

Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Bill

Committee Stage Evidence



Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Bill

Committee Stage Evidence

Introduction

Living with a loss of sight can have a detrimental impact on the emotional, social and educational development of a child or young person. We receive 80% of information from our sight and any deficit of sight can significantly impact on the ability to learn by delaying key developmental milestones, have a negative impact on learning through unequal access to the curriculum, or being unable to embrace the full value of the school experience.

Education is a fundamental human right under Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and is about creating an environment in which children and young people are given the skills and tools to reach their full potential in life. 'The purpose of Education for all children is the same; the goals are the same but the help that individual children need in progressing towards them will be different' (Warnock Report). This is particularly true for those children with a vision impairment.

The SEND Bill provides an opportunity to ensure that the Statement of Educational Need with its associated arrangements, processes and support services best meets the needs of children and young people who are blind and partially sighted.

Habilitation and Education

Blind Children UK (NI) is the sole provider of habilitation services in Northern Ireland. Habilitation is founded on the integration of service between health and education. It supports the holistic development of the child in reaching key developmental milestones and developing confidence in life skills to reach their full potential. It provides programmes of sensory integration to support conceptual development and moving around in physical and social environments with confidence. Such skills are the foundation of educational development and attainment for children who are blind and partially sighted. Article 26 of the UN Convention of Human Rights requires that persons with a disability receive the Habilitation support they need and that those delivering it are suitably trained (Habilitation Quality Standards).

The SEND Bill provides an opportunity to embrace and include habilitation as a key component of any Statement of Educational Need for a vision impaired child.

SEND Bill: General Comments

Blind Children UK (NI) welcome the opportunity to submit evidence to the Committee for Education. Throughout our response we will highlight the important role that habilitation has to play in supporting vision impaired children and young people with special educational needs.

Given the holistic nature of habilitation from birth through transition to young adult Blind Children UK (NI) are disappointed that the Bill does not include pre-school

settings and periods of transition. It is well evidenced that early years is a critical time in the development of any child and we believe that habilitation support and intervention in pre-school settings is critical to the future development of a child. 0-4 years is critical as a period of brain and child development and is a key part of the Children and Young People's Strategy for NI. We believe that parents, and the children and young people at this key stage of development, should be included and benefit from the entitlements within this proposed Bill.

Blind Children UK (NI) also believe that the period of transition is equally critical to the development into adulthood. Blind Children UK (NI) offer a Skills for Life programme teaching movement and independence skills. After a recent residential programme for 12-16year olds, which included recording a song at the Oh Yeah centre, feedback identified that the most useful skill learned by several of the participants was the correct use of a knife in the preparation of food and when eating - a skill many sighted children take for granted by this age. Habilitation and independence training would provide invaluable support to teachers and schools in preparing young people with the transition from school to further/higher education or employment. Blind Children UK (NI) believe that habilitation intervention needs to be recognised by the Department for Education and formally included within any Statement of Educational Need and transition review and planning.

SEND Bill Specific Comments

Clause 1: Duty of Authority to have regard to the views of the child

Article 5

Blind Children UK (NI) welcome the commitment in Article 5 for the inclusion of children and young people in the discussions and decisions regarding their educational future and Statement of Educational Need. Blind Children UK (NI) are mindful that children, young people and their parents/carers need a degree of habilitation literacy if they are to effectively express their needs. This is best illustrated by a parent who when asked if their child needed help with their mobility stated no, but when asked if their child needed help to move around with greater confidence by exploring their environment and reaching out in a safe and confident manner through fun and engaging activities, they were very keen that their child receive habilitation support. However the child, young person or parent/carer must have the understanding and language of habilitation to effectively inform the discussions and decisions regarding educational needs.

Clause 2: Duty of Authority to publish plans relating to it's arrangements for special educational provision

Article 6A1 & (2)(a) & (4) & 7(c)

Blind Children UK(NI) believe that Article 6A (1) and (2) should specify the need for detailed specification and quantification of arrangements, resources and support services the Authority propose to make available.

'The State of SEN Statements' (CDSA) reflects parental experience and highlights how existing legislation, policies and procedures are often not specific enough and therefore do not effectively meet the needs of a vision impaired child with special educational needs. We believe there is a need for this Bill to clearly state the need for the Statement of Educational Need to contain detailed specification and quantification of the arrangements, resources and support services required.

Article (6) (4)

Given the unique holistic and cross departmental nature of the habilitation service provided by Blind Children UK (NI) and the existing level of co-working with Qualified Teachers for the Vision Impaired (QTVI'S) we believe that the Authority should recognise Blind Children UK (NI) as a key organisation to consult with.

Blind Children UK (NI) Habilitation Specialists have agreed processes and protocols for collaborating across all areas with QTVIs in the Education Authority. This means that currently, blind and partially sighted children are receiving services from Habilitation Specialists in schools, bus journeys, walks to and from home, as well as within the home. In some areas case reviews have included habilitation specialists and are crucial to parental understanding of achieving the outcomes, milestones and targets referenced in IEPs. Outcomes such as moving around independently and confidently, releasing dependency from classroom assistants and being socially included are all assisted using movement, kinaesthetic, proprioceptive and independence skills training provided by Blind Children UK (NI)

Article (6) (7)

Blind Children UK (NI) believe that any regulations should contain the requirement for detailed specification and quantification regarding the content of any plan. Given the unique holistic and cross departmental nature of habilitation service we believe it is important that the type and level of movement, mobility or independence support required is accurately recorded to meet the needs of the child when moving from class to class, during key lessons such as home economics or physical education or when participating in extra-curricular activities.

Clause 3: Duties of Governors in relation to pupils with special educational needs

Article 8 2(e) & Article 8ZA (1) (b)

Blind Children UK (NI) seeks the support of the Authority in helping inform the 'designated teacher (the learning support co-ordinator) of the important role that the habilitation service can play in the educational provision and individual development of vision impaired children and young people who have special educational needs. Blind Children UK (NI) acknowledge the concerns of many teachers regarding their knowledge, expertise and time constraints when working with children with additional educational needs. Having specialist habilitation support for professional development or to call upon for reports, assessment and intervention can only but be in the best interest of the vision impaired child.

Clause 4: Duty of Authority to request help from health and social care bodies

Article 14 (3)

Blind Children UK (NI) ask that the Authority adopt the Habilitation Quality Standards and recognise the important role that habilitation specialists bring to the educational learning and development of a vision impaired child with special educational needs. We therefore believe that where it is the Duty of the Authority to request help from health and social care bodies that this should be extended to include voluntary sector organisations such as Blind Children UK (NI).

At a recent All Party Group on Visual Impairment Blind Children UK (NI) asked that the DHSS&PS also adopt the Quality Habilitation Standards. This would then place a corresponding duty on Health and Social Care to work alongside Education in the best interests of the child, demonstrating best practice cross departmental collaboration.

Conclusion

Blind Children UK (NI) believe that the SEND Bill will be considerably strengthened if the Authority adopt the Habilitation Quality Standards and recognise habilitation as an integral part of the education experience of a child or young person with a vision impairment. We believe the inclusion of habilitation needs to be formally included in any Statement of Educational Need for a vision impaired child or young person..

If you require any further information or clarification regarding this submission please contact

Andrew Murdock
Policy & Engagement Manager
Guide Dogs (NI) & Blind Children UK (NI)
Tel. 08453727402
Email: andrew.murdock@guidedogs.org.uk