

Children's Summary (7-11)

An illustration of a magnifying glass with a dark teal frame and handle. The lens is focused on a dark teal door with a white number '10' in a circular inset. The door has a white handle and a keyhole. The background shows a light blue building facade with windows and a black metal fence.

**How well are
we respecting
children's rights?**

The United Nations' verdict 2016

Foreword

**By Robert Goodwill MP,
Minister for Children & Families**

“I am sure you all receive reports from your teachers telling you what you have done well at and things where you may need help to improve. Last summer the Prime Minister and her Government got their report back from the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (UN Committee) on how well we are respecting children’s rights in the UK.

The UK is a great place to grow up, and in its report the UN Committee told us that we are doing lots of things to make sure we live up to our promise to respect children’s rights. Most of what the UN Committee said was good, but we can always do better - and it is our job to help the Prime Minister do that.

We need to do more to make sure schools help you to stay safe, and this includes when you are using the internet. So we decided it was right for you to be taught about this at school.

We also need people working for the Government to think more about children and families when making important decisions. So we are helping the rest of the Government to understand how important it is for them to consider children and their views when making decisions which affect you and your families.

I hope you enjoy reading the report from the UN Committee and that it helps you think about what adults, including politicians, can do to respect your rights and follow the rules set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.”

What are children's rights?



The United Nations is a place where all countries meet together. It was set up after the Second World War to help people live peacefully together and with respect and understanding. The United Nations does lots of different things like helping to maintain peace, giving help to people in need and making sure human rights (special rules to make sure everyone is treated well) are not broken. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (the UN Convention) is a special group of rules which sets out how all children across the world should be treated (a child means everyone aged 17 years or younger).

The rules in the UN Convention took ten years to develop and were finally agreed by the United Nations in 1989. The rules include: children should be protected from all forms of violence; be able to play; have an education; have their views heard; and families should have enough money and a decent place to live so children can have a good childhood and grow and develop well. It also gives special rights to children in challenging situations, for example, disabled children and children who are in trouble with the law. Look at the box at the end of this leaflet to find out where you can learn more about children's rights.

Checking up on children's rights



In 1991 the UK Government made a promise to respect children's rights and follow the rules set out in the UN Convention.

About every five years a group of experts on children's rights from the United Nations - called the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (the UN Committee) - checks that a government is living up to the promise it made to respect children's rights. The UN Committee carefully looks at lots of information about how well children's rights are respected in a particular country and how children are treated, including from children's charities, human rights organisations, children and young people and the government of the country being examined. When the UN Committee has looked at all the information an important document called the 'concluding observations' is published. This document sets out where a country is doing well at respecting children's rights and where it needs to do better. It gives recommendations for a government on what it needs to do to improve things for children. The UN last checked up on the UK in June 2016. The UK is made up of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland have their own governments and parliaments and are able to make some decisions that affect children and young people. The UN Committee reported on all parts of the UK but this leaflet is on children living in England.



What did the UN Committee say?

The UN Committee said that the UK Government has done some good things to make sure that children have their rights respected.

It was happy that the Government has made it possible for the Children's Commissioner for England to do more. A Children's Commissioner is a special job set up in law, and provided with money from government, to help make sure children's rights are respected. The Government has made the job of the Children's Commissioner more important by making it more independent from the UK Government and making sure that all its work is framed by the UN Convention. The UN Committee was also pleased that the UK Government had done lots of other things to improve children's lives. Examples of good things the Government has done are:

- ★ Reducing the number of girls who have babies when they are still teenagers. A teenager is someone aged between 13 and 19.
- ★ Taking steps to improve the help that doctors and nurses can give when children are particularly worried about things.
- ★ Making the law on domestic violence stronger so that telling someone what they can and can't do or forcing them to do something that they don't want to do is against the law. Domestic violence is violence which happens between two people aged 16 years or over who are partners (two people who are living together but aren't married), married or members of the same family.
- ★ Taking action to make sure children are kept safe and protected from harm.

- ★ Putting in place more childcare (like nursery) for parents of young children.
- ★ Taking steps to make sure that a child's background (for example how much money their family has) does not affect how well they do at school.
- ★ Making sure fewer children are locked up after they have broken the law.

However, despite this good news, the UN Committee said that the Government still needed to do some more things before children in this country have their rights fully respected.



Making sure governments think about children

The UK Government and local government make lots of decisions that have an impact on children, for example, deciding what children should learn at school, how children who get in trouble with the law are treated, how hospitals are run, how much money should be given to families who don't earn very much or cannot find a job, and how much money should be spent on parks and libraries. Because of this the [UN Committee said that when national and local government is making a decision about a new law, or how much money to spend on something, they need to think more about the impact it will have on children.](#) It also said that the UK Government needs to make a special plan which sets out what actions it will take to make sure children's rights are better respected.



Listening to children



Children have views about lots of things just like adults. The UN Committee thinks it's really important to listen to children when deciding things that will affect them. It was worried that children in this country don't always feel listened to by adults such as teachers, social workers and people who are paid to look after them. It said that **more needs to be done to make sure that children are listened to, and their views thought about, when a decision is being made that will affect them.** The UN Committee said it was really important that the Government did more to make sure that younger children (those under 12) are also listened to.



Having enough money



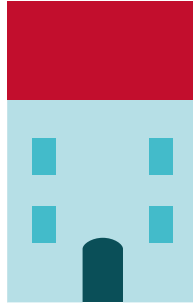
The UN Committee was worried that there are children in this country whose families don't have enough money to buy all the things that children need to grow and develop. Things like enough money to buy clothes, have the heating on in winter, buy enough food to eat and have books and toys. **The UN Committee was unhappy that help given to families with children who do not have much money has been reduced.** The UN Committee said that the Government needed to do more to make sure this problem was solved and should put back a target to make sure that this issue is tackled properly. A target to make sure that by 2020 there are no children living in families without enough money was removed by the Government in 2016. The UN Committee said that when the Government decides how to spend its money it needs to think more about how the decisions will affect children, especially children who live in families without much money.





Having a decent place to live

The UN Committee was worried that some children don't have a decent home. It was especially worried that some children end up staying in places for a long time which are not suitable for them - places like Bed and Breakfasts (B&Bs). In B&Bs children and their families sometimes have to live in one room. This often means there isn't enough space to play or do homework. They also have to share bathrooms and kitchens with people they don't know. The UN Committee said that the Government must do more to make sure children do not have to live in places which are cold, damp, not safe or overcrowded (where there is too many people and not enough space).



Children living in care

Sometimes children and young people are not able to stay with their families - this could be because their parents are not able to look after them or keep them safe. If a child cannot live with their family they are taken into care. The UN Committee was worried that although the Government has tried to improve the lives of children living in care, some children still move house a lot and have to live with too many different people. It said that the Government should do more to make sure children did not have to move so much. Children in care have an adult to help them called a social worker. It's important that children have the same social worker so they can get to know and trust them. The UN Committee thought that too many children in care still have lots of different social workers rather than the same one. Although the Government is trying to change this the UN Committee thought that more needed to be done.



Keeping children safe



The UN Committee was happy that the Government has been doing lots of work so that children are not hurt by adults and are kept safe but it said the Government still needed to do more, especially to make sure that children are safe when they use the internet. It said the Government needed to collect better information about how many children are hurt and develop plans to make sure all children are kept safe from harm.



Making sure children are healthy



The UN Committee was worried that some groups of children are not as healthy as others such as children who live in families without much money, Gypsy and Traveller children and children from other minority ethnic backgrounds. Ethnic background means the country, social group or religion where a person's ancestors came from, for example, someone could have an Irish or Chinese background. It recommended that the Government spend as much money as it can to make sure that all children, no matter what their background, are as healthy as possible.

The UN Committee was pleased that the Government has spent more money to improve mental health services for children. However, it was worried that there are lots of children that need help with their mental health. If you do not have good mental health then you may feel very unhappy or worried a lot of the time or feel very tired. It can also mean that you may find it hard to concentrate at school, don't want to see your friends or don't eat properly. The UN Committee said that the Government needed to collect better information about how many children needed help with their mental health and develop a plan so the right help was in place for children that needed it. The UN Committee was also concerned that there are not enough hospital places for children with serious mental health issues and that sometimes children stay in a hospital with adults rather than other children.



Disabled children and children with special educational needs



Just like other children, disabled children and children with special educational needs have a right to have their views listened to when decisions are made which will affect them. The UN Committee said that if a plan is put in place to give a disabled child extra help and support then they should be asked for their opinion about what help they need. The UN Committee said that the Government needed to make sure that disabled children can go to school with non-disabled children rather than have to go to 'special schools' which are just for disabled children.



Children seeking asylum (safety) and refugee children

Some children need to come to this country because of war in their own country. Others may need to come here because they (or their families) have not been treated well or hurt because of, for example, their religion or if they have criticised their government. Some children come here with their families but others may come here by themselves. The UN Committee was worried that these children do not have a special person to give them extra help – this special person is called an independent guardian. The UN Committee was pleased that the Government had stopped holding children with their families in detention centres when they are not allowed to stay in this country and are waiting to be returned to their own country. A detention centre is a bit like a prison.



However, the UN Committee was worried that families who were waiting to see if they could stay were not always given the help they needed to access services such as school or health care. Most of these families are not allowed to work. **The UN Committee was worried that if they are not given enough money by the Government they could struggle to buy their children warm clothes, shoes that fit, and enough food to eat.**

Trafficked children

Trafficked children are children who have been made to come to this country (or moved about inside this country) when they didn't want to, and may be made to do lots of work, and may be hurt by bad people. **The UN Committee was pleased that the Government has introduced an independent guardian for children who have been found to be trafficked and has passed a new law which gives extra protection to trafficked children.** However, the UN Committee was disappointed that this law wasn't as strong as it could be by, for example, making sure these children are always treated as victims of trafficking and not as criminals (sometimes trafficked children may be made to do things by bad people which are against the law).

Children in trouble with the law

In England you can be convicted of committing a crime from the age of 10 (this is called the age of criminal responsibility). The UN Committee thinks this is too young and said that the Government should make sure that a child needs to be older before they can be convicted of a crime. **There are now fewer children in prison than last time the UN Committee checked the UK, which it thought was good news. But the UN Committee said that too many children who commit crimes are still being locked up.** It said that the Government needs to



make a new law to make sure that children are only locked up if they really need to be and for the shortest time possible. It also said that the Government should take action straight away to make sure that children in prison are always treated well and not hurt.

Children's treatment by the police



The UN committee said that the Government needed to make sure that it had more information about which children are stopped and searched by the police. This is to make sure that the Government can check whether or not certain groups of children are being unfairly stopped by the police. The UN Committee also said that the police should not use Tasers on children. A Taser can give an electric shock to a person. The electric shock is very painful and frightening. The UN Committee also said that there should be better information collected and made available on how many times the police use Tasers on children.

A good education



The UN Committee was unhappy that certain groups of children continue to do less well at school even though the Government has done a lot of work and given money to try and make sure this isn't the case. Children from families with not much money, children in care and Gypsy and Traveller children still don't do as well at school as other groups of children.


The UN Committee was also worried that some children cannot speak as well as they are expected to before starting school in reception class. This could mean they find it harder to learn at primary school (Reception year until year 6).



Places to play

The UN Committee also said that more should be done to make sure that all children, especially disabled children and those from poorer backgrounds, have somewhere to play which is suitable for their age. This could be a playgroup for toddlers, a play park, a swimming pool, a skate park, or somewhere to play football or tag.





This briefing was written by Louise King, Director of the Children's Rights Alliance for England, with help from the children in the school council at Hove Junior School, Holland Road site, Hove.

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You can read the full version of the Concluding Observations and find out more about children's rights and the UN Convention at the Children's Rights Alliance for England's website:
[www.crae.org.uk/
childrens-rights-the-law](http://www.crae.org.uk/childrens-rights-the-law)



Children's
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Children's Rights Alliance for England

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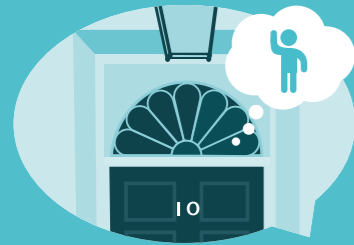
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A summary of what the UN Committee said...



1. Making sure governments think about children

National and local government need to think more about the impact on children when they make decisions

2. Listening to children

More needs to be done to make sure that children are listened to, especially young children



3. Having enough money

Too many children live in families without enough money

4. Having a decent place to live

The Government must do more to make sure children do not have to live in cold, damp, unsafe or overcrowded spaces



5. Children living in care

Although the Government has tried to solve this problem, some children in care still move house a lot and live with too many different people

6. Keeping children safe

The Government has been doing lots of work to make sure that children are not hurt and kept safe but it said that the Government needed to take more action, especially so that children are safe when they use the internet



7. Making sure children are healthy

The Government must spend as much money as it can to make sure that all children, no matter what their background, are as healthy as possible

8. Disabled children & children with special educational needs

The Government needed to make sure that disabled children could go to school with non-disabled children



9. Asylum seeking, refugee and migrant children

The UN Committee was pleased that the Government had stopped holding children with their families in detention centres but it thought children on their own should have a special person to help them called an independent guardian



10. Trafficked children

The UN Committee was pleased that the Government has introduced an independent guardian for children who have been found to be trafficked and has passed a new law which gives extra protection to trafficked children



11. Children in trouble with the law

The UN Committee said that too many children who commit crimes are still being locked up



12. Children's treatment by the police

The UN Committee said that the police should not use Tasers on children



13. A good education

The UN Committee was unhappy that certain groups of children continue to do less well at school even though the Government has done a lot of work and given money to try and make sure this isn't the case



14. Somewhere to play

The UN Committee said that more should be done to make sure that all children, especially disabled children and those from poorer backgrounds, have somewhere to play which is suitable for their age

Good things that the Government have done:

- ★ Reducing the number of girls who have babies when they are still teenagers.
- ★ Taking steps to improve the help that doctors and nurses can give when children are particularly worried about things.
- ★ Making the law on domestic violence stronger so that telling someone what they can and can't do or forcing them to do something that they don't want to do is against the law.
- ★ Taking action to make sure children are kept safe and protected from harm.
- ★ Putting in place more childcare (like nursery) for parents of young children.
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