

# Developing high-quality inclusive practices

*The experiences of school-based childcare settings supported by Family Action in developing inclusive provision for 0–5 year olds across England with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)*



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# 1. Introduction

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This report has been commissioned by the charity Family Action, which has been delivering a one-year project funded by the Department for Education to increase the provision of high-quality, inclusive school-based childcare for 0-5s with SEND.

Evidence shows that high-quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) is associated with a positive impact on children's social and cognitive development, both short and long term. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds can start school up to 16 months behind their more well-off peers. Attending a day nursery or pre-school promotes school readiness and introduces them to a more structured environment. High-quality ECEC is vital to reduce this gap (Hilman and Williams, 2015).

As well as supporting children's learning, early education gives children a chance to play with other children and adults, explore the world around them and prepare for school. Childcare also gives parents the opportunity to work and train. Studies have shown that countries with higher enrolment rates in childcare also have higher maternal employment rates.

It is widely acknowledged that children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) are more likely to fall behind their peers and experience social exclusion. To improve outcomes for children over the long term, effective support and intervention must begin in the early years. But parents of children with SEND tell us they are frequently refused a place for their child because childcare settings do not feel they have the experience or expertise to care for their children, even though meeting the needs of children with SEND does not necessarily mean having expensive equipment or expertise about specific conditions or disabilities.

All children benefit from inclusive play and learning opportunities, not just those with SEND. Encouraging inclusion helps all children gain an understanding of fairness and adapt to the different needs of others. For children with SEND, supporting healthy social interactions with other children from pre-school upwards is an important preparation for a happy and fulfilling life.

## Inclusion

Inclusion means that all people should be freely and openly accommodated without restrictions or limitations of any kind. It is the practice of ensuring that people feel they belong, are engaged, and connected. It is about valuing all individuals, giving equal access and opportunity to all and removing discrimination and other barriers to involvement.

Miller and Katz (2002) present a common definition of an inclusive value system where they say "*Inclusion is a sense of belonging; feeling respected, valued for who you are; feeling a level of supportive energy and commitment from others so that you can do your best work.*"

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## Introduction

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A common barrier to inclusion can be institutional or professional attitudes which focus on impairments or health conditions and position disability as a 'problem' that belongs to the disabled individual. It is not seen as an issue to concern anyone other than the individual affected. For example, if a student using a wheelchair is unable to get into a building because of some steps, the medical model would suggest that this is because of the wheelchair, rather than the steps.

The social model of disability, in contrast, would see the steps as the disabling barrier. This model draws on the idea that it is society that disables people, through designing everything to meet the needs of the majority of people who are not disabled. There is a recognition within the social model that there is a great deal that society can do to reduce, and ultimately remove, some of these disabling barriers, and that this task is the responsibility of society, rather than the disabled person.

The social model is more inclusive in approach. Pro-active thought is given to how disabled people can participate in activities on an equal footing with non-disabled people. Certain adjustments are made, even where this involves time or money, to ensure that disabled people are not excluded.



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## Introduction

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### The Childcare in Schools project

This report focuses on the journey of seven school-based early years settings towards inclusive practice relating to children with SEND.

The research has taken place at a time when the Government is trying to increase the amount of ECEC delivered in schools. This can include free early education for two, three and four year olds and after-school clubs open to the under-fives. Schools are well placed to meet the demand for childcare for two to four year olds for a number of reasons: access to resources and equipment; ability to attract highly qualified staff; expertise in supporting school readiness; connections to local authorities; and convenience for parents who may have older children attending the school. Schools can also play a role in addressing the gaps in provision of childcare for children with SEND.

For a parent of a child with a special educational need or disability (SEND), the search for safe and suitable childcare is often difficult. Having inclusive childcare on a school site, particularly for children under five, adds a valuable service to a school's prospectus. Mentioning on a school's website that inclusive childcare and holiday provision are available can be a strong marketing tool for any school and can have a positive effect on a falling school roll. Schools offering such provision can improve their reputations and links within their communities.

### Inclusive childcare in schools

The Childcare in Schools project has supported a number of school-based settings across England to develop and deliver inclusive childcare. The names and locations of these settings are listed in the appendix which also gives:

- ▶ different types of school-based settings
- ▶ deprived areas and more affluent areas
- ▶ different areas (such as North, South, South West, Midlands, London)
- ▶ rural, seaside and urban areas
- ▶ types of schools (such as maintained, academy, primary/infant/nursery).

This project provided participating school-based settings with bespoke support and other resources to support the development of inclusive childcare provision.

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## Introduction

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## Methodology

The research for this report was carried out in autumn 2015 and draws on a number of site visits and interviews. Seven of the school-based settings were visited, in the North West, Midlands and South of England. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key members of staff, including headteachers and deputy headteachers, nursery managers and Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs).

The researcher also attended Family Action's regional events and spoke to staff in additional settings and other delegates<sup>1</sup>. Members of Family Action's Childcare in Schools project were also interviewed as part of the research process.

Detailed case studies for the schools involved in the project, including their background, demographics and their particular journeys, are available online on the Learning Exchange website.

This report hopes to share some of the best learning from the Childcare in Schools project to help other early years educators to develop more inclusive settings. It discusses the lessons that have emerged from the settings and follows on directly from other pieces of work produced for Family Action by the Family and Childcare Trust in 2013-15, which gives guidance in good practice for setting up and developing wraparound childcare in schools (Lugton, 2015a and 2015b).

Peer support, challenges specific to rural settings, English as an additional language, and working with childminders are areas outside the remit of this piece of research, but Family Action has carried out small pieces of research into these areas and the findings and recommendations for school-based settings are on the Learning Exchange website.

There is an extensive body of information, guides, templates and how to documents available online that have been produced during the course of this project. This report is not intended to duplicate these materials, but rather to identify the key factors that have contributed to the successful development of the participating schools' childcare provision and to present a set of recommendations to help other school-based settings develop inclusive childcare. For more information please go to: [www.learning-exchange.org.uk](http://www.learning-exchange.org.uk).

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1. More detail about the events is available on the Learning Exchange website [www.learning-exchange.org.uk](http://www.learning-exchange.org.uk)

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## 2. Policy background

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The Government has recognised the importance of ECEC to both promote child development and parental employment. Over the last 20 years successive governments have taken action to increase the availability, affordability, flexibility and quality of ECEC in the UK. The Childcare Act 2006 (covering England and Wales) requires that local authorities in England secure sufficient childcare as far as is 'reasonably practicable' for working parents and those undertaking training with the intention of returning to work. This legislation also obliges councils to have regard for disabled children and make sure there are enough free early education places.

Measures to make childcare affordable include help through tax credits, childcare vouchers and free early education. Parents now receive help with their childcare costs through the childcare element of Working Tax Credit and employer-supported childcare vouchers. Working Tax Credit enables parents to get help with 70 per cent of their childcare costs up to a maximum of £175 per week for one child (meaning the parent gets 70 cent of this = £122.50) and £300<sup>2</sup> for two or more children.

Tax credits are now being merged into the single Universal Credit, with 2018 now being the target date for its full implementation. Within Universal Credit the overall maximum support levels will remain, but it will cover 85 per cent of childcare costs.

At present, an estimated 540,000 parents who are not in receipt of Working Tax Credit are entitled to help with their childcare costs through employer-supported vouchers and tax relief on workplace nursery costs. Those receiving childcare vouchers can save up to £55 per week if they are basic rate taxpayers or higher rate taxpayers who joined a voucher scheme before 5 April 2011. Childcare vouchers can also be 'banked' and used at a time when childcare costs may be particularly high, for example, during the school holidays. The disadvantages of childcare vouchers are that only five per cent of employers offer them and not all childcare providers, particularly out-of-school clubs, accept them.

From 2017 childcare vouchers will be phased out and replaced with the Tax Free Childcare scheme. This will be an online system where parents bank their payments. For each £8 a parent pays in, the Government will add an additional £2 up to a maximum of £2,000 per year per child. Families of disabled children will receive help with their childcare costs to a maximum of £4,000 per year. This latter move was welcomed by families with disabled children, as childcare for this group of children is often more expensive.

All three and four year olds in England are also entitled to 570 hours of free early education every year – the equivalent of 15 hours per week during term time.

Since 2014, local authorities have also had a statutory duty to provide free early education to the 40 per cent most disadvantaged two year olds. The eligibility is based on household income, as well as children who have a current statement of special educational needs, an Education, Health and Care Plan, receive a Disability Living Allowance, or have been adopted from care under a

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2 Parents get 70 per cent of this = £210 per week.

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## Policy background

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special guardianship, adoption or child arrangements order. Primary schools, particularly those with existing nursery classes, are being encouraged to offer early education places to two year olds to support the extension of the free entitlement to disadvantaged children.

The Government also recently announced that they will fund 30 hours of free childcare for working families with three and four year olds from 2017. This extra support will be available to parents working 16 hours a week or more and where neither parent earns over £100,000 a year. In preparation for the additional hours, the Government is supporting some pilot programmes, including some that will specifically focus on delivering these extra free hours to children with SEND (Department for Education, 2016).

## Disability legislation

Children with SEND are covered by disability legislation. All relevant international human rights instruments recognise the right to education without discrimination on any grounds, including gender, disability, ethnic background, and other aspects of identity. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities explicitly states that education for disabled children should be inclusive.

The Equality Act 2010 replaced previous anti-discrimination laws such as the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. This legislation protects people from discrimination in the workplace and in wider society and sets out the different ways in which it is unlawful to treat someone.

The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 extended the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 to include education and, from this point onwards, early years settings in schools were also covered. The requirements of the Equality Act 2010 sit alongside the other requirements on early years providers, such as the Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage, the Children and Families Act 2014 and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice introduced in 2014. Although the Equality Act 2010 applies to all early years settings, there are differences in the way it applies to schools and those in the private and not-for-profit sectors (Council for Disabled Children, 2015).

The Equality Act 2010 obliges early years settings not to discriminate in their admissions, the provision of education, access to any benefit, facility or service, or otherwise exclude or disadvantage disabled children. The duties cover not just teaching and learning, but lunchtimes, activities and trips. Depending on the type of school, responsibility for complying with the Equality Act falls on the governing body, the proprietor, the Academy Trust or the local authority if they are responsible for admissions.

Early years settings not in schools are covered by the 'services and public functions' part of the legislation. Public authorities are also required by the public sector Equality Duty to consider all individuals when carrying out their day-to-day work – in shaping policy, in delivering services and in relation to their own employees.



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## Policy background

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There are also some protections for children with SEND in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) guidance. This provides a framework that brings together the learning and development requirements with welfare requirements. Covering childminders as well as group-based provision, it sets the standards that all early years providers must meet to ensure that children learn and develop well and keep healthy and safe. EYFS was made compulsory for all registered early years providers and schools in 2008, and was updated in 2014. In relation to children with SEND, the EYFS sets out an inclusive approach, designed to be responsive to individual needs. It requires that all providers must make information available to parents and carers on how the setting supports children with SEND.

### Policy to improve access to childcare for children with SEND

Despite these entitlements, there are many gaps in the availability of ECEC for children with SEND, including access to free early education. In 2014, an independent Parliamentary Inquiry into childcare for disabled children brought to light the serious problems families often experience when they try to access childcare. Some 41 per cent of parent carers who responded to the Inquiry's survey said their children did not access the full 15 hours of their free early education entitlement (Contact a Family, 2014). The Inquiry also found that parents are often asked to pay excessively high fees, which many cannot afford, the choice of suitable settings is limited, and there is a significant shortfall of knowledge, skills and confidence in providing quality care and education to disabled children in the childcare and early years workforce.

Successive governments have recognised these problems and there have been a number of initiatives which have attempted to increase access to ECEC for children with SEND. The Aiming High for Disabled Children programme committed £340 million revenue funding, from 2008 to 2011, to transform services for disabled children. This scheme included the Disabled Children's Access to Childcare (DCATCH) pilots, which provided funding to ten local authorities to pilot ways of improving the range and quality of childcare for families of disabled children, and involving the families in shaping childcare services. An evaluation of this pilot found evidence that perceived accessibility of childcare among parents had improved as a result of DCATCH activities in pilot areas, but there had been no significant impact on the take-up of childcare or the satisfaction of parents with the quality of care provided (Department for Education, 2011a). The main barriers to delivery of DCATCH were found to be resistance to inclusive working in some mainstream settings and local authorities and parents lacking confidence in the ability of childcare to meet their children's needs.

A further study on the impact of DCATCH found that families reported positive outcomes and highlighted:

- ▶ a beneficial impact on the parents' capacity to work
- ▶ enjoyable experiences for the disabled child

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## Policy background

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- ▶ increased confidence and independence for both parents and children and
- ▶ the creation of time for parents to pursue other activities (Abbot and Jessiman, 2014).

More recently, reforms implemented through the Children and Families Act 2014 require Clinical Commissioning Groups and local authorities to work together to integrate services across the 0–25 age range. Under the new system there will be a much clearer emphasis on offering help at the earliest possible point, with children and young people with SEND and their parents or carers fully involved in decisions about their support and what they want to achieve.

The legal underpinnings of the above reforms are set out in the Children and Families Act 2014, and the new SEND Code of Practice (Department for Education, 2014a). The latter replaces previous guidance and aims to give children more choice, support and opportunities for play and learning.

All early years childcare providers who offer free places to two, three and four year olds must meet the requirements of the SEND Code of Practice. These include the need to involve children and parents properly in decision making, as well as better coordination between services, with new joined-up assessments and plans for children who need support from several services (Department for Education, 2014a).

All early years providers have a number of legal obligations relating to SEND and inclusion. Providers must have arrangements in place to support children with SEND. Maintained nursery schools must identify a member of staff to act as Special Educational Needs Coordinator and other providers (in group provision) also have to do this.

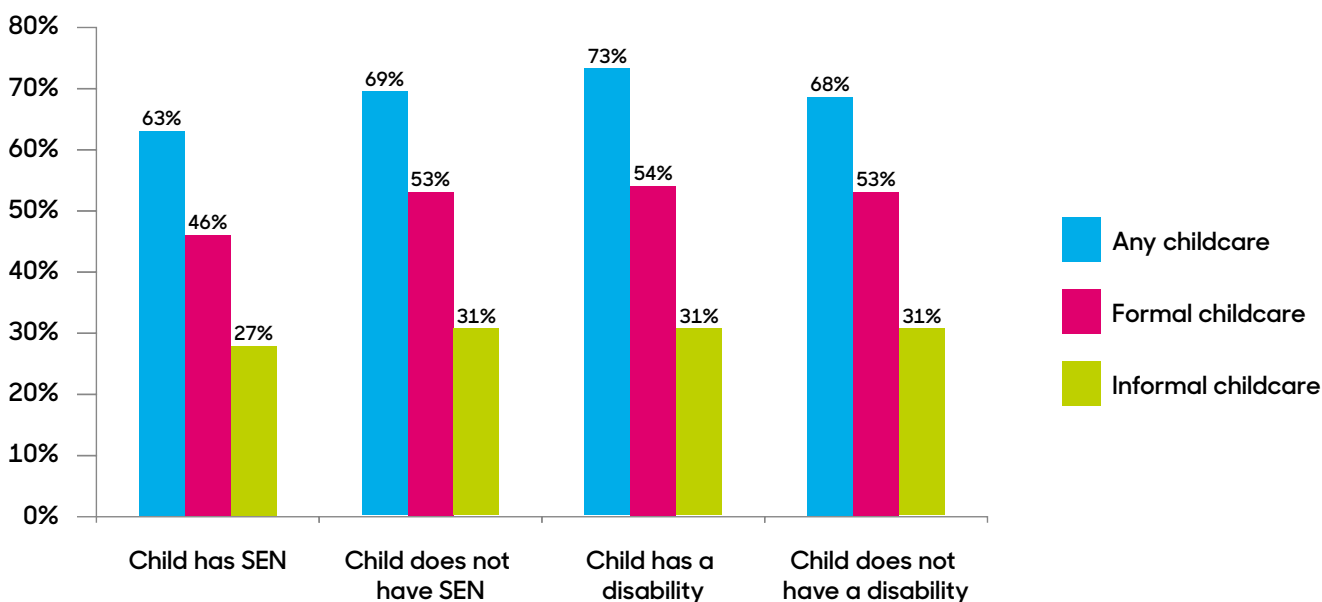
Local authorities are also required to publish information about services they expect to be available in their area for children and young people from birth to 25 who have SEND; and also services outside of the area which they expect children and young people from their area will use. This is known as the 'Local Offer' and puts all the information about education, health and care services, leisure activities and support groups in one place. Its main purposes are to provide clear, comprehensive and accessible information about the support and opportunities that are available and to make provision more responsive to local needs and aspirations.

### 3. Existing patterns of childcare use among disabled children

Some two per cent of two year olds in maintained early years provision are receiving special needs support, with 0.1 per cent having a statement of special educational needs or an Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plan. By the time children reach the age of 5, 11.9 per cent of children in maintained education have special educational needs support and 1.1 per cent have statements or EHC plans. This increase is largely because many special educational needs only become evident as children become older and start formal learning. This factor needs to be taken into consideration when interpreting statistics about patterns of use of ECEC among children with special education needs.

Analysis of patterns of childcare use highlights a complex picture. The Department for Education’s Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents (2014c) found that 46 per cent of children with SEND used formal childcare compared to 53 per cent without SEND. Some 27 per cent of parents whose child had SEND reported using informal childcare compared to 31 per cent without SEND (Figure One). There was no statistically significant difference between disabled and non-disabled children in their use of formal and informal childcare.

**Figure One: Use of childcare, by child characteristics**

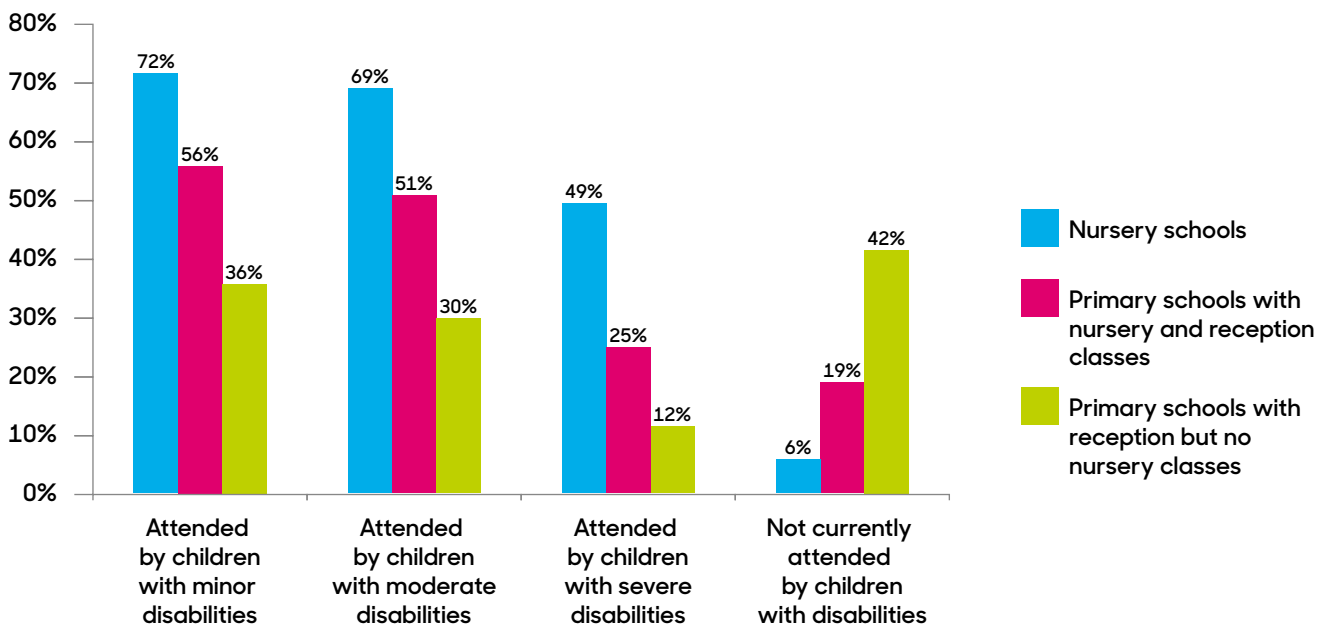


Source: (DfE, 2014c)

The data shown in Figure One is not broken down by severity of disability. Figures Two and Three break down childcare use by severity of disability

## Existing patterns of childcare use among disabled children

Figure Two: Proportion of providers attended by children with disabilities (school-based providers)



Source: (DfE, 2014b)

The *Childcare and Early Years Providers Survey* (2014b) finds that disabled children were far more likely to attend maintained nursery schools, with 72 per cent of nursery school providers reporting caring for children with minor disabilities and 69 per cent caring for children with moderate disabilities, as illustrated in Figure Two. However, this type of provision tends to not be very flexible in the hours they can provide, with most settings usually offering 15 hours over five days, meaning parents have three hours of childcare a day either in the morning or afternoon.

Children with severe disabilities were poorly represented across all three types of school-based providers but were most poorly served by primary schools with no nursery classes, with 42 per cent of primary schools with reception but no nursery not having any children with disabilities in their care.

The same survey also finds that full day care settings in general have seen an increase in the proportion caring for children with minor disabilities since 2011, rising from 32 per cent in 2011 to 42 per cent in 2013 (DfE, 2014b). Full day care settings in children's centres were particularly likely to care for children with more pronounced disabilities, with almost two thirds (62 per cent) caring for children with moderate disabilities and a third (36 per cent) caring for children with severe disabilities, as shown in Figure Three.

## Existing patterns of childcare use among disabled children

Figure Three: Proportion of providers caring for children with disabilities (group-based, out of school and childminders)

	Full day care	Full day care in children's centres	Sessional	Before school	After school	Holiday	Childminders
Care for children with minor disabilities	42%	55%	39%	41%	41%	42%	11%
Care for children with moderate disabilities	30%	62%	27%	26%	29%	34%	5%
Care for children with severe disabilities	16%	36%	13%	10%	11%	18%	2%
Do not currently care for children with disabilities	36%	13%	40%	40%	36%	35%	84%

Source: (DfE, 2014b)

Where parents are working, they may need to find childcare that is flexible enough to accommodate not only work commitments but the needs of the child. Childminders are frequently the most flexible childcare option and can often meet a parent's request to provide extra hours of care at the beginning or end of the day (Rutter, 2016). Yet childminders are the providers least likely to care for children with disabilities (Figure Three), with 84 per cent reporting in 2013 that they did not look after any children with disabilities.



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## 4. Barriers for families accessing childcare

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The previous section shows that children with special educational needs are less likely to use formal childcare than those without special educational needs. Children with SEND are more likely to attend maintained early years provision and less likely to be cared for by a childminder or in private and not-for-profit provision. These findings are supported by the experiences of parents which show the many barriers they face in finding appropriate ECEC.

These include high prices and a lack of suitable local provision. Families sometimes also report having to send their disabled and non-disabled children to different locations because of the lack of inclusive childcare providers that can accommodate both children (Contact a Family, 2014).

### Cost

Providers frequently charge more for ECEC provision for children with SEND. Some 86 per cent of parents who responded to the Parliamentary Inquiry into childcare for disabled children reported paying £5 or more an hour for under-fives care, 38 per cent paid £11–20 and 5 per cent paid more than £20 (Contact a Family, 2014). In 2014, the hourly rate for day care for a child over two was £4.40 per hour, and £3.21 for after-school care, so it can be seen that children with SEND are being charged far above the market rate.

Local authorities can provide extra funding for childcare providers to meet the extra costs of caring for disabled children. Paying for support such as one-to-one care would typically come out of the High Needs Funding Block, which provides targeted funding for individual children with SEND. However, this funding cannot be used to offset the additional costs of childcare for children with SEND outside free early education. The Department for Education is in the process of reviewing school funding, including the High Needs Funding Block, and has committed to consider how best children with SEND can be supported in the early years as part of the reform process.

Funding does not always cover provider costs, even for free early education. Providers may have to cover the extra costs of caring for a disabled child or ask parents to make up the shortfall through raising fees for any hours used in addition to the free entitlement (Contact a Family, 2014). Funding for support workers can be linked to set times during day nursery hours, meaning that access to this support is not flexible enough to meet a family's needs.

### Availability

Parents with disabled children also have difficulties finding a provider who can meet their child's specific needs. Providers may lack the training and therefore confidence to care for children with special needs and disabilities. Some 86 per cent of families who responded to the Parliamentary Inquiry said that there was insufficient choice of good-quality childcare for disabled children (Contact a Family, 2014). The need for one-to-one care, specialised skills and higher staff-to-child ratios mean childcare is too often not available.

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## Barriers for families accessing childcare

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Providers may also be unwilling to offer places to disabled children because they cannot meet their needs or they have health and safety concerns. Difficulties securing funding for one-to-one care, specialist equipment, specialist training such as administering medicines, manual handling and communication methods may also mean that providers have to refuse places.

### Staff skills

The Parliamentary Inquiry found that 33 per cent of parents with disabled children say that the lack of staff with the skills and experience to look after their child and cater to their specific needs was the reasons for not accessing childcare.

The Nutbrown Review (2012) highlighted the skills shortage amongst childcare staff in dealing with children with SEND. Providers, too, have stated that they lack the knowledge, skills and confidence to provide quality ECEC to children with SEND.

Children receiving their free early education entitlement within a maintained setting will have access to the support offered by a Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) who is often able to offer staff training. This help is not available to private and not-for-profit early education settings. Local authorities and providers clearly need to do more to make childcare settings more inclusive by training staff to help them meet specific needs of disabled children, providing training in inclusion to tackle attitudinal barriers and develop an inclusive ethos, ensuring that premises are appropriate for people of all abilities and securing funding for adaptations. However, providers may find it difficult to access grants from local authorities for physical adjustments and sometimes experience long delays in accessing specialist advice or training (Contact a Family, 2014).

A lack of inclusive mainstream settings means that children are often forced to attend specialist settings catering for disabled children. This is a bigger issue for children aged over five, but it is faced by families with younger children with SEND. This means that disabled and non-disabled children within the same family may be using different ECEC provision, because of the lack of inclusive childcare providers that can accommodate both children (Contact a Family, 2014). Families with disabled children also often find it difficult to find childcare that fits around their work commitments and the changing needs of their child.

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## 5. Good practice in providing inclusive early years childcare

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Although all the target settings in the Childcare in Schools project were committed to providing childcare for children with SEND, there were some significant practical barriers to achieving inclusivity on the ground. The Childcare in Schools team supported settings to enable them to make their settings more inclusive. This involved identifying what good practice the settings already had in place and working with them to recognise areas for improvement in relation to:

- ▶ planning and the development of inclusion policies and other key documents
- ▶ preparedness for receiving children with SEND
- ▶ inter-agency working
- ▶ identifying potential external providers and sources of funding
- ▶ use of space and suitable learning resources
- ▶ staff training
- ▶ marketing a setting as being suitable for children with SEND
- ▶ consultation and engagement with parents.

This section explores these barriers and how they were overcome.

### Planning and policies

Whilst early years settings might have a policy statement on inclusion, inclusive practice needs to be reflected in their recruitment policy, health and safety policy and safeguarding policy.

These policies should stipulate how settings will interact with a child with a certain condition in every circumstance and not just an isolated policy on inclusion. Settings have been working to overcome this and Family Action's Project Leaders have been able to assist in ensuring that their documents conform to the most recent official SEND guidance.

*'We found that the policies [in relation to SEND]... there were not a lot of policies in place or easy to find... the Project Leader asking us that question made us realise that we did not have policies in place... we are working towards that now.'* (Headteacher)

Early years providers can learn from other settings about how to develop their policies and the Learning Exchange website has many resources to help them do this. Once policies are in place, it is important that these are made accessible to parents and carers by putting them on the setting's website or making them available in an induction pack for new parents. Settings should also ensure that all staff, including reception and midday assistants, are aware of their inclusion policies.



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## Good practice in providing inclusive early years childcare

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### Preparedness for receiving children

The SEND 0–25 Code of Practice requires that services are responsive to local needs and that education settings are ready to take on children with SEND. This means that early years settings need to be proactive about ensuring that their settings are inclusive. For some settings, this was more of a challenge and they were still being reactive to the needs of children with SEND.

*'If we do not have a child that needs a ramp right now then there is not the demand to have one put in. You react on what children you have got and at the moment there is not that need.'*  
(Headteacher)

During the course of the project, the Childcare in Schools Project Leaders worked with settings to assist them in being more prepared to meet the different needs of children with SEND. For example, they looked at how to put in place the resources and support necessary for children who have visual impairments so that settings would be ready should a child with those needs choose to register. Settings that were effective at providing inclusive education were very proactive in their approach to inclusion.

*'I wanted the nursery to be inclusive. Although we did not have that many children with additional needs... I was worried that because we did not have them, we would not be ready to take them.'* (Nursery worker)

### Inter-agency working

Liaising with the local authority and other agencies is very important for making sure that children with SEND get the right support. This liaison may need to take place while a child is being assessed and after a diagnosis has been received.

*'We are getting much better at working with the Early Years team at [the local authority] so that has given more links to social workers, health visitors and key workers; we have a multi-agency meeting where we talk about children we have concerns about... I would like to do more of this.'*  
(Nursery room leader)

Local authority Early Years teams, childcare and inclusion officers, SENCOs, charities and other agencies that work in the local area can also provide a range of advice, resource and support.

*'When the children have been identified with an additional need we put together a plan for them. So we work with the key person and the SENCO, look at what the difficulties are and think of some simple steps and goals that we want them to achieve in the short term and put some measures in place to help them achieve that.'* (Nursery room leader)

There are a number of barriers to inter-agency working, including data protection. For some settings, the ability to access and share information with health visitors is limited. While much of this liaison is the responsibility of a SENCO, sufficient time has to be allocated to effective inter-agency work.

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## Good practice in providing inclusive early years childcare

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### Funding

As discussed in the previous section, whilst early years settings may want to offer places to children with SEND, the need for one-to-one care, specialised skills and higher staff to child ratios may mean that childcare is too often not available for families. For some children with SEND, adjustments will need to be made to the setting, which can be an additional barrier for early years educators who want to provide inclusive childcare but cannot afford to fund adjustments to the building.

Although there are two grants that early years settings can apply to their local authorities for, the Early Intervention Grant and the Early Years Education Access Grant, these sources of funding have been reduced. Research carried out for the National Children's Bureau indicates that councils have cut spending on early intervention by eight per cent in 2015/16 compared with the previous year on the back of previous spending cuts (Puffet, 2015).

For the target settings, funding uncertainties created anxieties about whether or not essential members of staff would be able to be kept on if they did not get the funding that they needed.

*'You can only apply termly for grants and when that money is used to pay staff and then you might not get the grant, then you are over budget and that can be quite hard to manage... but that is the most important resource, having people to work with a child with SEND.'*

**(Headteacher)**

For other settings funding and budget restraints meant that they were not able to provide as many resources as they would like to for young children with SEND.

*'Funding is an issue so although there are more sensory toys now, we would like to have more, but it depends on budgets.'* **(Room leader)**

The Childcare in Schools Project Leaders worked with the target settings to research other sources of funding while also empowering them to ask for extra support, for example from charitable trusts and businesses. Settings found that local businesses were a good source of small grants for equipment. A list of potential funders is given on the Learning Exchange website.

### Use of space and suitable learning resources

Early Years Foundation Stage regulations state that the premises and equipment must be organised in a way that meets the needs of children. The provider must also ensure that, so far as is reasonable, the facilities, equipment and access to the premises are suitable for children with disabilities.

For settings that want to develop inclusive early education settings, factors to consider may include: ensuring that pictures, equipment and resources reflect disabled people's lives as part of the wide representation of children's differing backgrounds and experience; making sure

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## Good practice in providing inclusive early years childcare

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that staff have training around disability and equality issues and that this is continually updated; and having a mission statement that defines your ethos towards inclusion backed up by policies and procedures that do not disadvantage any child.

Challenges reported by school-based settings included: acquiring inclusive resources such as sensory toys; a lack of space for sensory areas; the time it would take staff to develop their own sensory resources; and the cost of materials such as posters and signs. Ensuring that all staff share the same vision, and developing effective management structures to support staff, were also challenges that school-based settings had to overcome.

Some children with SEND may have sensory processing difficulties and for them a multi-sensory room is a vital resource. They need just the right amount of sensory stimulation to enable them to learn to organise sensory information and to re-establish an understanding of their bodies' sensory experiences without overload. This can help inhibit and filter out unwanted stimuli, register and process stimuli correctly and regulate sensations accurately, in order to encourage appropriate behaviour. However, for some settings having a sensory room was not appropriate due to space constraints.

*'The differences in the cohort in the mornings and afternoons, we can't have something that is permanent such a sensory room... We can't have resources that are just for SEND as we may only have one child with SEND who comes at the beginning or end of the week or just for the morning or afternoon and we don't have the space to have a room that is just for children with sensory impairments for example.'* (Worker in nursery attached to school)

For this setting, the Childcare in Schools Project Leader worked with them to include small, portable sensory resources that can also be used in classes and other areas to support individual children's needs throughout the day.

*'The Project Leader has worked with us to have different sensory resources in every area so the construction area has things that feel rough and hard and nuts and bolts so that when you are in the construction area you would know it's the construction area even if you were blind for example so we needed to have things that can be moved around and not static in one place.'* (Nursery worker)

When space is at a premium, other settings have found that other areas of the nursery, such as a quiet reading area, can also double up as a sensory area for children who needed that resource.

Some settings have attended workshops and training events to learn about how to make cheap DIY sensory resources or how to turn a small area of their building into a sensory area using readily available, cheap supplies. For other school-based settings that may face challenges in developing sensory areas and resources, the Learning Exchange website has many tips and hints for developing sensory resources and sources of funding.

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## Good practice in providing inclusive early years childcare

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Settings should also consider which resources such as toys, books and posters they have that illustrate to families that everyone is welcome at their school.

*'We have lots of books that are in different languages and we have two families that are same sex couples so we have books about that and we have books about all different cultures across the world and different family set-ups... I want the children to know that not everyone is the same.'* (Teacher)

In most cases, settings found that the best way to ensure that everyone was included was to include non-SEND children in games and activities that were designed for children with SEND.

*'We always open up everything we do to everyone who comes here. Every child can do things with materials and different textures... it's about tailoring it to the individual child. ... we get out shaving foam and spread it on the tables which was at first for SEND children but all the children wanted to play with it so where we started trying to think of things that SEND children could do we ended up with a game that everyone wanted to do.'* (Nursery worker)

Settings need to consider how their toys, games and activities can include children of all abilities. For example, many of the settings had their nurseries divided into different play areas such as a building/construction area, a reading area and outside play areas. Settings need to think how a child with a visual impairment would know that they are in the building area by incorporating toys that children can feel rough or simulate noises that you would hear on a building site.

Other things to consider when developing inclusive learning:

- ▶ Treat all children as individuals and make sure that everyone can join in with everything
- ▶ Mixed-ability groups
- ▶ High expectations of all children
- ▶ Diversity of resources, such as spaces that will incorporate a wheelchair and tables and chairs that have adjustable heights.

## Training

Supporting children with SEND – particularly those with higher levels of need – often requires expertise and knowledge. In an ideal world, recruiting staff with skills and experience with SEND would enable them to support their colleagues.

All staff within all the project settings had relevant early years' qualifications but had different experiences of supporting children with SEND. It should be noted that there is currently very little time allocated within early years education programmes to cover issues of inclusion and additional support needs.

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## Good practice in providing inclusive early years childcare

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Staff may feel that they do not have the training required to look after children with SEND. Specific medical support skills can be an area of particular concern, especially if staff have not worked with children with SEND before (Lugton, 2015a).

One of the first measures taken by the Childcare in Schools team was to help the settings carry out a detailed training audit, looking at current levels of need and gaps in knowledge.

A particular issue was training for Makaton, which many of the settings were keen to do but found difficult to gain access to.

*'Makaton training is actually quite hard to come by, we have had access to it from the county once a year, but only one member of staff can do that. It's something you need to do regularly, otherwise you lose it.'* (Childcare Coordinator)

Some of the settings highlighted that as there were so many different conditions and they would like to be trained in how to deal with them all, they found the most effective way was to make sure at least one member of staff attended relevant training and then shared what they had learned with other staff members. Other settings noted that they used to be able to access training from the local authority but this was no longer as readily available to them.

However, not all training related to SEND need be expensive. A range of free training resources are available online and the Learning Exchange website provides links to them.

Attending training courses is also a good way to network with other settings and to share best practice, as well as perhaps begin to form partnership working with other settings where staff can go and visit other nurseries to see how they have overcome barriers to inclusion.

Family Action held free inclusion events where settings learned how to develop very cheap sensory resources and shared best practice ideas. For more information about the inclusion workshops, please see the Learning Exchange website.

## Marketing

None of the target settings would have turned away a child for having SEND. However the settings were not making the local community aware of their inclusivity. For the inclusive childcare offered by a school-based setting to have the most impact, it needs to be effectively promoted so that all parents are aware of its existence, purpose, and the details of their ability to support the varying needs that children with SEND can present.

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## Good practice in providing inclusive early years childcare

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When parents are looking for childcare for a child with SEND, they want clear information that gives them all the details about the childcare on offer to help them decide whether a setting looks suitable for their child – and whether to investigate the provision further. Setting out a setting's vision on how it can support families with children with SEND will help quell any anxieties parents may have about approaching a setting.

*'I have had people fill in registration forms and we wouldn't know there are any SEND issues until the child started because they were scared they wouldn't get a place... I don't want that, I don't want people to feel like they can't talk to us.'* (Headteacher)

The Childcare in Schools project found that it was useful for settings to include a links section in their website, where parents can see where they can go for specific support for a child with SEND. Reflecting children with SEND in the general communication of the setting – in newsletters, banners, leaflets and online – also shows that the setting is inclusive.

The SEND Code of Practice requires that local authorities publish a Local Offer which details the provision a local authority expects to be available in their area for children and young people from 0 to 25, who have special educational needs and disabilities. The EYFS requires that all early years providers must make information available to parents and carers on how the setting supports disabled children and children with SEN. However, for some settings, because they were not highlighting their achievements in working with children with SEND, the local authority was not signposting families to their setting.

*'When parents look at the council website, we do not show up as a SEND setting but ... we are very inclusive so we needed to work on our marketing to showcase what we do.'* (Headteacher)

The Childcare in Schools project found it important for marketing materials, such as a website, to detail clearly what the childcare offer is, what ages of children the setting accepts and what the staff ratios are. To highlight inclusive practices and help families feel confident in the setting, the Project Leaders suggested visits and taster sessions to discuss their child's particular needs so that the staff are prepared to support the child when they start attending the setting.

Some early years settings may also have difficulties in engaging with parents of children with SEND, either because of the parent's own time pressures or because parents may be reluctant to talk about their child's behaviour or requirements for special arrangements because they may fear that the setting may not be accepting of their child.

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## Good practice in providing inclusive early years childcare

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### Parental engagement

Settings used a variety of methods to make sure that they were engaging parents in their work. Many of them are no different from those used with children without SEND, for example, reports, parents' evenings and informal conversations when a child is picked up. In relation to children with SEND, some settings made use of impromptu engagement sessions whilst parents or carers were waiting to pick up their children. Other settings had developed holding a weekly coffee morning with the SENCO and had an 'open-door' policy so that parents/carers could come and visit them at any time to discuss issues around their children's development.



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## 6. Tips for school-based settings developing inclusive childcare

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Drawing on the findings of the Childcare in Schools project, there are a number of recommendations that would help school-based childcare settings to become more inclusive. This section will focus on these innovations and this will hopefully help other schools who want to make their settings inclusive.

Achieving an inclusive setting is an ongoing process and settings should regularly evaluate how inclusive their childcare setting is and what could be done to improve their practices. As discussed in the previous section, there are common barriers to doing this but settings have come up with innovative ways to address these issues. In summary, these barriers have been overcome by:

### Having policies

- ▶ It is not sufficient to have a specific inclusion policy. Inclusivity needs to be reflected across all policy areas.

### Being prepared or pro-active, rather than reactive

- ▶ Settings should be as pro-active as possible and be prepared to receive children with SEND, rather than react when an individual child enrolls.

### Working with others

- ▶ Other organisations may be a great source of expertise and advice, so there are many benefits of working together in a local area.

### Creative fundraising

- ▶ There may be other sources of funding to help settings become more inclusive outside of statutory funding. This could include charitable trusts and local businesses.

### Making resources

- ▶ There are many creative ways to make learning resources and physical space inclusive of all children.

### Training

- ▶ A training audit is a good first step to see what gaps there are in staff knowledge and skills.
- ▶ Any training received should be disseminated to other members of staff.
- ▶ Peer support is a valuable resource: a setting can approach others in the locality and ask if staff can observe some of their practices.
- ▶ There is much free material available online that can be used to increase the expertise of staff.



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## Tips for school-based settings developing inclusive childcare

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### Marketing

- ▶ Local parents need to know that a setting is inclusive so make sure this is reflected in your setting's website and leaflets.

### Parental engagement

- ▶ Coffee mornings with a SENCO or timetabled open door slots are effective ways of engaging with parents.

Overall, the Childcare in School project showed that a willingness to change, creativity, goodwill and determination to overcome barriers were essential factors to achieving inclusive provision. It is a learning process, but inclusive early years settings have the potential to make a real difference to the lives of families.

Further ideas, tips and resources on inclusive education are available on the Learning Exchange website: [www.learning-exchange.org.uk/documents\\_library\\_pages/creating\\_inclusive\\_childcare\\_in\\_schools\\_0\\_to\\_5\\_years/tips\\_and\\_templates](http://www.learning-exchange.org.uk/documents_library_pages/creating_inclusive_childcare_in_schools_0_to_5_years/tips_and_templates)

For case study examples of how school-based childcare providers are developing inclusion in their settings, please go to: [www.learning-exchange.org.uk/case\\_studies/inclusion\\_childcare\\_case\\_studies](http://www.learning-exchange.org.uk/case_studies/inclusion_childcare_case_studies)



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## References

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### Electronic sources

'How to guide', case studies and other resources are available on the Learning Exchange website: [www.learning-exchange.org.uk](http://www.learning-exchange.org.uk)

# Appendix

## List of school-based settings supported

Settings	School site	Location
Acorn New Bradwell Nursery (PVI)	New Bradwell Primary School	Milton Keynes
Castle Pre School (PVI)	St Nicholas CE Primary School	Kenilworth, Warwickshire
Castledown Primary School Nursery (school-run)	Castledown Primary School	Hastings, East Sussex
Daisy Chain Childcare (PVI)	Chain working on multiple sites	Leeds
Dolphins Out of School Club (PVI)	Pinhoe Church School	Exeter, Devon
Exhall Cedars Infant, Nursery and Pre-School (school run)	Exhall Cedars Infant, Nursery and Pre-School	Bedworth, Warwickshire
Hawthorn Primary School Nursery (school run)	Hawthorn Primary School	Doncaster
Hornsey Road Children's Centre (charity run)	Montem Primary and Samuel Rhodes Special School	Islington, North London
Little Darwins Nursery (CiC)	Rettendon Primary Academy	Chelmsford, Essex
Co-operative Nursery (PVI)	Castle Hill Primary Academy	New Addington, Croydon
Ore Village Primary Academy Nursery (school run)	Ore Village Primary Academy (part of Kemnal Academies Trust)	Hastings, East Sussex
Morecambe Bay Community Primary School Nursery	Morecambe Bay Community Primary School	Morecambe, Lancashire
Selhurst Children's Centre	The Crescent Primary School	Croydon
St Michael's Children's Centre Nurture Nursery	St Michael's CE Academy and Children's Centre	Bedworth, Warwickshire
St Saviour Pre-School	St Saviours Catholic Primary School	Ellesmere Port, Cheshire West and Chester
The Shore Pre School (charity)	Weston Shore Infant School	Southampton
The Ferns Primary Academy Nursery (school run)	The Ferns Primary Academy	Bolton

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## About the author

Lisa O’Dea is a Policy and Research Officer at the Family and Childcare Trust. She works on a variety of policy and research projects for the charity and has previously worked for leading think tanks and high profile charities.

## About the Family and Childcare Trust

The Family and Childcare Trust is the leading national charity in the field of policy, research and advocacy on childcare and family issues, working closely with government, local authorities, businesses and charities to achieve positive and long lasting change for families across the UK. Our vision is a society where all families are well-supported and have genuine choices about their lives.

The Family and Childcare Trust’s annual childcare costs survey is the definitive report on childcare costs and sufficiency in the UK and its data are used by the Department for Education and OECD. For further information, go to [www.familyandchildcaretrust.org](http://www.familyandchildcaretrust.org)



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## About Family Action

Families come in all shapes and sizes. No matter how they are constructed, Family Action is committed to supporting them to realise their potential. All families encounter difficult and challenging times and many will find ways to deal with their problems, getting the support they need from friends and relatives. There are times, however, when problems can seem too overwhelming to manage.

Family Action works to tackle some of the most complex and difficult issues facing families today – including financial hardship, mental health problems, social isolation, learning disabilities, domestic abuse, or substance misuse and alcohol problems.

These issues can have a huge impact on the stability of family life, and will have a significant impact on the health, wellbeing and development all family members. Family Action believes that families facing these difficulties should have the support they need to become stronger, happier and healthier. With the right kind of support, families can overcome their difficulties and find hope for a brighter future.

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