

Dear Ms Stinton, Thank you for your email of 5 January asking what steps the government has taken to ensure that all disabled children and young people can access appropriate childcare. The Government is committed to ensuring that all families have access to high quality, flexible and affordable childcare. Parents with disabled children should have the same opportunities as other parents via increased choice and access to high quality childcare. The Government already provides significant support to families. This includes the provision of free early education for all three- and four-year-olds and for around 40% of all two-year-olds including those children with an Education, Health and Care Plan or who received Disability Living Allowance. Low income families can also claim up to 70% of their childcare costs through working tax credit while Universal Credit will extend childcare support to those working fewer than 16 Hours and will provide up to 85% of childcare costs. Families with children who have disabilities will also be eligible to claim tax-free childcare, which is being introduced this year, for children up to age 17 compared to age 12 for other families. This will pay up to 20% of childcare costs up to £2,000 per child. We are aware that families with disabled children often experience challenges and financial pressures in getting the services they need. We recognise that there is more we can do to build on good practice using the levers within our reformed frameworks (EYFS and SEN code) to increase the supply of providers offering affordable, high quality childcare for children with a disability. We are keen to work with providers to identify what more can be done to ensure that early years settings are building inclusive and accessible service for parents with disabled children. The Department has also included in its 2015-16 VCS national prospectus, specific reference to early years SEN provision. Through this, we aim to increase levels of awareness and understanding of the SEN reforms amongst the wider Early Years market audience, and increase the number of quality childcare places for disabled children. Thank you for writing on this important matter and I hope the information provided is helpful.

Sent to the DfE on January 21st

Please can you clarify who is responsible for providing funding for disabled children to access childcare? If a parent of a disabled child wishes to work full time or even for their free 15 hours and the nursery setting says they cannot meet the needs of that child without additional support, is the Local Authority responsibly for funding this? I am an early years trainer and it seems each Local Authority has differing systems with some providing no funding until the child has an Education, Health and Care Plan.

Dear Mrs Stinton

Thank you for your email of 21 January about childcare for children with disabilities. There are childcare options available to support parents who are working. All local authorities have a legal duty to ensure that there are sufficient childcare places, so far as is reasonably practicable, for working parents with children aged 0-14, or up to 18 for disabled children in their area. As part of this, local authorities must also ensure sufficient childcare places are available for disabled children. All 3- and 4-year-olds are entitled to a funded early education place while 2-year-olds with an Education, Health and Care Plan or who receive disability living allowance are also entitled to a place. The full criteria can be found at www.gov.uk/freechildcare<<http://www.gov.uk/freechildcare>>.

Local authorities must ensure that all providers that they fund to deliver funded early education places are aware of the requirement to have regard to the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice and that they effectively meet the needs of children with special educational needs and disabilities. Providers should discuss any local arrangements with their local authority about any additional support available. A new Code came into effect on 1 September 2014 and is available online at: www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25<<http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25>>.

We recognise that childcare costs for families with disabled children can often remain high throughout their teenage years. So, to support this group, families who have children with disabilities will be eligible to claim Tax-Free Childcare up to age 17, in line with existing Employer-Supported Childcare rules.

The child element of Universal Credit has an additional amount to help those with disabled children. This has a lower rate of £123.62 (for a child who gets Disability Living Allowance (mobility or care) apart from the highest rate of the care component), and a higher rate of £352.92 (for a child who gets the highest rate of the care component of Disability Living Allowance or who is registered blind).

Thank you for writing on this important matter and I hope that the information provided is helpful.

Sent to the DfE on January 20th

Please can you tell me which of the recommendations from the Parliamentary Inquiry into childcare for disabled children (July 2014) have been actioned and what the time-scale is for further actions? Families with disabled children are being failed on a daily basis, unable to secure childcare because funding for additional support is unavailable.

Dear Mrs Stinton,

Thank you for your further email of 29 January about childcare for disabled children.

The government have accepted the recommendations and are constantly reviewing what more we can do to help support children with Special Educational Needs (SEN). The department has a number of things in place that supports providers in delivering childcare for children with SEN.

The government have yet to put into practice some of the recommendations set out in the parliamentary inquiry into childcare for disabled children. However, as I am sure you will agree, getting it right and being able to offer the best support is a main priority and will take time. Also, these are just a small selection of what can be done to support children with SEN. The government are not relying solely on the recommendations: instead, we are and have implemented other ways to support children such as those set out below and in our previous reply. We will continue to look into and develop ways in which we can help support children with SEN.

The EYFS framework requires early years providers to have arrangements in place for meeting children's SEN. Those in group provision are expected to identify a special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO). Childminders are encouraged to identify a person to act as SENCO and childminders who are registered with a childminder agency or who are part of a network may wish to share that role between them.

The role of the SENCO involves:

- ensuring all practitioners in the setting understand their responsibilities to children with SEN and the setting's approach to identifying and meeting SEN
- advising and supporting colleagues
- ensuring parents are closely involved throughout and that their insights inform action taken by the setting, and
- liaising with professionals or agencies beyond the setting

SEN and disabled children can already receive support via the High Needs Block through funding which is proportionate to the level of extra support they require. In 2013-14, LAs spent 22 million and have a budget spend of 24 million for 2014-15 to top-up funding for early years pupils in maintained schools, academies and PVI's. It is the additional support from the high needs block which supports these children in early education.

Local authorities must ensure that all providers that they fund to deliver funded early education places are aware of the requirement on them to have regard to the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice and that they effectively meet the needs of children with special educational needs and disabilities.

The government are continuing to develop practice within the frameworks we have established – capturing and sharing how it can work. We are keen to work with providers to identify what more can be done to ensure that EY settings are building inclusive and accessible service for parents with disabled children.

Thank you for writing on this important matter and I hope the information provided is helpful.