**Response to the Call for Evidence: Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill**

**Introduction**

1. This is a joint response from the Disabled Children's Partnership and the Special Educational Consortium, the two leading coalitions of organisations and parent groups in the special education and disability field, together representing more than 130 organisations. We welcome the opportunity to provide evidence on the Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill. While the Bill includes important provisions aimed at improving children’s wellbeing, we believe that certain areas require amendment to ensure that the needs of children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) are fully addressed.

**Breakfast Clubs**

2. The provision of universal free breakfast clubs is a positive step towards supporting children’s wellbeing. However, the Bill does not sufficiently ensure that these clubs will be accessible to children with SEND. Many disabled children currently face barriers to accessing breakfast clubs due to:

1. **Food Provision:** Some children may require specific dietary accommodations or feeding assistance.
2. **Transport:** Council-provided school transport typically only operates at the start and end of the school day, leaving children unable to attend breakfast clubs.
3. **Specialist Support:** Schools may lack the staff or resources needed to support children with complex needs during breakfast club hours.

3. We recommend the following amendments to the Bill:

* A clear requirement for schools to make reasonable adjustments to ensure breakfast clubs are inclusive of children with SEND, including the provision of specialist support staff.
* Guidance on extending reasonable adjustments, such as food vouchers, to breakfast clubs for children unable to access the meals due to their disabilities.
* Duties on local authorities to co-operate with schools in delivering their duties, including ensuring that where home to school transport is provided it enables attendance at breakfast clubs; and that support needed to access breakfast clubs should be included in Education, Health and Care Plans.

**Home Education and School Attendance**

4. The provisions on home education and school attendance risk penalising families of children with SEND who are often home educating as a last resort due to systemic failures. Many families choose to home educate because:

* Local authorities and schools fail to provide suitable placements or support.
* Delays in the Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan process leave children without appropriate support

5. The requirements in certain circumstances for local authority approval to withdraw a child from school and the introduction of a compulsory Children Not in School register must not exacerbate existing tensions between families and local authorities. We are particularly concerned about the requirement for local authority consent to home educate who were in special schools, which could:

* Reduce parental choice.
* Force children to remain in unsuitable placements.

6. We recommend:

* Safeguards to prevent local authorities from using the register to pressure families into unsuitable school placements.
* Clear rights of redress for parents who disagree with local authority decisions on home education.
* A commitment to fostering a supportive relationship between families and local authorities, including the creation of an Attendance Code of Practice that prioritises a support-first approach.

**Place Planning and Admissions**

7. We welcome the duty for local authorities and schools to cooperate on admissions and place planning. However, the Bill must address:

* The lack of adequate school places for children with SEND, particularly those with complex needs.
* Delays in the EHC plan process, which prevent children from accessing appropriate placements.

8. We recommend:

* A requirement for local authorities and schools to prioritise the inclusion of SEND-specific provisions in place planning.
* Measures to ensure that SEN units within mainstream schools foster an inclusive culture and are not segregated from the wider school community.

**Information Sharing and Unique Identifiers**

9. The introduction of a Single Unique Identifier is a positive step towards improving multi-agency collaboration. However, its focus on risk avoidance and child protection misses an opportunity to enhance the holistic care of disabled children. We urge the government to:

* Use the identifier to improve multi-agency working across education, health, and social care.
* Streamline processes for families to access support, reducing the need to repeatedly provide the same information to different agencies.

**Conclusion**

10. The Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill presents an opportunity to improve outcomes for all children, but it must go further to meet the needs of children with SEND. By addressing the issues outlined above, the Bill can ensure that its provisions are truly inclusive and supportive of all children’s wellbeing.

11. We would welcome the opportunity to provide further evidence or clarification on the points raised in this submission.

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Contact – Stephen Kingdom, Campaign Manager, DCP – stephen.kingdom@mencap.org.uk