendance

- In principle, the proposed homeschool register could help ensure better data and understanding of the needs of disabled children who are unable to find suitable school places.
- However, the details of this provision risk penalising families with disabled children who have no other option than to educate their child at home.
- Families may choose to home educate their child because of local authorities or schools failing to provide suitable placements or support, or delays in the EHC plan process. Polling from Sense found that 2 in 5 (38%) families have to educate their disabled child from home, due to a lack of adequate funding or provision⁴.
- The requirement for Local Authority approval to withdraw a child from school in certain circumstances may risk exacerbating tensions between families and local authorities.
- The requirement for local authority consent to home education children who were in special schools risks reducing parental choice and forcing children to remain in unsuitable placements.

⁴ The research was conducted by Censuswide with a sample of 1,001 Parents/guardians of disabled children under 18. The survey fieldwork took place between 4, September, 2024 to 9, September, 2024.



Recommendations

1. Implement a safeguard to prevent local authorities from using the register to pressure families into unsuitable school placements.
2. A clear right for parents to challenge any disagreement on decisions on home education.

Place planning and admissions

- It is positive to see the Bill's focus on Local Authority and school cooperation on admissions and place planning.
- Many children with SEND face a postcode lottery due to insufficient provision from the Local Authority where they live, and this duty has the opportunity to ensure disabled children get the school place they deserve.
- However, this provision will only work for disabled children who already have an EHC plan. Under this duty, many children will still be unable to access the school place they need due to delays in EHC plan assessment outcomes.
- We know that only 50% of EHC plans are delivered within the 20-week statutory timeframe, and this varies hugely across the UK⁵. 46% of parents Sense polled had faced difficulties getting an EHC plan put in place⁶.
- We also know the number of suitable school places for children with SEND is low, so this measure must ensure local authorities and schools work together to create increased provision.

Recommendations

1. When implementing this measure, government must consider how they will address the delays in EHC plan assessment outcomes, to ensure more children benefit from this duty.

⁵ Education, health and care plans, June 2024 <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/education-health-and-care-plans>

⁶ The research was conducted by Censuswide with a sample of 1,001 Parents/guardians of disabled children under 18. The survey fieldwork took place between 4, September, 2024 to 9, September, 2024.



2. Local authorities and schools must prioritise the inclusion of SEND specific provisions in place planning.

Sense's expertise in this area

- We work closely with children and families through our Sense Centres and specialist Sense Colleges. In 2023, we supported over 3,800 children and families through our specialist operational services. Our specialist college sites worked with 334 young people and adults.
- Our multi-sensory impaired (MSI) children's team of teachers and practitioners provides tailored support for children and young people aged 0-25 nationally. In 2023, the team supported 3,276 children and families.

January 2025