

Action Cerebral Palsy

Political & Parliamentary Monitoring

Week Commencing 10th December 2018

In a tumultuous week in Westminster, Theresa May has won the backing of her party to stay on as Prime Minister. At nine o'clock on Wednesday evening, Sir Graham Brady, Chair of the 1922 Committee of backbench MPs, announced the result. In a blow to pro-Brexit Conservative MPs who had hoped to remove the Prime Minister, the result – 200 votes in her favour, 117 against – means she cannot be challenged in a similar vein for another year.

Emerging from 10 Downing Street late on Wednesday evening, the Prime Minister said she and her party had a “renewed mission” to deliver Brexit and unite the country. May flew to Brussels on Thursday to appeal to her fellow EU leaders to offer Britain a legally-binding commitment that the backstop on the island of Ireland, which would be introduced in the event of a ‘no deal’ scenario in which new trade arrangements have not been completed, would be legally binding.

In private, it is believed that May confirmed to colleagues that, although she would like to fight the next general election, she would step down before 2022. James Cleverly MP, a loyalist to the Prime Minister, said that May “recognises a lot of people are not comfortable with her leading us into a future general election.” In response to the vote, the Leader of the Labour Party, Jeremy Corbyn, urged the Prime Minister to “bring her dismal deal back to the House of Commons.”

Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose. The more things change, the more they stay the same. At the end of a week of politicking, the Prime Minister remains secure in her position, and a vote in Parliament on a Brexit deal remains some weeks off.

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New evidence on the decline of cerebral palsy

The occurrence of cerebral palsy in young children in South Carolina is on the decline, new figures have shown. Just a week after it was revealed that the rate of cerebral palsy amongst children in

Australia had fallen by a third in just a decade, the new evidence from South Carolina shows the rate of cerebral palsy falling significantly in the State from 1996 to 2009.

Researchers from the Medical University of South Carolina, working with the San Diego State University, evaluated the occurrence of cerebral palsy in the first four years of life from 1996 to 2009, using data from the federal government and healthcare agencies. They analysed occurrence by birth, prematurity, ethnicity and gender. Among the 755,433 live births that occurred during that period, the team identified 2,080 children with cerebral palsy diagnosis. Interestingly, whilst live births in the State increased from 48,622 in 1996 to 59,677 in 2008, the cases of cerebral palsy decreased.

The results also confirmed what was already understood; that underweight and extreme premature newborns had a higher cerebral palsy prevalence. Whilst the team which analysed the data acknowledged that additional studies were required to validate their findings, it was still a valuable insight in to cerebral palsy trends. The report stressed the importance of the role of magnesium sulphate for pregnant women and better campaigns to keep babies safe from shaking as two major contributing factors to the decline.

ACP will welcome this great news, which could provide extra examples for the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust Report, and the public affairs and public relations work undertaken by Whitehouse, including evidence for use in consultations and when meeting with Government Ministers, politicians and senior civil servants.

Scottish local government funding slashed

Scottish council chief executives have [called](#) the Scottish Finance Secretary the “Greatest Showman”, after he claimed town halls were the biggest winners of his 2019/2020 budget. Derek Mackay MSP, the Scottish Finance Secretary, announced this week that he would provide a real term increase in both revenue and capital funding, totalling £11.1 billion.

However, since the announcement, local authorities have come out in anger at the claim that they will be able to dramatically improve provision, saying that the small increase in financial support will make little impact given they have taken on additional new child protection and personal care duties. COSLA, the umbrella organisation representing local authorities in Scotland, said that councils had “taken a hit”, with the organisations President, Alison Evison, saying that many councils had already slashed services and that “there is no scope for local government to mitigate the impact of these cuts as there has been no moment yet on local taxation.”

In response, an SNP Government official challenged local leaders, saying that their plans represented “real money that can be spent”. Now, parties from across the political spectrum are lining up to vote the Finance Bill down, with Labour councillors saying that without additional investment day-to-day spending would be cut dramatically.

This new will be of interest to ACP given that local authorities oversee, manage and fund the care plans for children with cerebral palsy and special educational needs. As budgets at the local level are continuously squeezed, the quality of care afforded to children is likely to suffer. Indeed, one major ramification may be a rise in the number of court cases brought against councils, which – as ACP will be aware – have continued to grow in number.

Social mobility commission to focus on school funding

The Social Mobility Commission’s new head, Dame Martina Milburn, has pledged to “change things” as she announced £2 million of additional government research funding in to social mobility earlier this week. The Commission has been tasked with looking at the impact of school funding and teaching shortages on young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, including those with special educational needs.

Dame Martina will be joined by 12 new commissioners, appointed earlier this year to fill the vacancies left by the last team who resigned en-masse last December in protest over government inaction. Speaking to *Schools Week*, Dame Martina said she was “very encouraged” by the support she had received from Government. Whilst the revamped commission is yet to hold its first board level meeting, Dame Martina said she expected the focus of the organisation to be on the impact of school funding.

Dame Martina’s work has the potential to influence wider education and social policy. She has said previously that the Commission should focus on every group in society, including those with special educational needs. To this extent, her remit could include examining the growing postcode lottery, whereby specialist provision for children with special needs in some areas ranks far better than other local areas.

There is an opportunity for ACP to write the Social Mobility Commission to highlight the struggle that many young people with cerebral palsy face in getting access to good-quality education, thus preventing them from reaching their potential.