

Services for disabled children

A review of services for disabled children and their families

The Audit Commission is an independent body responsible for ensuring that public money is spent economically, efficiently and effectively, to achieve high-quality local and national services for the public. Our work covers local government, housing, health and criminal justice services.

As an independent watchdog, we provide important information on the quality of public services. As a driving force for improvement in those services, we provide practical recommendations and spread best practice. As an independent auditor, we monitor spending to ensure public services are good value for money.



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The views of disabled children and their parents lie at the heart of this study...

- children told us that what matters to them is being respected and listened to, being able to play and have friends, and feeling safe and comfortable. They also told us and how painful it is to be left out of ordinary activities that others take for granted
- parents told us about their experience of public services, and about their practical, realistic ideas about how that experience could be improved

We took those views back to service providers. In all the areas we visited, we found...

- a lottery of provision, dependent on where people live and on how hard they can push for the services they need
- too little being provided too late, with long waits for information, equipment and treatment
- a maze of services that frustrates and confuses families
- pockets of good and innovative practice, and service champions

Our study identifies four critical components of effective services for disabled children...

- commissioning and delivery driven by a thorough understanding of what local families want and need
- specialist and mainstream services focusing on helping families participate in everyday activities
- recognition of the particular impact on children of waiting for support or treatment
- frontline staff who understand individual needs, and work with users in respectful partnership

Improving disabled children's services does not need new targets, new structures or wholly new approaches. What is needed is...

- better management of services, so that good practice is mainstreamed
- leadership that makes this possible
- and a new attitude that sees the social exclusion of disabled children as unacceptable

The Commission has developed a suite of improvement tools to support change at every level...

- *Let me be me: an improvement handbook*, which is aimed at local operational staff
- factsheets for parents and carers, to help them to get the best out of services
- a Children's Summary, to support children's efforts to be heard
- a national report, setting out our learning and analysis
- key principles for services for disabled children
- recommendations for a small number of immediate key actions