

Whizz Kidz Written Evidence

Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill: call for evidence

1. Whizz Kidz

1.1 [Whizz Kidz](#) is the UK's leading charity for the 75,000 young wheelchair users in the UK, having provided over 30 years of support. We empower young wheelchair users by providing them with essential mobility equipment, offering confidence-building activities and experiences, such as wheelchair skills training, activity and employability programmes, and campaigning for a more inclusive society.

1.2 This evidence is informed by the young people and families we work with. It is also built upon by our knowledge and experience as a charity, developed over the decades we have supported young wheelchair users.

1.3 We are submitting the following evidence to this call for evidence as we want to ensure consideration is given to young wheelchair users and their needs and their lived experiences are reflected in government policy.

2. Executive Summary

Our response focuses on the areas of our expertise, namely part 2 of the Bill in relation to schools: Breakfast clubs and school food standards, school uniforms and children not in school. There is also an additional section outlining the inequality in access for young wheelchair users at school and the impact on educational outcomes and wellbeing.

- While we welcome the breakfast club initiative, we believe it should be offered to all schools, including SEN schools. There should also be requirements to ensure all breakfast club offers are fully accessible to all children, including young wheelchair users.
- We welcome the introduction of a statutory limit of the number of branded items. Young wheelchair users are more likely to live in poverty and have increased costs, so we support initiatives that support families financially. Families should be supported where needed to source and buy accessible school uniform at the same cost as non-accessible clothing.
- The withdrawal of children from school should be based on the children's needs and not based on schools or local authorities not being able to meet the child's needs.
- Changes to the area of 'Not in School Children' should not disproportionately impact or disadvantage children with SEND who are home educated or their parents.
- Young wheelchair users should be able to access education: physically, socially and emotionally, in the same way as their non-disabled peers.

Providing an inclusive environment and approach will support young wheelchair users to start achieving educational outcomes in line with non-disabled peers.

3. Part two: Schools: *Breakfast clubs and school food standards*

3.1 Require state-funded primary schools to provide free breakfast clubs (clause 21)

3.1.1 While we welcome this initiative it is concerning to see that this does not extend to all schools, including Special Educational Needs (SEN) Schools. Young wheelchair users do not achieve at school in line with their non-disabled peers and so while we agree with the Department of Education outlining that free breakfasts provide ‘a supportive start to the school day, ensuring they are ready to learn and make the most of the opportunities schools offer’ (Department of Education, January 2025)¹ we feel this should extend to all pupils, including those that attend SEN schools.

3.1.2 Again, while we welcome the Department of Education recognising that ‘Schools that offer breakfast clubs report improvements in behaviour, attendance, and academic attainment² not providing them in SEN schools will make it an initiative that widens the disability attainment gap. One-quarter (24.9%) of disabled people aged 21 to 64 years in the UK had a degree as their highest qualification compared with 42.7% of non-disabled people; 13.3% of disabled people had no qualifications compared with 4.6% of non-disabled people³.

3.1.3 ‘Breakfast clubs also support families financially by reducing the costs of living⁴ as well as support families day to day. Parents of disabled children are twice as likely to care for longer hours than other types of carers, with more than 56% providing more than 35 hours of care per week and 24% providing more than 100 hours per week. Unsurprisingly, 46% of parents therefore report that their caring role has affected their paid employment⁵. Initiative such as free breakfasts that aim to support wellbeing, improve educational attainment and support families should include children attending SEN schools.

3.1.4 Breakfast clubs should be accessible for all children, including young wheelchair users. In a recent survey by Whizz Kidz only 70% of young wheelchairs user said their school lunch hall was fully accessible and sadly 10% said it was not accessible at all. Provision of breakfast clubs should not be provided in an ‘alternative’ or ‘appropriate’

¹ [Breakfast clubs early adopter guidance for schools and trusts in England - GOV.UK](#)

² Ibid

³ [Outcomes for disabled people in the UK - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#)

⁴ [Breakfast clubs early adopter guidance for schools and trusts in England - GOV.UK](#)

⁵ [caring_more_than_most_full_report.pdf](#)

way but offered equally alongside their nondisabled peers with reasonable adjustments being made where necessary.

3.1.5 If a breakfast club is run by a third-party provider, then it should be required that they have an accessibility statement, plan, training and processes to ensure they offer a fully accessible breakfast club.

3.1.6 Those who staff the breakfast club should be sufficiently trained to be able to include and support young wheelchair users as required.

4. Part two: Schools: School uniforms

4.1 Place statutory limits on the number of branded items of uniform state funded schools can require (clause 23)

4.1.1 We welcome the statutory limit of branded uniform. Disabled children are more likely to live in poverty and their families face additional costs purely because of being disabled. On average, disabled households need an additional £1,010 a month to have the same standard of living as non-disabled households⁶. These extra costs might include mobility aids, specialist equipment, adaptations to the home, medicines or therapies, and greater fuel or transport costs on account of accessibility needs.

4.1.2 Families raising a disabled child are more likely to live in poverty⁷ and more likely to be higher energy users, relying upon disability aids and equipment such as powered wheelchairs, ceiling hoists, feeding pumps or electric hospital beds and therefore face higher energy costs. Research shows that people living in poverty struggle to meet uniform costs⁸ so we welcome this initiative that should support families financially.

4.1.3 While we welcome this initiative, accessible options of uniform should be available, and families should be supported where needed to source these at the same cost as non-accessible clothing.

5. Part two: Schools: Children not in school

5.1 Introduce a local authority consent mechanism for the withdrawal of certain children from school, including those at special schools (clause 24)

5.1.1 Recent trends show that there is increasing pressure on SEND schools and provision in the UK. Currently, around 150,000 young people attend a special

⁶ [Disability Price Tag 2024 | Disability charity Scope UK](#)

⁷ [Nearly Half of Families With A Disabled Child Living in Poverty | Disability Rights UK](#)

⁸ [School-Uniforms-Guide.pdf](#)

educational needs school or college in England⁹, and reports have found that half of those schools which are state-funded are oversubscribed¹⁰. Furthermore, 58% of children with SEND have had to take time out of school because their needs could not be met¹¹. It is perhaps unsurprising then that pupils with SEND are more likely to be home educated.

5.1.2 Some young wheelchair users may face complex health issues and/or high educational support needs. However, in overcrowded and oversubscribed schools, young wheelchair users may find that their needs are not being met.

5.1.3 If home education is the best option for a child with SEND, then transitioning to this should not be delayed in any way. Councils are already overstretched and there is potential that acquiring permission from the council to home educate could result in unnecessary delays, negatively impacts on a child's health, wellbeing and education.

5.1.4 It is also important to note that requiring parents to obtain council permission will not necessarily ensure that more children with SEND stay in formal schooling. Proper investment and reform is needed across the SEND sector to ensure that young people's needs are met, and they can achieve their potential.

5.2 Introduce a requirement for local authorities to maintain a register of children not in school, with duties for parents and related requirements for school attendance orders to be issued in some cases (clauses 25 to 29 and schedule 1)

5.2.1 According to the Department for Education, as of Autumn 2024, 111,700 children were in elective home education; 16% of these children had an additional requirement of SEN support and 6% had an Education, Health and Care Plan¹². In the same dataset, 14% of those home educated pupils cited the reason for this as mental health, whilst 3% said dissatisfaction with SEND, and a further 2% said physical health.

5.2.2 Given that children with SEND are more likely than children without SEND to be home educated¹³, it is essential that any changes to the area of 'Not in School Children' does not disproportionately impact or disadvantage children with SEND who are home educated or their parents.

⁹ [Special education schools and colleges in England: Policy and challenges in the special educational needs sector - House of Lords Library](#)

¹⁰ [Overcrowded specialist schools: 'We're teaching in cupboards' - BBC News](#)

¹¹ [ITV News investigation reveals shocking scale of special educational needs crisis across UK | ITV News Anglia](#)

¹² [Elective home education, Autumn term 2024/25 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK](#)

¹³ [Pupils with SEN more likely to be home educated | Whole School SEND](#)

6. Additional comments: School inclusion of young wheelchair users

6.1 There should be a clear definition of 'wellbeing' as young wheelchair users report that they do not always feel included, able to participate equally alongside their non-disabled peers or that staff understand their needs.

6.2 Recent research by Whizz Kidz showed only 20% of young wheelchair users said PE lessons were fully accessible at their school, only 44% said school trips were fully accessible and only 33% said extra-curricular or after school clubs were fully accessible. This inability to engage equally alongside their peers impacts negatively on their educational outcomes and wellbeing. Supporting schools to employ more inclusive practices would support young wheelchairs users' wellbeing at school.

6.3 School sites, especially older buildings, playgrounds, classrooms, bathrooms, lunch halls, libraries, computer rooms etc. can impede on a young wheelchair users' ability to access all that schools have to offer. One young wheelchair told us '*[My school] put one of my mandatory classes' upstairs with no lift. When I raised the issue, they said the class wasn't compulsory for me, but that limits my equal opportunity to education.*' Not being able to physically access some or all areas of school discriminates against young wheelchair users, exclude them and can leave them feeling isolated.

6.4 Another barrier for young wheelchair users is the awareness and knowledge of school staff on disability. If school staff do not fully understand disability and the needs of disabled students, they may find it harder to adapt activities and plan lessons with accessibility and wheelchair users in mind. Research by Whizz Kidz found that 49% of school staff said they had not received enough training to support the young wheelchair users at their school. Therefore, all support staff should receive comprehensive disability awareness training and training on supporting young wheelchair users in education.

6.5 Treating young wheelchair users as fully part of the class, and school community, in the same way as their non wheelchair using peers would support full inclusion. Whizz Kidz research revealed only one example of a young wheelchair user that experienced this, demonstrating that it is possible, '*the staff have always tried to take the approach that if it's not suitable for my son as a wheelchair user then it's not suitable for any of the children because he is not singled out in his class because of his disability he is part of the class wholly and they do things together (unless of course it's something that he needs do additionally to the other children) but where it's a class "thing" they make sure it's suitable for him first*'.