



## Afasic's submission to the Treasury's initiative on services for disabled children

1. Afasic is the UK-wide parent-led charity representing children and young people with primary and specific speech and language impairments i.e. impairments that are not associated with other disabilities such as a hearing impairment or cerebral palsy. We welcome the opportunity to contribute to this initiative.

2. At least 1 million children and young people in the UK have some degree of difficulty with speech and/or language. If not addressed, speech and language impairments may cause difficulty in:

- interacting with other children and adults
- acquiring literacy and numeracy skills
- accessing the curriculum at school or college
- making friends and acquiring social skills
- understanding the world and acquiring independence skills.

3. Speech and language impairments are a 'hidden disability'. Children with speech and language impairments usually look no different to other children, and they may superficially appear to talk quite well. Awareness of speech and language impairments is also very low among both the general public and professionals who work with children and young people. These two factors in combination mean that speech and language impairments are not always recognised as readily as they might be, and some children's needs are 'mis-diagnosed' as, say, a behaviour problem, or a learning difficulty. This means that too many children and young people do not receive the support they need or are given inappropriate support.

4. Children with speech and language impairments need speech and language therapy and appropriate teaching at school or nursery that enables them to access the curriculum. For some children, this means being educated in special schools for children with speech and language impairments, or in special units attached to mainstream schools.

5. Regrettably, many children with speech and language impairments, even if their needs are properly identified, do not receive the help they need, due to the underfunding of specialist services.

**Recommendation: Increase funding for speech and language therapy.**

**Recommendation: Improve support for children with special educational needs.** This might entail a number of different measures, but ensuring that all teachers have adequate training in all aspects of SEN would make a huge difference. At the moment, the DfES, states in its SEN strategy *Removing Barriers to Achievement* that 'every teacher should expect to teach children with SEN' but few teachers have received enough training to do this effectively.

6. Besides these general aspirations, Afasic has identified a number of specific proposals any of which, if implemented, would make a considerable difference to the lives of children and young people with speech and language impairments and their families. They are:

- Requiring all mainstream primary and secondary schools to have a full-time speech and language therapist on staff. In some cases, schools might need more than one, if they are very large and have a high level of need. On the other hand, some very small schools might only need to share a speech and language therapist with one or two other schools.

Costs: Employing a speech and language therapist costs around £30 000 per year.

- Creating a short simple screening test for speech and language impairments (in practice this might need to be 4 - 5 tests for children of different ages), and training all professionals who work with children to use it when they encounter a child or young person who is in any way a 'cause for concern'.

Costs: creating the screening test: an experienced speech and language therapist might charge perhaps £1000 for this work. There would then obviously be printing costs. All professionals working with children would need training in using the screening test. This might entail a day or half a day's training. Training in using the test should also be incorporated into the initial training for all professionals who work with children, so that in time the need for additional training would disappear.

- Ensuring that all schools have a teacher with responsibility for the language development of children within the school. The teacher concerned would need to have appropriate training for the role, and have adequate non-contact time to carry out the duties required.

Costs: The teachers concerned would need to be trained, perhaps through an MA course, costing an estimated £7 000 - £9 000 per teacher. In addition of course, allowing non-contact time for the teachers would have a cost. This would vary from school to school. Some schools with a high level of need might need a full-time teacher with responsibility for language development; other smaller schools with a low level of need might only need a teacher to put a few hours a week into this role, or might share a teacher with a number of other schools.

An alternative to this proposal would be to fund well-resourced teams to support children with speech and language impairments in mainstream schools and early years settings. While most local authorities already have such teams, they often only serve primary schools and are very poorly resourced, so that they can only offer a minimal service to individual children and schools. The teams would need to include adequate numbers of speech and language therapists, specialist teachers and specially trained learning support assistants. They might be based at, or at least supported by, the (very small number of) special schools for children with speech and language impairments. This would ensure that the teams have the necessary expertise.

Costs: It is very hard to say what a typical well-resourced team would cost, as this would depend on the level of need in the area. Children with speech and language impairments are however likely to need contact with a speech and language therapist at least once a month (and sometimes far more frequently), with a specialist teacher at least once a week, and learning support assistance for anything between a few hours per week and full-time while they are at school. It might cost around £30 000 to employ a speech and language therapist, about the same to employ a specialist teacher, and perhaps £10 000 per year per learning

support assistant. There would also be transport costs, and the costs of specialised resources and equipment.

- A guaranteed place in a specialised language unit or resource attached to mainstream schools or early years settings for all children with severe and long-term specific speech and language impairments. This is thought to apply to 1 child in 500. This would mean all local areas having units or resources for all age-groups, from pre-school through to the end of secondary education.  
Costs: The costs of running a resource or unit are approximately £10 000 per child, plus capital costs and the costs entailed in transporting the children to school. However, this would not all be additional costs. Most areas already have at least one unit or resource. Also the children who would attend the resources or units have statements which already entail funding for additional support at school. Few mainstream schools, though, really have the expertise to provide the support that children with speech and language impairments actually need.

Linda Lascelles, Chief Executive, Afasic  
30.11.06