

Agenda – Children, Young People and Education Committee

Meeting Venue:	For further information contact:
Hybrid – Committee room 3 Senedd and video conference via Zoom	Naomi Stocks Committee Clerk
Meeting date: 29 November 2023	0300 200 6565
Meeting time: 09.15	SeneddChildren@senedd.wales

Private pre-meeting

(09.00 – 09.15)

At its meeting on 16 November, the Committee agreed a motion under Standing Order 17.42(ix) to exclude the public from Items 1 and 2 of today's meeting

1 Residential Outdoor Education (Wales) Bill – consideration of the scope and approach

(09.15 – 09.30)

(Pages 1 – 8)

Attached Documents:

Private Paper 1 – Scope and Approach

2 Do disabled children and young people have equal access to education and childcare? – presentation of findings from family interviews

(09.30 – 09.45)

(Pages 9 – 47)

Attached Documents:

Family Interviews – Engagement Findings

Online Advisory Panel Meeting 1 – Notes



3 Introductions, apologies, substitutions and declarations of interest

(09.45)

4 Do disabled children and young people have equal access to education and childcare? – evidence session 13

(09.45 – 11.00)

(Pages 48 – 75)

Jeremy Miles MS, Minister for Education and Welsh Language

Jane Hutt MS, Minister for Social Justice and Chief Whip

Julie Morgan MS, Deputy Minister for Social Services

Amelia John, Interim Director, Communities & Tackling Poverty, Welsh Government

Nicola Edwards, Deputy Director, Equity in Education Division, Welsh Government

Claire Severn, Head of Early Childhood Education and Care & Childcare, Welsh Government

Rebecca Johnson, Head of Early Childhood Education and Care & Childcare, Welsh Government

Gill Huws-John, Head of the Disability Rights Taskforce, Welsh Government

Louise Brown, Head of Additional Learning Needs Branch, Welsh Government

Attached Documents:

Research Brief

Paper – Welsh Government

5 Motion under Standing Order 17.42(ix) to resolve to exclude the public from items 6 and 9 of this meeting and item 1 of the meeting on 6 December

(11.00)

6 Do disabled children and young people have equal access to education and childcare? – consideration of the evidence

(11.00 – 11.05)

Break

(11.05 – 11.15)

7 Scrutiny of Children's Commissioner for Wales Annual Report 2022 – 2023

(11.15 – 12.25)

(Pages 76 – 88)

Rocio Cifuentes, Children's Commissioner for Wales

Rachel Thomas, Head of Policy & Public Affairs

Children's Commissioner for Wales Annual Report and Accounts 2022 – 23

Attached Documents:

Research Brief

8 Papers to note

(12.25)

8.1 Information from Stakeholders

(Pages 89 – 90)

Attached Documents:

Letter from Cross-Party Group on Deaf Issues

8.2 Mental Health support in Higher Education

(Pages 91 – 97)

Attached Documents:

Letter from the Deputy Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing

8.3 Do disabled children and young people have equal access to education and childcare?

(Pages 98 – 107)

Attached Documents:

Note from stakeholder event on 27th September [in-person]

8.4 Do disabled children and young people have equal access to education and childcare?

(Pages 108 – 115)

Attached Documents:

Note from stakeholder event on 27th September [virtual]

8.5 Do disabled children and young people have equal access to education and childcare?

(Pages 116 – 124)

Attached Documents:

Note from visit to ASD Rainbows on 9th October

8.6 Do disabled children and young people have equal access to education and childcare?

(Pages 125 – 137)

Attached Documents:

Note from the Sparkle focus group session on 15th September

8.7 Do disabled children and young people have equal access to education and childcare?

(Pages 138 – 145)

Attached Documents:

Note from the Oakhill ASD Childcare focus group session on 15th September

8.8 Do disabled children and young people have equal access to education and childcare?

(Pages 146 – 156)

Attached Documents:

Letter from the Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee to the Minister for Economy

8.9 Do disabled children and young people have equal access to education and childcare?

(Pages 157 – 165)

Attached Documents:

Letter from the Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee to the Deputy Minister for Climate Change

8.10 Services for care experienced children: exploring radical reform

(Pages 166 – 167)

Attached Documents:

Letter from Vale of Glamorgan Council

8.11 Welsh Government Draft Budget 2024–25

(Pages 168 – 170)

Attached Documents:

Letter from the Chair of the Finance Committee

8.12 Information from Stakeholders

(Pages 171 – 176)

Attached Documents:

Letter from the Head of Wales, Equality and Human Rights Commission

8.13 Information from Stakeholders

(Pages 177 – 189)

Attached Documents:

Letter from the Welsh Language Commissioner

8.14 P-06-1341 Accessible guidance for parents and schools to help develop plans to support children with additional learning needs

(Page 190)

Attached Documents:

Letter from the Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee to the Chair of the Petitions Committee

8.15 General scrutiny of the Minister for Education and Welsh Language and Minister for Economy

(Pages 191 – 197)

Attached Documents:

Joint letter from the Minister for Education and Welsh Language and the Minister for Economy

8.16 P-06-1358 Review the inadequate funding for Schools in Wales

(Pages 198 – 199)

Attached Documents:

Letter from the Chair of the Petitions Committee

9 Scrutiny of the Children's Commissioner for Wales Annual Report 2022 – 2023 – consideration of the evidence

(12.25 – 12.30)

Document is Restricted

Document is Restricted

Document is Restricted

Agenda Item 4

By virtue of paragraph(s) vi of Standing Order 17.42

Document is Restricted

Evidence paper for the Children, Young People & Education Committee inquiry into childcare and education access for disabled children and young people and the extent to which childcare providers, schools and local authorities meet their duties under the Equality Act 2010.

EDUCATION PROVISION

1. Background

- 1.1. We are undertaking systemic reform of education in Wales which includes introducing a new curriculum and a new system to ensure those learners with additional learning needs (ALN) have their needs properly planned for and protected. Together, the Curriculum for Wales (CfW) and the ALN system seek to transform the expectations, learning experiences and outcomes for children and young people. Both emphasise an inclusive education system which balances equity of access to the curriculum for all learners with addressing the needs of individual learners.
- 1.2. The CfW is designed to raise aspirations for all learners, including those with ALN; seeing every learner as an individual with different strengths and areas for development, who may progress in different ways and at different paces. The ALN system is being implemented over the four-year period from 1 September 2021 until August 2025. It is gradually replacing the special educational needs (SEN) system. Early identification, intervention and prevention is a key aim of the ALN system which changes the legal framework and practices to support children and young people, so their needs are met in a more timely way.
- 1.3. Under the ALN system learners aged 0-25 who require additional learning provision to meet their ALN are entitled to a statutory plan called an Individual Development Plan (IDP) which sets out their needs and the provision required to meet those needs.
- 1.4 It is worth noting that not all disabled children and young people will necessarily have ALN. A learner will have ALN if it is decided that their 'learning difficulty or disability' calls for additional learning provision (ALP).
- 1.4. Maintained schools and further education colleges have duties under both the ALN and Education Tribunal Act 2018 and the Equality Act 2010. These duties are separate, and a learner may require reasonable adjustments, provision under an IDP, or in some cases, both. Meeting the duties under one Act does not negate the need to discharge the duties under the other.
- 1.5. The CfW guidance notes that a school's curriculum is everything a learner experiences in pursuit of the curriculum's mandatory four purposes. It is not simply what we teach, but how we teach and crucially, why we teach it. The guidance has been developed in Wales, by practitioners for practitioners, bringing together educational expertise and wider research and evidence. The guidance helps schools design their own curriculum. It contains

information on legal requirements, guidance on how to develop a school curriculum, and an explanation of the purposes and principles of assessment.

- 1.6. The [Progression Code](#) sets out the ways in which a curriculum must make provision for all learners. Progression in learning requires partnerships among all those involved, including the learner. It should recognise the individual learning needs and backgrounds of each learner and encourage a holistic view of each learner's development. Accordingly, both practitioner and learner should develop an understanding of how the learner learns and their attitude and approach to learning, in order to support them to continue to progress and to foster commitment to their learning.
- 1.7. The duties and responsibilities the ALN Act and ALN Code place on schools, local authorities, FE institutions (FEIs) and other agencies are intended to break down barriers so that learners with ALN receive the right additional learning provision at the right time and have their views, wishes and feelings taken into consideration as part of the process.
- 1.8. We have invested significantly in helping schools, local authorities, and others prepare to meet their responsibilities under the ALN system and we are continuing to work closely with providers, local authorities, Estyn, and other stakeholders to ensure the system is implemented effectively.
- 1.9. We have invested over £62 million of revenue grant funding in ALN between 2020 and 2023 and we increased the ALN implementation grant by £5.4m, to £12m, across Wales for 2023-24. This additional grant is intended to increase the resources for schools to implement the ALN system and lead whole-school strategies to embed inclusive education.
- 1.10. The Welsh Government's Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme is in its second phase and has played a major role in improving education infrastructure across Wales, including new special schools and specialist resource base provision in some areas. To support local authorities to deliver facilities for learners with additional learning needs, the Welsh Government funding rate increases from 65 percent to 75 percent of the total project costs.
- 1.11. In addition to the significant investment we are making in the education infrastructure through our Sustainable Communities for Learning programme, we have also made an additional £20 million of capital funding available to local authorities in 2022 and 2023. This funding is to support the improvement or creation of inclusive spaces and facilities to help ensure all learners are taught in classrooms and spaces with the technologies and facilities they need.
- 1.12. The CYPE Committee is currently scrutinising implementation of both the curriculum and ALN reforms. [Evidence provided](#) to the Committee as part of that scrutiny sets out what we are doing to support schools and local authorities with implementation of these reforms. This includes consideration

of ALNCo workloads and work to address issues related to teaching assistants.

2. Local Authority responsibilities

- 2.1. Local authorities are responsible for ensuring suitable education provision for children and young people in their area, including those with ALN, and this includes responsibility for the planning of school places. Local authorities have to keep under review the extent to which their existing pattern of school provision meets current and forecast demand for school places and the requirements of delivering the modern curriculum.
- 2.2. Under the ALN Act, local authorities also have a duty to keep their arrangements for ALN, and those of their schools, under review. This duty involves the local authority considering, at a strategic level, the overall additional learning provision in their area, as well as arrangements to support the identification of needs and provision to meet them. This review is a key part of local strategic planning and decision making and enables local authorities to assess current and likely future needs and secure sufficient provision and services to meet those needs.
- 2.3. We recognise that more needs to be done to establish a consistent approach to implementation of the ALN Code and Act across local authorities in Wales. We asked Estyn to review schools and local authorities' progress on implementing the Additional Learning Needs system and supporting pupils with ALN. This review is crucial in helping us understand both the progress achieved, and areas of improvement required across the system as implementation of the ALN reforms continue.
- 2.4. They found that overall, pupils in the schools they reviewed are receiving the support they need, although they found that individual settings are interpreting and applying the legislation in different ways. We are working closely with education stakeholders to surface challenges and variations in implementation, highlight effective practice and co-create further action.

3. Welsh language provision

- 3.1. One of the core aims of the ALN Act is to create a bilingual system of support for learners with ALN. Under the new ALN system, local authorities and education settings are required to consider whether additional learning provision (ALP) should be provided to children or young people in Welsh. Where a learner has a need for ALP in Welsh, this must be specified in the Individual Development Plan, and the body must take all reasonable steps to ensure that it is provided.
- 3.2. The ALN Act also includes a series of strategic duties which are aimed at driving progress towards a bilingual ALN system. In particular, local authorities are required to consider the sufficiency of additional learning provision made in Welsh. If it is not sufficient they must take steps to remedy that.

- 3.3. Local authorities must set out in their Welsh in Education Strategic Plans how they will use the findings of their reviews under the ALN Act to improve Welsh language provision for learners with additional learning needs and for workforce planning within the ALN sector.
- 3.4. The challenges highlighted by the Welsh Language Commissioner and Children's Commissioner for Wales' joint policy paper [The Welsh Language in the Additional Learning Needs System](#) echo many of the points raised with us by the sector and by learners and their families. Addressing these challenges is a priority.
- 3.5. A national stakeholders group has been established to help co-ordinate and prioritise the development of Welsh-medium additional learning provision, resources and professional learning at a national level. The group will be supported by a National Welsh Language Lead who will work with local authorities and other partners to develop a consistent offer across Wales.
- 3.6. Through the newly established bilingual educational resources company 'Adnodd', we aim to continue creating new Welsh-medium resources to support the teaching and learning of the Curriculum for Wales and identify and commission resources to better support learners with ALN.

4. Person-Centred Practice and keeping people informed

- 4.1. Under the ALNET Act there is a duty on those exercising functions under the Act to involve and support children, their parents and young people. This duty gives effect to rights in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and United Nations Convention on the Rights of Disabled People (UNCRPD).
- 4.2. The ALN system places a duty on all local authorities and schools to ensure the views, wishes and feelings of the child and the child's parent, or the young person, are at the heart of the decision-making process. This duty reflects the ethos of Person-Centred Practice (PCP). The Welsh Government has published guidance to support the use of PCP approaches. Chapter 4 of the ALN Code for Wales explains this duty and what is expected. A range of resources to support practitioners in using person-centred practice approaches is available on Hwb.
- 4.3. Estyn's recent thematic review of the implementation of ALN reforms found local authorities and schools united in their enthusiasm for PCP and planning. As a result, relationships between schools and families have been enhanced. Person-centred practices align well with the overall direction for the CfW, which has been designed to be inclusive.
- 4.4. In 2022 the Welsh Government published guidance to support local authorities in their duties as set out in the Equality Act 2010 (Disabled School Pupils) (Wales) Regulations 2021. This provides guidance on providing

advice and information; resolving disagreements; case friends; and independent advocacy services.

- 4.5. Under the ALNET Act, local authorities are required to make arrangements to provide people with impartial advice and guidance on ALN and the ALN system and take reasonable steps to make these arrangements known to providers, children, young people and parents.
- 4.6. Estyn's thematic review of the implementation of the ALN reforms found nearly all local authorities who participated in the review have uploaded relevant information on ALN reform to their websites. In addition, a range of information leaflets aimed at parents and carers, and children and young people have also been produced. Those that have been produced by clusters of schools, or regionally, help to ensure a consistent message across a region.
- 4.7. However, Estyn noted the quality and accessibility of information for parents on both council and school websites are too variable and that some families are being incorrectly advised that the ALN system does not apply to their child. In addition, insights from Education Tribunal Wales and parents suggest greater transparency in decision making and accountability is required.
- 4.8. Recommendations in Estyn's review include for local authorities to provide clear, accurate and up-to-date information to stakeholders in relation to what constitutes additional learning provision in its schools; and for schools to improve the quality of information they provide for parents and to clearly state what the school regards as additional learning provision.

5. Disability Rights Taskforce

- 5.1. The Disability Rights Taskforce brings together people with lived experience, representative organisations, and Welsh Government policy leads, with the aim of removing the inequalities and discrimination disabled people face every day, in every aspect of their lives. The Taskforce works to the Social Model of Disability, and within the scope of the Welsh Government's legal remit and not in areas that solely fall under the UK Government's responsibilities.
- 5.2. The Taskforce has established a number of thematic working groups to take forward key priorities for disabled children and adults. The working groups have a range of stakeholders, including organisations that support disabled people, people with lived experience and Welsh Government policy leads.
- 5.3. The Children and Young People Working Group has held two meetings to-date and has heard presentations from CAMHS colleagues and Learning Disability Wales. We are making plans for children, parents and carers' participation to inform our work. The group will present co-produced recommendations and actions, to the Disability Rights Taskforce on 14

December 2023. The recommendations from the working groups will form a Disability Rights Action Plan, which we will commence drafting in 2024.

6. ALN Workforce

- 6.1. A key part of our work on implementing the new ALN system is to help ensure teachers can develop the skills they need to meet the needs of learners with ALN so they can put in place differentiated teaching or other targeted interventions so children can learn more effectively and make best use of expert advice and support provided by specialists.
- 6.2. As part of the professional learning available to all teachers we have developed an online national ALN professional learning pathway. This pathway, which is available on Hwb, is intended to help all teachers support learners with ALN, and especially ALN Co-ordinators (ALNCos) who have a strategic role in schools and are the first point of call for teachers seeking advice and guidance on ALN. We will continue to review professional learning on ALN as the ALN reforms progress.
- 6.3. To assist with the supply of specialists the Welsh Government funded training for local authority-based teachers of learners with sensory impairment and we are channelling over £2.6 million between 2022-23 and 2024-25 to train new educational psychologists, through a contract with Cardiff University, who must spend the first two years of their career working for local authorities in Wales.
- 6.4. Local authorities are responsible for planning their workforce and under the ALNET Act they are required to keep under review their arrangements for children and young people with ALN and those of their maintained schools. This review must include consideration of the size and capability of the workforce available.
- 6.5. We are alert to concerns about the increased workload placed upon ALNCos and the need for schools to ensure there is sufficient support around the ALNCo to prevent them becoming isolated and overwhelmed with caseloads. The ALN Code makes clear that the designation of an ALNCo does not remove the responsibilities of the wider workforce.
- 6.6. An ALNCo Task and Finish Group has been looking at the pay and non-contact time of ALNCos in response to a recommendation from the Independent Wales Pay Review Body (IWPRB) and is expected to report back to the Minister for Education and Welsh Language by December with recommendations for the Independent Welsh Pay Review Body (IWPRB) on this matter.

7. CHILDCARE PROVISION

Overview

- 7.1. The Childcare and Play sector in Wales encompasses a wide range of different types of provision, which are subject to a set of [National Minimum Standards](#).
- 7.2. The key distinction is between child minding and day care. Child minding is childcare provided by one or more people for children from birth up to the age of 12 years within domestic premises that are not the child's own home, for more than 2 hours per day for reward. Day care is provided on non-domestic premises and includes day nurseries, out of school childcare, play groups, crèches and open access play.
- 7.3. The Welsh Government launched its vision of an integrated Early Childhood Play Learning and Care (ECPLC) system in 2019, centring on the principle that all children should have a high quality stimulating learning and care experience in any education and care setting they attend. Sitting within a wider landscape of early years support, ECPLC focuses on pre-school provision (0-5), building on the programmes already operating in this space:
- Flying Start;
 - The Childcare Offer;
 - Universal provision of early education.
- 7.4. Flying Start, launched in 2006, is the Welsh Government's flagship early years programme. It continues to make a real difference to the lives of children in some of our most disadvantaged communities and the Welsh Government has reaffirmed its commitment to continue to support the programme throughout this term of government.
- 7.5. This targeted early years programme aims to make a decisive difference to the life chances of children under four years with four core elements; fully funded quality childcare, parenting support, intensive health visitor support, and support for speech, language and communication. Flying Start is geographically targeted using income benefit data, a proxy indicator for poverty, to identify areas with the highest proportions of children under 4 living in income benefit households. Flying Start parenting guidance recognises that some parents may require special consideration and those providing parenting support may need to adapt services to accommodate their particular needs. This includes parents of disabled children and those with children who have additional learning needs.
- 7.6. In 2021-22, the last year of programme data currently available, 2% of children on Flying Start health visitor caseloads had a declared impairment. Flying Start guidance prescribes that local authorities must accommodate children with ALN and disabilities to enable them to engage with provision so far as this is practicable and in the best interest of the child. This commitment

may extend to training, purchasing equipment and supporting adaptations of the environment. Flying Start parenting guidance also recognises that some parents may require special consideration and those providing parenting support may need to adapt services to accommodate their particular needs. This includes parents of disabled children and those with children who have additional learning needs.

7.7. The Childcare Offer for Wales is the Welsh Government commitment to providing 30 hours of government funded early education and childcare for 3 and 4-year-old children of eligible parents for up to 48 weeks of the year.

7.8. The Offer has been designed to take account of barriers that eligible parents may face in accessing the childcare element, in particular, those who have children with additional support needs including learning disabilities, physical and sensory impairments. To ensure the childcare element of the Offer is inclusive to eligible children who need additional support, help has been made available by means of a separate funding stream called the Childcare Offer for Wales Additional Support Grant (ASG). Local authorities can draw on this funding to help ensure that eligible children with additional needs are able to access the childcare element of the Offer in the same way as other eligible children.

7.9. An independent review of the ASG is currently being undertaken and is expected to report its findings and recommendations by March 2024. The review team have issued a survey to all 2500+ childcare providers registered to deliver the Offer to develop a better understanding of providers' concerns in accessing support and funding for those children with additional support needs that use their services. We know that many providers do access the ASG for those eligible children that require it, but due to the current grant monitoring and reporting requirements, the Welsh Government is unable to fully assess the scope of demand. The research project is intended for us to better understand whether the current grant is sufficient and easily accessible, and make improvements where needed to ensure that all eligible children may benefit.

7.10. As part of this review, the research team will also be seeking the views of parents accessing the Offer, including those who have received support via the ASG, to better understand how this support may be promoted, accessed, and coordinated.

8. Local Authority responsibilities

8.1. Local authorities have a statutory duty to secure, as far as is reasonably practicable, provision of childcare that is sufficient to meet the requirements of parents in their area to enable them to work or undertake education or training. To help them meet this duty LAs undertake a childcare sufficiency assessment (CSA) which must be supported by an action plan, identifying the gaps in provision, and how they intend to bridge them and keep them under review. They must then report on progress in relation to these actions on an

annual basis. LAs provided their most recent progress reports to the Welsh Government at the end of June 2023.

- 8.2. The assessment requires LAs to consider the issues around access to childcare for various categories of parents and carers, including families with children who have additional learning needs or who are disabled. Some of the gaps identified by CSAs in 2022 showed a higher incidence of children with additional needs post pandemic, particularly focused on speech and language needs.
- 8.3. The approach LAs use to identify and action ALN referrals within their areas may differ from one LA to another however, the majority of LAs have their own dedicated teams/people to manage ALN provision to ensure inclusion and access.
- 8.4. Local authorities progress reporting for 2022-23 show that multi-agency teams target support to those children identified with ALN and this could include providing training to the sector, specialist resources, 1:1 support and/or other support.
- 8.5. The Childcare and Play element of the Children and Communities Grant provides funding to LAs to help them address gaps in their CSAs including improving access for those with ALN. LAs have used this funding to support Assisted Places, Extra Hands and 1:1 support to improve access for children with ALN.
- 8.6. For example, one local authority hold half termly multi agency 'Enhanced Provision Panels' to ensure identified children with developmental delay are supported appropriately with early intervention within settings. They also provide a sensory room at the integrated children's centre over school holidays and after school sessions.
- 8.7. In another local authority the funding has been used the childcare and play grant funding to develop a resource library of specialist equipment for ALN, supported by guidance on strategies to maximise the benefit of the equipment.

9. Next Steps

- 9.1. In March 2023 the Welsh Government published its new road map for education—high standards and aspirations for all. This sets out our priorities for education, and the timetable for delivery this Senedd term.
- 9.2. This is a coherent and cohesive road map which covers the breadth of education in and for Wales, from early years to post-16 and beyond. It sets out the six objectives we believe will help us achieve those priorities. These are: learning for life; breaking down barriers; a positive education for everyone; high-quality teaching and leadership; community-based learning; and Cymraeg for all.

- 9.3. We will continue to review progress, share effective practice and work through challenges as implementation of the ALN system continues. A second thematic review will be undertaken by Estyn in 2024, in addition to formative evaluation of implementation of the ALN system (the ALN Act and ALN Code and associated regulations). The views of those implementing the ALN system and the experiences of children and young people and their parents/carers will be important insights to assess progress.

Agenda Item 7

By virtue of paragraph(s) vi of Standing Order 17.42

Document is Restricted

**Y Grŵp Trawsbleidiol
ar Faterion Pobl
Fyddar**

Senedd Cymru
Bae Caerdydd
Caerdydd CF99 1SN

Ebost: rob@robwilks.com
(Rob Wilks, Ysgrifennydd)

**Cross-Party Group on
Deaf Issues**

Welsh Parliament
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff CF99 1SN

Email: rob@robwilks.com
(Rob Wilks, Secretary)

GOHEBIAETH CORRESPONDENCE

Recipient Name: Senedd Children, Young People and Education Committee

Address: Welsh Parliament
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff CF99 1SN

Email: SeneddChildren@senedd.wales

CC: Ian Morgan, Chief Executive, Welsh Joint Education Committee
(ian.morgan@wjec.co.uk)
Philip Blaker, Chief Executive, Qualifications Wales
(philip.blaker@qualifications.wales, enquiries@qualifications.wales)

12 November 2023

Dear Members of the Senedd Children, Young People and Education Committee

GCSE British Sign Language

At the Cross-Party Group for Deaf Issues (the Group) meeting on 30 June 2023, it was agreed that the Chair would write to you on behalf of the Group to bring to your attention significant concerns raised regarding the introduction of the GCSE British Sign Language (BSL) and its potential impact on deaf education in Wales.

During our discussion, Group members highlighted the issue of the GCSE BSL set to be introduced in England in September 2025. While the Department of Education in London launched a consultation on this matter, it is crucial to note that Qualifications Wales has announced the development of a 'Made-for-Wales' GCSE in BSL. The focus of our agenda item shifted to address the Welsh GCSE BSL specifically.

The Group has concerns regarding the potential shortage of qualified teachers for the new GCSE BSL. In England, where the GCSE BSL will be available from September 2025, there are worries that hearing teachers may be recruited to teach BSL due to a lack of deaf teachers. This could pose a significant challenge, as these hearing teachers may not have the requisite levels of BSL skill to effectively teach the language. We wish to emphasise the importance of prioritising the development

of a generation of fluent BSL users, particularly among deaf children, before rushing into the implementation of a GCSE in BSL in Wales.

The British Association of Teachers of Deaf Children and Young People Cymru representative of the Group also noted that Teachers of Deaf Children and Young People are already receiving requests for teaching resources, and there is a need to establish foundational support before introducing the GCSE in Wales.

In light of these concerns, the Group agreed that the Chair would write to the Senedd Children, Young People and Education Committee, the Welsh Joint Education Committee and Qualifications Wales to express our reservations and seek further clarification on the readiness and implications of introducing GCSE BSL in Wales.

Therefore, on behalf of the Group, I kindly request that you consider these important matters during your scrutiny of the GCSE BSL initiative. We believe it is crucial to ensure that the introduction of GCSE BSL is well-planned and considers the unique needs and challenges faced by the Deaf community in Wales.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to your insights and guidance on ensuring the successful implementation of GCSE BSL in Wales, and to receiving your response accordingly.

Yours faithfully

Mark Isherwood

Mark Isherwood MS

Chair of the Cross-Party Group on Deaf Issues

Agenda Item 8.2

Lynne Neagle AS/MS,
Y Dirprwy Weinidog Iechyd Meddwl a Llesiant
Deputy Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing



Jayne Bryant MS
Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee

Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

13 November 2023

Dear Jayne

Thank you for your letter dated 15 September 2023 regarding your ongoing work relating to the mental health of children and young people. The letter also requests more information or updates in a number of areas which I have set out in this response.

Work is now well underway to develop our Mental Health Strategy and our Suicide and Self-Harm Prevention Strategy for consultation later this year. I would like to assure the Committee that we continue to engage children and young people to help shape this work. I met with the Welsh Youth Parliament in July to discuss the alignment between the key themes across their Mental Health Committee's recommendations with the developing mental health programme of work, and the emerging priorities in the strategy. Officials have also had a number of sessions with the Welsh Youth Parliament and the Youth Stakeholder Group, most recently in October to further inform our strategy work.

We also launched a survey over the summer to inform our strategies and we promoted this to encourage young people to share their views. Our aim is to consolidate the findings from this work and the recommendations from the previous Senedd Committee reports to shape the actions in the strategies. To meaningfully change and improve the support that is available, it is vital that we focus our work in key priority areas or common themes from across the range of reports, surveys and reviews which make recommendations to improve the mental health and well-being of children and young people. The new strategies are an opportunity to do that; setting out key priorities that will bring about the changes we all want to see.

The draft strategies will set out the high-level actions and will be supported by more detailed Delivery Plans. When the strategies are out for consultation, officials will begin work on the detailed Delivery Plans. Our aim is to assure the Committee, through the actions in the Delivery Plan, that the key themes from the Committee reports are included.

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay
Caerdydd • Cardiff
CF99 1SN

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:
0300 0604400

Gohebiaeth.Eluned.Morgan@llyw.cymru
Correspondence.Eluned.Morgan@gov.wales

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

The Committee will then receive the routine reporting against the Delivery Plan as opposed to separate reporting on previous Committee reports published in the last Senedd term. This will ensure you receive regular assurance, but also guarantees officials and colleagues in the NHS Executive can focus on the delivery of the actions without having to provide multiple updates.

We will publish the Mental Health and Suicide Prevention strategies for consultation at the end of the year. During the consultation period, I'd like to offer a meeting with officials to provide you with a factual briefing on how the Committee recommendations have shaped the actions.

Transitions from CAHMS to AMS

Sort the Switch includes one main overarching recommendation to implement and to improve our ability to monitor the Welsh Government's Transitions Guidance. I accept this key recommendation and I am committed to delivering it. As you are aware, in May 2022 the Welsh Government commissioned TGP Cymru to take forward a consultation and publish a report highlighting the transition experiences of young people in their own words. In May 2022 MIND Cymru also published an independent young person transition report. Both reports make a number of recommendations and to ensure that we are able to focus limited resources in key areas, we are focusing on the common themes across both reports. These are:

- Improving support while waiting to move to AMHS.
- Improving communication and information.
- Better co-production of transition healthcare plans.
- Implementing the transitions guidance.
- Improving our ability to monitor progress and experience

Whilst a focus in these areas will deliver the vision in both reports, I recognise that Sort the Switch Report includes a range of wider, underpinning recommendations – for instance extending advocacy support, which are not included in the transitions workplan. These wider recommendations have been considered along with a range of other information to inform the draft strategies and we will consult on these later this year.

Following the workshops held over winter 2022/23 the CAMHS Implementation Network (in the NHS Executive) are working with Health Boards (CAMHS and AMHS), Mind Cymru and young people with lived experience to improve and monitor the ongoing transition process. The CAMHS Implementation Network is currently liaising with Mind Cymru to identify participants and to bring a group of young people together. I will be involved with this liaison and consultation process with young people. This work will be used to inform a strengthened framework for monitoring implementation of the guidance and the replacement or redesign of the young person passport. The CAMHS Implementation Network's key focus will be the following:

- Continuous development of a clear understanding of the transition process in consultation with young people with lived experience of services.
- Continue to build an understanding of Health Boards current offer and their approaches through the lived experience of young people.
- Work with young people and health boards to co-create practice-based evidence to support service development.
- Encourage and facilitate health boards to provide a quality, seamless transition process.

- Ensure that quality care and treatment plans and transition healthcare plans are co-produced with the young person.
- Share good practice across health boards.
- Continue to explore the evidence for extending the age range of Specialist CAMHS to 25 years.
- Develop and report regular evaluation and monitoring of the maturity of service provision in individual Health Boards

The work that the CAMHS Implementation Network team are now taking forward will include ongoing consultation with young people whilst working alongside the Performance and Assurance Division of the NHS Executive. This work will help us to understand the young person's journey and experience and support the development of data collation and patient satisfaction questionnaires. The planned development of regular service evaluation and reporting will also support ongoing service improvement.

Improving transitions will be a priority in the draft Strategy with routine updates on progress against the final Delivery Plan once agreed.

In respect of the Delivery Unit's work on CAMHS; the Implementation Board for CAMHS is leading work to deliver the necessary changes identified by the NHS Delivery Unit (now part of the NHS Executive) including supporting the dissemination of good practice examples across Wales. This will be underpinned by a national service specification for NHS specialist CAMHS to ensure equity of provision across the whole of Wales and enable Health Boards to develop quality improvement plans. The current aim is for health board to have agreed improvement plans that they can be held accountable for by Spring 2024. The NHS Executive will shortly be appointing a dedicated mental health Clinical lead to drive this work at the necessary pace.

This work is in parallel to the strengthened focus on performance in monthly meetings between the NHS Executive and health boards. All have boards have performance and waiting time trajectories in place to achieve waiting time targets by March 2024.

In my response of 26 May to recommendation 8 of your inquiry into mental health support in higher education, I noted that we have now agreed our governance and reporting arrangements for the Whole School Approach (the education aspect of the wider NYTH/NEST whole system approach).

A new Oversight and Delivery Board, jointly convened by the Minister for Education and Welsh Language and I, replaced the previous Joint Ministerial Task and Finish (T&F) Group on a Whole School/System Approach to Wellbeing. The T&F Group had fulfilled its remit in relation to education settings with the publication of the statutory Framework on embedding a whole school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing (March 2021) and associated significant funding from the Welsh Government to support activity. As such the Minister for Education and Welsh Language and I felt that the T&F Group should now focus on implementation and delivery of activity. The newly constituted Oversight and Delivery Board held its first meeting in May.

The Board has a specific focus on scrutiny and challenge to ensure consistent and effective implementation of our Framework and the associated work which supports its implementation. Beneath the Board seven workstreams report on the key activity required to successfully meet our wellbeing objectives. These are:

- implementation of the Framework;
- rollout of our CAMHS school in-reach service;

- expanding and improving school counselling;
- education workforce wellbeing and training;
- a whole education group, which looks at wellbeing across the whole sector from foundation to higher education;
- a stakeholder reference group which considers issues such as resources, monitoring and evaluation; and
- our National Youth Stakeholder Group which ensures the voice of children and young people informs activity.

In my response to your inquiry, I undertook to provide an annual report (by academic year) of activity. We are currently considering the first such report and I will write further in relation to this in due course.

We also recognise that the school alone cannot address all the wellbeing issues facing young people today and that our whole school approach must sit within a wider whole system approach. The [NYTH/NEST framework](#) takes a whole system approach to mental health and wellbeing services for babies, children and young people. Our governance around NYTH/NEST is aimed at fostering the principles of a connected system. Our National NYTH/NEST Steering Group is a mix of Welsh Government colleagues as well as external stakeholders involved in the creation of NYTH/NEST to direct implementation. In addition, we have a cross governmental group which draws in a broad range of policy holders to ensure NYTH/NEST is applied throughout our broader work for babies, children and young people. It is important to us that our whole system work in relation to mental health and wellbeing is shaped and directed by young people themselves and thus we work closely with the National Youth Stakeholder Group and other youth groups to continually engage on our ongoing NYTH/NEST implementation. We are developing annual National NYTH/NEST reporting which will provide progress updates on the implementation of NYTH/NEST both nationally and regionally. To support NYTH/NEST implementation we are co-producing a NYTH/NEST Self-Assessment and Implementation tool and NYTH/NEST training as well as a [good practice examples document](#).

In relation to the specific questions you raised (5 a to c) in your letter:

- The work of Public Health Wales' implementation co-ordinators, how well-established the network of co-ordinators is across Wales, and what impact this work is having.

The Welsh Government has provided Public Health Wales (PHW) with £670,000 in the current year to support implementation of the statutory Framework. This has enabled PHW to recruit seven (whole time equivalent) implementation coordinators, embedded within the Welsh Network of Health School Schemes. Progress to embed the Framework across maintained schools in Wales continues to improve, particularly among schools with secondary-aged learners. However, continued focus is being placed on increasing the proportion of schools with strategic action plans routinely embedded within their School Development Plans (SDPs). As at the end of July 2023 52% of schools (48% primary, 73% secondary and 73% special schools/PRUs) had undertaken the self-evaluation process, whilst 28% (24% primary, 46% secondary and 47% special/PRUs) had action plans in place. Both the Minister for Education and Welsh Language and I remain concerned at the pace of progress and made this point to PHW when we met them in September. PHW have set a target that 80% of schools with secondary learners having identified actions within their SDPs by March 2024, increasing to at least 90% by March 2025

PHW is also conducting a mixed-methods evaluation that is focused on the implementation of the Framework across several stages, including self-assessing needs and strengths; creating an action plan; and implementing, system wide-working. This work draws on feedback from schools who have already engaged with implementation coordinators.

In addition, the Welsh Government conducted a survey in June/July 2023 that explored the progress of schools and education settings in developing their whole school approaches and their use of available resources to achieve this. The survey invited members of senior management and leadership teams, and/or health and well-being lead staff from schools and education settings to respond. This included maintained nursery, primary, secondary, middle, and special schools including pupil referral units. We intend to formally publish the results on 16 November as a Government Social Research Bulletin. In addition, pending budgetary agreement, we also intend to undertake some follow-up work in the form of interviews and/or focus group work with respondents to further consider some of the issues raised in the survey.

b. An update on work to measure and evaluate the implementation of/outcomes from the whole-school approach, following the publication of the evaluability assessment in January 2022.

There is a range of activity underway to measure and evaluate activity at the strategic, local and school level. However, we are concerned that the activity is disparate and does not fully recognise the many interdependencies in this area. As such we have agreed that there is a need to develop a detailed evaluation and monitoring strategy which seeks to pull all this activity together into an evaluation plan that will include our short-term research projects and will explore how we can consider longer-term monitoring. I am hopeful that the initial scoping of this work can occur in early 2024 for agreement by the Oversight and Delivery Board and to inform the funding and budget setting process for 2024-25.

This will include:

- A research summary on the effectiveness and impact of statutory school and community-based counselling services for children and young people.
- Phase 2 of our research to explore implementation of the whole school approach survey (as detailed in (a) above), which will explore the help provided to schools and education settings and the resources utilised to support the development of their approach, as well as how they can be further supported to deliver their approach.
- The biennial School Health Research Network (SHRN) survey for senior leaders in secondary schools and work to extend this to primary schools.
- The Wolfson Centre for Young People's Mental Health evaluation of the whole school approach in Wales.
- PHW evaluation activity (as detailed in (a) on implementation of the whole school approach and schools engaging in the process.
- Wider interdependencies such as the wellbeing activity schools are supporting using their PDG funding and the work of Estyn in considering wellbeing as part of the inspection process.
- Data provided by local authorities and local health boards to support the funding we provide in respect of school counselling; delivering training and interventions in schools; and in relation to our CAMHS school in-reach service.

c. Barriers identified so far to the successful implementation of the whole-school approach across Wales (for example, in relation to the capacity of school staff to

support children and young people's emotional and mental wellbeing, and the availability of specialist support in local areas).

the points you mention around capacity and availability of support are both valid. In addition, the establishment of our workforce workstream, beneath the Oversight and Delivery Board has not progressed at the pace we would like to see, for a variety of reasons. However, the Board discussed progress in this area at its recent meeting on 24 October and agreed a number of actions which should mark a step change in this work.

In addition, we are pleased that we now have CAMHS school in-reach support available across all of Wales, with over £5m annual Welsh Government funding supporting this important initiative. However, as the teams establish, we will want to ensure that provision is consistent and equitable across all of Wales and that regional variations in provision do not disadvantage children and young people in receiving support.

There is an interdependency between the NYTH/NEST framework and the Whole School Approach to emotional health and wellbeing. We have been clear, and will strengthen our communications, to ensure that educators understand that the two are complimentary guidance to support the mental health and emotional wellbeing of children and young people in educational, health and social care settings.

The statutory Framework provides statutory guidance to schools to meet the needs of children and young people in educational establishments, whilst the NYTH/NEST framework relates to the whole system including health, social care and third sector. Alignment of the core values ensures that implementation of either framework in their specific area will meet the principles of both sets of guidance. Together, these frameworks provide a holistic approach to children's mental health and wellbeing, promoting clarity, collaboration and continuity of practice across each sector and as long as educators are working towards the statutory whole school approach Framework, then they will be meeting the requirements of NYTH/NEST also.

Yours sincerely,



Lynne Neagle AS/MS

Y Dirprwy Weinidog Iechyd Meddwl a Llesiant
Deputy Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing

Agenda Item 8.3

Welsh Parliament

Children, Young People and Education Committee

Stakeholder Event

27 September 2023

Committee attendees:

- Jayne Bryant MS (Chair)
- Heledd Fychan MS
- Buffy Williams MS
- Naomi Stocks, Clerk (note taker).

1. Background

1. On 27 September 2023 the Committee held a stakeholder event to inform it's inquiry: Do disabled children and young people have equal access to education and childcare? Stakeholders from groups which support children, young people and their families were represented.

2. This note provides a summary of the issues discussed. Some of the stakeholders involved had personal experiences as well as professional experience of these issues.

2. General issues

3. There was an ongoing theme of the need for families to have to fight for all support. We heard examples of families who have "fought the hardest" and yet provision was either not provided or was not maintained. We heard of a case where support was identified, but was then not delivered. We were told that the situation was "misrepresented" to the family, who had put trust in the people providing the support.



- 4.** While another described despite navigating the system “from a place of privilege, they then found out during a tribunal that their child had not seen an occupational therapist for 18 months, despite plans stating they would see them weekly. There were concerns that even when a framework of support is agreed, there is no guarantee it will be delivered, and if it isn’t, families are not told. We were asked “why do people have to fight?” We were told that if a family has been appropriately assessed and the right provision is in place, there should be no battle. The reason that families have to fight is because the system is not “fit for purpose.” The impacts of the pressures of fighting on the whole family was highlighted
- 5.** Concerns were raised for those children and young people whose families will accept whatever support is given to them because they “can’t, won’t, or don’t know how to fight”. People called for a programme of maintained support for children regardless of the ability of the family to fight for the support. For some parents / carers the ability to battle for all support may be impacted by their own additional needs. It was highlighted that some conditions will be genetic.
- 6.** We heard that there are inconsistencies of support across Wales, and sometimes even within the same area or region. Families can be unaware of “life changing” support that they are entitled to or that is available.
- 7.** People highlighted the changes over the past 30 years in the type of need. Thirty years ago it was primarily physical disabilities. It was suggested that there has been a failure to deal with both the increase and the change in need. As a result services are not managed in a way that addresses these changing needs. We were also told that there was an increase in families needing support.
- 8.** It was suggested that improvements in identifying and addressing needs has partly driven these changes and increases. We were told that diagnostic assessments didn’t start until the 1980s and they were mainly focused at learning disabilities. However, the improved understanding of neurodiversity has led to better identification. We were told that these learners have always been in schools with these needs but they would have just “struggled in school.....previously seen as difficult and awkward.” Although, this was not the view of all participants. In particular, issues around diagnosis for girls were highlighted.
- 9.** While outside of the remit of the inquiry, challenges around direct payments was also highlighted. Direct payments are issued in “lieu of services”. However, there are issues as local authorities have fixed rates for services, so if they don’t buy a service at the market rate, it can’t be accessed by those using direct payments.

- 10.** The importance of leisure as part of education was highlighted. We heard examples of inclusive leisure provision such as swimming lessons, play clubs and tech clubs being provided by the third sector. Questions were asked why this provision wasn't being provided by local authorities. We were told that inclusive provision is not being provided in mainstream settings, and as a result children and young people are being deprived of leisure opportunities. It was described as "blatant discrimination". We were told that families and their children want to go to integrated provision but that staff in these settings are not trained to support children with additional needs. There are also issues in mainstream settings of physical access, such as wheelchair accessibility.
- 11.** The challenges of provided integrated provision was also highlighted, and that integrated settings are not appropriate for some children and young people.
- 12.** Some of the inclusive provision allows parents / carers to drop off which can make a big difference to the parents / carers. Yep some, parents / carers have to stay for the duration. It therefore does not provide any respite or time for parents / carers to do other things.
- 13.** We heard that while wider society has improved in many ways, for example, businesses such as hairdressers will often run quiet hours that this wider change has not been seen in leisure / after school provision for children and young people. We also heard of the need for community spaces where families can go, and not worry about their children's behaviour. We were told that these spaces can be the "difference between make and break" as a family. It helps them not feel segregated.
- 14.** The importance of allowing children with additional needs to take part in activities such as residential trips was also highlighted. We were told "education doesn't just happen in the classroom."
- 15.** People felt strongly that these issues also speak to the wider issue of the place of children and young people with additional needs in society. There should be leisure facilities that they can access everywhere in Wales, and some of this is about upskilling mainstream provision. There is a lot of work trying to push cultural change and help settings become more inclusive. We were also told that the impulse to segregate at an early year can mean "out of sight out of mind" which has consequences into adulthood. There is a need for spaces for all children and young people to be together, to help build social cohesion longer term.
- 16.** The burden that is placed upon the family to find appropriate spaces was raised. It adds to the workload and administrative burden which is already very high for families.

17. We also heard of the positive impact that Family Liaison Officers can have, and one third sector organisation described them as “one of the most valuable things we do.” One of their roles is to disseminate information to families on a regular basis, which was described as “really important.”

18. Across the piece, we were told there are examples of good practice, and people are trying hard to provide inclusive services. However, we were reminded that “disabled” children and young people are “not one homogenous group”. For example with neurodiversity we are only just starting to understand that reasonable adjustments should be put in place. Currently a lot of these children are excluded, and it’s seen as a behavioural issues.

3. Childcare provision

19. We heard of the challenges in securing accessible and inclusive childcare, and the impacts this has on parents and carers’ ability to work. We were told that when childcare is available it needs to be reliable to support employment . It was highlighted that playschemes are often not set up for that type of reliable and sustainable need. We were told that “lots of parents have had to give up work because of a lack of childcare”, and that there was a “huge pool of talent that was been wasted.”

20. Other challenges in accessing childcare, included a lack of provision for older children, as most mainstream provision stops at 11, whereas some disabled children and young people may need it up to the age of 19. We were also told that for some children and young people “generic access to childcare” will not be suitable, and that for these children and young people is a need for specialised provision that can properly support these children and young people.

21. We also heard about the lack of “short break” provision, which also has a huge impact on the wider family. Some did not like the use of the term “respite” because it frames the provision negatively, and said that using short breaks is more positive. This is because it has positive benefits both for the child (who spends time with people outside the immediate family) and the family. We were also told not to “conflate short breaks with childcare” because childcare is for working parents, while short breaks is a different type of provision. Short break provision has a “massive impact” on the whole family, including siblings, who are often also young carers.

4. Statutory school provision

22. We heard that there has been work with Estyn to ensure that inspections consider the needs of children with additional needs. We heard that it can be down to the individual

inspector. While Estyn have to look at wellbeing, we were told that feedback is not taken from families on their experiences. It was suggested that children with additional learning needs, who may not have received adequate support, may not have the opportunity to share their experiences with Estyn.

23. Some people asked whether Estyn are looking at the progress being made by these groups of children. This needs to take account of the fact that children and young people progress at their own pace. We were told it isn't good enough to rely on someone making a prediction about what they are going to, and were asked how do you identify if they are making an adequate progress. Concerns were also raised about the lack of aspirations for these children, and we were told that "school is not a holding pen."

24. The importance of an individualised approach was emphasised. We were told of particular approaches that may be used for children with additional needs but that didn't work for some children. The support needs to be person focused, and centred on the individual's specific attributes and needs.

25. We heard that there is an appetite from education and healthcare staff to do training required as part of the Code of Practice on the Delivery of Autism Services. We were told there is a clear need for this training.

26. In relation to Individual Development Plans, we were told that IDPs are not always shared with all the teaching assistants, yet these are the staff who often have to provide the support and manage any issues. We were told that teaching assistants often do not have the right training to deal with these issues, and that puts the teaching assistants under pressure.

27. Concerns were raised around attendance management policies. For example rewards for certain levels of attendance. For some children with disabilities, maintaining attendance rates of around 95% is "impossible". There were also concerns raised about anxiety based school avoidance, and the fact this is not recorded as a reason for absence.

28. We were told that there was a "big gap" in support around transitions between primary and secondary; and then into post 16 education. Although we also heard some positive feedback on support in further education colleges (which is outside the scope of this inquiry.)

29. We were told that there may be limited opportunities for children with additional needs to secure work experience, and is often not focused on what the young person is interested in.

30. We heard concerns about Welsh medium provision and support. This is more of an issue in non-traditional Welsh speaking areas. It was also highlighted that the level of Welsh medium

need was under-identified. The importance of assessments being done in a child's first language was also emphasised, especially around speech and language assessments.

31. There was also discussions around the increase of home education. This can be a positive choice for many. Some children and young people did not want to return to school following the pandemic, and parents / carers "don't want to push it." We were told there is a lot of anxiety around school attendance, schools can be very busy places, and school estates, especially new buildings, are often open plan, which are not very autism friendly. It was said that for some "school is just not the right setting." Other families are home schooling because they are not receiving the right support in school.

32. We were told that local authorities are "not forthcoming" on education other than school ("EOTAS"), which would often be of benefit to a lot of children and young people with additional needs.

33. Linked to these issues, there was also discussions about absences and exclusions for children with additional needs. We were told that absence and exclusion rates are "disproportionate" for these groups. For those children and young people on part-time timetables, there can be issues with recording attendance.

34. We were also told there are issues around "unlawful exclusions" where children and young people are just being pulled out of school. We were told that some parents are unaware of the requirements around exclusions, and that often schools will exclude informally, so they do not have to adhere to requirements for fixed term exclusions, where a return date must be set out in writing, and where the reasons for exclusion must be recorded. One parent described their experience, where they were "constantly" having to go into school to pick up for informal exclusions, where they would just be told to come back in a week.

School trips

35. We were told there was mixed practice around school trips, with some "really good practice in some communities, others not." For example, some schools will be able to support trips to Llangrannog, and others won't. We were asked if some schools can accommodate this, why can't others? We were told it was often down to a lack of planning, and not putting in place appropriate risk assessments. It was described as a "postcode lottery".

36. One parent said when they asked their child's school why they had never been able to go on a visit, they responded "we don't know."

37. Other barriers to children and young people being able to access school trips were given as financial, or the need to manage other children with other needs.

Learner transport

38. There were concerns about the accessibility of learner transport. We were told of cases where parents / carers have to accompany their child on learner travel because of concerns of the child's behaviour or concerns around management of a child's specific condition. Transport firms, in particular taxi firms, are concerned about the risks. It was felt there was a lack of planning and of risk assessments. Transport escorts need to be properly trained, and "most are not trained."

39. We were also told that often families are not offered transport initially, as there is an expectation that the parents / carers will be around to provide transport. It was cited as just one of the many fights "alongside the others." There can be challenges for families to provide transport, as it may clash with getting other children to different schools. It was described as "a massive problem." When these issues have been raised, the response from local authorities are for families "to sort it out yourself."

40. People said if you are able to work from home that may provide more flexibility to accommodate transport needs within the family, but not everybody is able to do this. Many families are reliant on having family / friends around to help. It was described as a "brittle service", and all it takes is for one piece of the jigsaw to be lost, for it to all fall down.

Tribunals

41. Concerns were raised about the number of families having to go to tribunals, and the level of stress and anxiety this places on families. One parent described the first tribunal they were involved in as "the most stressful thing I've ever done in my life." It was suggested, that there was a "perverse incentive" to local authorities to push people to tribunals as it delays having to provide services.

42. We were told that the system can drive you in the wrong direction, citing an example where a family was driven to get a diagnosis, despite the child not wanting this, as it was the only way to access support. In this instance, it was the solicitor who was pushing for a diagnosis. We were told that the system is "wrong", as the system should be listening to the child, rather than relying on diagnosis. People said that there was a lot about listening to parents, but quite often not listening to the child. The child has no say or no choice. In the case outlined, if the

system had worked around the needs of the child, they wouldn't have gone down the route that was followed.

43. Following on from this, people raised that often it is just the challenges of the child's behaviour that is highlighted and not their attributes. Simply, a lot of the time, children and young people are not asked what they want.

ALN reforms

44. We heard views comparing the new ALN system with the older system. One person who had experience of tribunals under both regimes, said they didn't think the previous system was outdated, although they acknowledged that others thought it was. They said the issues with the previous system was the implementation. These issues will continue with the new system, there is no guarantee that it will be effectively implemented. They felt the key issue is how families are engaged within the system.

45. Another highlighted that one of the key difference between the systems is that the new system should be needs led rather than diagnosis led. Although they did not feel this change has actually happened yet, with families often being asked for a diagnosis before support can be provided. They raised the ongoing concerns about the waiting times for diagnosis, with some children and young people still waiting years for a diagnosis.

46. We were told that some parents are not aware of the new system, or what an IDP is.

5. What improvements can be made?

47. We asked what changes would improve things for children, young people and their families. We had a range of responses.

48. Issues around scheduling appointments was raised. People asked why appointments aren't available over weekends / evenings? It was said that having a medical appointment on a weekend would be "one less thing to worry about." People said organising services around the needs of families as opposed to the needs of professionals "would be a good start". This is a particular issue for those who have multiple appointments.

49. The challenges of parents / carers having to be available at all times was also raised. The comparison was made between the employment rights people have as adults, where you can take time off for appointments, but the lack of similar rights for children or parents / carers with children with additional needs.

- 50.** This assumption of parental / carer availability goes wider, we were told. So it's also being available to do any therapy / work between appointments. One parent said they were asked "why are you working? Why not doing therapy?". They felt that changing this assumption would be helpful.
- 51.** There were suggestions to change the way people receive information about what support is available. We heard that there are frustrations around signposting services, particularly when the information is not up to date. It was felt this was an area where improvements were needed.
- 52.** Having more awareness, and improving wider knowledge about different conditions, and in particular around neurodiversity. This has a positive impact on everybody, staff and students. There was also a call for a "massive input into training for all staff, SENCOs and governors." We were told there are "massive gaps" in knowledge and understanding of conditions.
- 53.** Someone highlighted that there is a lot of free and accessible training materials on some conditions such as autism, and they were unclear why more schools didn't take up these training opportunities.
- 54.** The importance of the social model of disability was raised. We were told the Code of Practice on the Delivery of Autism Services does take a social model. Although it was highlighted that for some conditions, a medical model is also important, and there were concerns that not all the health services are available for children and young people with complex needs.
- 55.** We were also told on the impact on non-disabled siblings within these issues. They were described as "always invisible in these conversations."
- 56.** The importance of the DECLO role in coordinating between education and healthcare was raised. People asked how seriously HBs take the DECLO role, and to what extent has it improved the interface between health and education? Calls were made to understand the outcomes of the DECLO role, has it done what it should?
- 57.** We were told there was a need for a different therapy model. People felt that services are becoming a consultation model, where a therapist tells you what you have to do, and you go away and do it. There is less one-to-one support, and little or no monitoring. For some this is an insufficient model. There is also the need for parental training for that support which is offered in the classroom, and doesn't translate as well to home settings. It was suggested this is where the DECLO role could help in ensuring wrap around on all the services. .

58. There is a need for more general training, it was highlighted that teachers will only do one day on additional learning needs as part of their teaching training.

59. We were also told that the right things are not being measured. Waiting lists can be massaged, and often drive people into silos, where they are focused on meeting the targets rather than delivering joined up services. Also this has led to the growth of management at the expense of clinical care, there is a huge management infrastructure at the expense of the services that are supposed to be delivered.

60. There was a feeling that the size of Wales provides an opportunity as it's small enough to develop a consensus on how to improve, and then deliver improved services. We were told Wales "has to be brave, change tack and start listening to families about the hardship."

Agenda Item 8.4

Welsh Parliament

Children, Young People and Education Committee

Do disabled children and young people have equal access to education and children – Stakeholder event

Note of stakeholder event: 27 September 2023

Committee attendees:

- Laura Anne Jones MS
- Ken Skates MS (part)
- Sarah Bartlett, Deputy Clerk (note taker)
- Sian Hughes, Senior Researcher (note taker)

1. Extent of the issue

Childcare

1. There was general agreement that childcare for children with disabilities or who have additional needs was very limited. There were examples of specific settings where all staff had training to support children with additional needs, but there were very few spaces available. It was suggested that parents may feel nervous about leaving their children in the care of staff who do not have the necessary training.
2. While access to direct payments was welcomed, they could not be used as it is not possible to find adequate childcare for children with additional needs.



3. There was a lack of communication between parents and childcare settings with an example of a parent being told that their child could no longer attend, without any previous communication about any problems. Parents felt that they were made to feel that they were the problem with no suggestion that settings could adapt to support a child with additional needs. There was a call for more accountability for child care settings along with guidance on communication with parents.
4. There are variations across Wales in access for assistive hearing technology and variability in the time that staff had available for training in its use. There is also variation in access to external services such as speech and language therapy.
5. There is a need for compulsory training for nursery staff and teachers and knowledge of how to access external services.

2. Education

The school estate

6. There are difficulties with wheelchair access in some mainstream schools. Every school should be adapted for those with hearing or visual impairment. An inability to communicate for whatever reason excludes some learners. Schools with good acoustics benefit everyone. There are mixed views on how successful 21st century schools has been in relation to improving acoustics.

Assessment

7. There was concern about schools refusing to assess pupils based on limited evidence (for example having a good reading age) which means that the school is not able to provide the support that the learner needs. Assessment is not based on the child's individual needs. Schools do not accept a private diagnosis for a child, which are often sought by parents because of the length waiting lists.
8. There is a lack of availability of Welsh medium tests. There are dyslexia screening tools that can be used for children from the age of 6 years, but there is no consistency in their use across Wales. It was said that it is almost impossible to use British Sign Language (BSL) or sign supported Welsh in Welsh medium settings.

Reduced timetables

9. There seems to be a great use of reduced timetables for young children, below compulsory school age (4 and 5 year olds) as well as older learners. This seems to be becoming a trend. These should only be used where schools have the agreement of the parents and where it is in the best interest of the child. Examples were given of a school offering two hours in the school without any discussion with the family of how to meet the child's needs. There is no monitoring of the use of reduced timetables. There were examples of children being on reduced timetables for many years rather than being a short term measure. It was felt that reduced timetables reduces stresses on schools which is caused by lack of finances, resources and staff and can be seen as an 'easy option' for schools. There is a shortage of specialist staff for deaf children.

10. Schools may threaten to exclude children due to behavioural issues, without considering that the school has an inability to adequately support the child. It was suggested that exclusion may be a better option for families as there is a right of appeal, but often families are very fearful of exclusion.

11. Some learners, such as those with long Covid may need a reduced timetable, but with work sent home for them.

12. The system needs to be suitable for and in the best interests of the individual and with parental agreement.

7. Workforce

13. School staff may not always understand a child's particular condition. Newer conditions such as long covid are not well understood by schools or medical staff and children may struggle to access education. Some learners need greater flexibility and a blended learning approach.

14. In rural communities one teacher may be supporting more than one early years class so they may be unable to support a child with additional needs.

15. There is a lack of specialist training to make simple adjustments in relation to acoustics in a room which would help all learners, not just those with a hearing impairment. There is also a lack at access to higher levels of BSL and BSL support for children and their families.

16. A lack of support staff in schools can be isolating for a child who can be bullied and lonely. Additional support is needed for some learners at breaks in the play-ground.

- 17.** Supply teachers not provided with information on individual children's needs in classes. This can lead to issues with the child's behaviour and consequently punishment.
- 18.** Many teachers of the deaf are close to retirement and there are few 'in the pipeline'.
- 19.** There are many free resources available to support teachers to help learners with hearing or visual impairments that can be transformational. Taking a slightly different approach to teaching would not add to a teacher's workload it would ease the burden.
- 20.** Consideration should be given to providing training for teachers in Initial Teacher Education to help them understand disabilities, especially as some disabilities are hidden. There is a need to be proactive rather than reactive.
- 21.** There should be more disabled teacher role models.

Information and communication

- 22.** There is very little information available for families. There are some independent resources available, but only a small amount from medical sources.
- 23.** Some felt that there is a view that schools know what is best for learners and there is a lack of communication with parents about how to support individual learners. This is especially true when a child is starting school. Everybody else's expertise is valued more than a parent's expertise.
- 24.** Information for parents on their rights to identification of needs is not proactively given to parents. Early identification is key to accessing support and parents need to understand how to get their child's needs identified.
- 25.** Some thought that information on choices is available, but parents of disabled children may also be navigating other systems such as benefits, health and housing. Parents feel that getting support is their responsibility. Sometimes a parent has to pick which thing to fight for.
- 26.** Families need to be supported but also empowered to take on issues themselves.

Discrimination

- 27.** Parents often do not realise that they are the subject of discrimination – a figure of 90 per cent was quoted for those who had been discriminated against. Families may just assume that 'this is the way it is'. Discrimination was described as very widespread across the board. Families may be discriminated against in every area of their lives and it 'becomes the norm'.

- 28.** Parents may be being 'manipulated' into feeling that they are a problem for asking for their child's needs to be met. While there are routes available to address discrimination, it can be difficult to prove.
- 29.** It was suggested that reduced timetables are a form of discrimination in that other pupils are receiving their full rights to an education. Similarly, for those who need it, refusal of a reduced timetable can be discriminatory.
- 30.** Exclusions can also be seen as discriminatory where a learner is excluded because a school cannot meet a learner's needs due to Additional Learning Needs (ALN) or the learner having other additional needs.
- 31.** Schools may be discriminating against learners but may not believe they are and it may not be intentional, but they are not able to cope with learners' behaviours. Often discrimination stops when appropriate support is provided to the school.
- 32.** There are very few cases of discrimination due to disability being made to the Education Tribunal.

Impact of the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal Act

- 33.** Neither parents or schools are receiving the correct information about the new law. Learners should have access to an Individual Development Plan (IDP) under the new system, but parents are 'battling' to obtain one and for their child's needs to be met.
- 34.** Waiting lists for assessment and diagnosis are long. Although a parent can ask for identification of ALN, this can take 12 weeks and during that time a child's needs are not being met.
- 35.** The new system is being implemented differently in each local authority, despite the fact that the definition of additional learning needs has not changed from the previous special education needs legislation.
- 36.** Children with significant learning needs are being told that they do not qualify for an IDP and so receive 'universal provision'. Parents may accept this and lose any right of appeal or any recourse to tribunal or resolution service. Not all parents are able to challenge the school or local authority and there is a concern that it is only the loudest voices that get heard.
- 37.** Some schools may be concerned that families are asking for support due to the cost implications for the schools. There is a fear that the need for ALN support is being interpreted according to what schools can offer.

38. The suggestion that the new ALN system would be easier than the SEN system for parents to navigate is not true.

39. There is a need to review the ALN Code.

3. Impact

40. Deaf children who are BSL users may be completely isolated as no-one else in the school is able to use BSL. The child may have a support worker, but there are no contingencies if that person is absent.

41. The impact for children with ALN attending mainstream school can be very bad for their mental health.

42. There is a lack of understanding about the impact of Covid and long term health. Long covid learners in mainstream school are becoming more and more isolated and being unable to take part in school activities has a negative impact on mental health.

43. Learners with additional needs may be unable to access after school activities, especially those who are unable to attend school for a full day.

4. Choices

44. Access to chosen provision is not available. In one area, there is one accessible special school which is full. Therefore, parents must use mainstream schools, where pupils are struggling and they feel that there is no hope of getting specialist support. Parents often think they are 'lucky' to access specialist settings. There is an increase in the requirements for specialist settings but no increase in capacity.

45. There is no school for the deaf in Wales so there is no peer to peer support. There were concerns about a decline in specialist support units and that they are becoming more generalist which denies choice for deaf pupils.

46. It is possible that aspirations for learners are lower in special schools than in mainstream schools. However, some families have different priorities, and attending a special school has many benefits including to learners' mental health and well-being.

- 47.** Many families want their child to be educated in mainstream. All schools should be able to meet the needs of all pupils locally, but this needs to be resourced. This is incredibly expensive in terms of having the appropriate staff and buildings.
- 48.** It is the ideal for young people to go to the local school and be part of the community but this is not possible for all learners. Mainstream schools may focus on results, but parents want their children to thrive. The pressure on schools to have good academic performance filters through to learners.
- 49.** Deaf children are mostly educated in mainstream school where there may be no support for them.
- 50.** There is no provision for those children who 'fall in the middle' between needing a special school or a mainstream school.
- 51.** There is a need for more suitable career opportunities.

5. Barriers

Transport

- 52.** Buses are often not equipped to deal with wheelchairs and wheelchair users. Transport can be an issue for some who may need to be picked up from school during the school day. This has been a problem especially in Welsh medium schools where it has been suggested that learners attend an English medium school instead. Deaf children may have a limited capacity to travel a long way.
- 53.** Where a child attends an out of catchment school, the local authority may refuse to provide free home to school transport, even if that school is in the best interest of the child. This should not be considered to be an issue of parental preference. The school would need to named on an IDP for transport costs to be met.

There are issues of safety in some contracted school transport with no adapted transport, such as taxis. There was some understanding of the cost to local authorities of providing specialist home to school transport. Specialist transport can be difficult to source. It is also difficult to find escorts for learners to travel to school.

Agenda Item 8.5

Welsh Parliament

Children, Young People and Education Committee

ASD Rainbows – Note of visit

9 October 2023

Committee attendees:

- Jayne Bryant MS (Chair)
- Heledd Fychan MS
- Naomi Stocks, Clerk (note taker).

1. Background

1. On 9 October Members of the Committee visited ASD Rainbows. The Committee was invited to visit ASD Rainbows, see the facilities, and speak to parents and staff.
2. We would like to thank ASD Rainbows for facilitating the visit, and to all the parents who attended and shared their experiences so openly and honestly.
3. This note provides a summary of the issues discussed.

2. ASD Rainbows

4. ASD Rainbows is based in Mountain Ash, and provides childcare and support for children on the autistic spectrum. Families from across South Wales access their provision and support. It is a non-profit charity, and is registered with the Charity Commission. It supports families with children who are diagnosed or going through assessment for autism or any other related disorders such as ADHD, Fragile X and dyspraxia.
5. It offers both pre-school and after-school provision. The pre-school provision is delivered in two separate two and a half sessions with am and pm sessions for children aged between 2



and 5. There is also a parent and child group up to school age.. The after school provision is accessible for children up to sixteen who are in full time education.

6. As part of the pre-school provision they use PECs (Picture Exchange Communication System). Staff highlighted that when children transition into school, schools often won't support the use of PECs. (As this system gives the child a voice to make their needs known, to withdraw it means taking their voice from them)

7. Staff indicated that the biggest challenge in running the charity was funding. They highlighted that they often can't access some grants because of the restrictions on what certain grants can be used for (as an example they highlighted that they can't access grants for community centre but the nursery is much more difficult to source funding for.) They currently have funding from Children in Need, Moondance Foundation and the National Lottery. At any given point they can be involved in the process for around 30 grants. They said there is a gap in available grants for services like theirs.

8. While they are registered with the Childcare Offer, they said that it doesn't "scratch the service", the Childcare Offer is £12.50 per session, whereas their costs are £63 per child per session.

9. They have four full time staff, with more part time staff. They also trying to access funding for two children who need 1:2:1 support due to complex health needs. They highlighted the importance of good quality staff, as parents have to feel confident that they will be able to support their children. They said that parents often don't want to go to mainstream settings because of concerns about how well supported their children will be.

10. In the future, they would like to provide more drop-in provision, as well provide holiday provision. At the moment, they do keep the pre-school provision open for the first three weeks of the summer holiday.

3. General issues

11. Parents spoke about how they have to fight for all elements of support. At one point throughout the session every parent we spoke to describe it as either a fight or battle and shared their own specific examples of support they had to fight for.

12. One said "everything is a battle. All we're asking for are the same opportunities for our children to succeed. Currently we're letting them fail to get what they need. Then have to work hard to undo the damage. It shouldn't be damaging our children. But our children in

mainstream education are being failed.” Another parent described the cost of having to put things right for their children in later life because of the failures in the system now. We heard that parents “need a fire in your belly” for the fight.

13. We were told that “provision always starts with the least amount.” Parents talked of the traumatising impact this is having on their children.

14. Parents also spoke that those who “shout loudest get the most.” They were concerned about those families who did not have support such as ASD Rainbows to help them in fighting to get the right type of support. A parent said that without ASD Rainbows they didn’t know how they would be coping with the mental health impacts of the constant battles. Another said they would be completely isolated without ASD Rainbows. One parent said the group of parents we were speaking to are “the pushy ones”. They said they were really concerned about those families where parents / carers are more passive because “we are really pushing and our kids are not getting anything.”

15. One parent said they wanted their child to go to Welsh medium provision but they were unable to fight for it because they had to balance “want and a need.” They said families shouldn’t have to fight to get what is right for their child. There were concerns that as a result families were getting the wrong education for their child.

16. Another parent described talking to their child’s school about potty training. The teacher told them they could not support this. The family contacted the family support charity Snap Cymru, who highlighted to the school that under the Equality Act they had to support this. The parent said the teacher did not know they had a requirement. They said that some parents in a similar situation have simply been told they will have to go in and change their child when necessary.

17. The constant battling also has a wider impact on the family, in particular on the parents / carers who find they lose their own identities. One parent said that when you embark on parenthood you don’t expect to be dealing with these issues. They said that while some people say they wouldn’t change their children, they would, if they could, “get rid of my child’s autism” because “the world is not designed for them” and that they will not always “be able to protect them.” They said their child described being autistic as being on a rollercoaster which you can’t get off which is “exhausting for them and for us.” Another parent said “slowly but surely you lose hope” and described how frustrating it was that even agreed support is not delivered.

18. Terms such as gaslighting were used in relation to local authorities and schools in their approaches to dealing with requests for support.

19. There was a call for wider awareness of autism. Parents described how some schools will do work during Autism Awareness Week, but that it will only happen in that week. They called for greater cultural training and said that unless you are directly affected by it, you don't tend to think about it. Someone said it would be helpful if policymakers had experience of autism. We were told of how autistic children will be excluded from wider social opportunities such as parties and sleepovers. Yet they are desperate to be included and accepted.

20. One parent said the system is an "absolute disaster. The current system doesn't work. The problem is everywhere in Wales." Another parent called for change "across the board", and highlighted instances of responsibility being passed between schools and healthcare services, in particular for referral to newer developmental services. They said getting referred is "a real issue" and that there is "no partnership between health and education services." While a third said the system "is not fair".

21. We were told that "it takes a team to raise an autistic child effectively". One parent said that they dread something happening to them, because although "everyone says they'll be there, but they won't." We were told that support services such as Resilient Families, will provide support but often only for short periods of time. One parent described their experiences with Resilient Families which ended before they could get to the resilient part of the programme. This was because "it took the time of the programme to build the trust with my son."

22. Concerns were raised about the information available to children, young people and their families. Often they simply don't know what they are entitled to, and parents said that local authorities did not know either.

23. The impacts of the waiting list times were also highlighted as an issue. Parents talked of the battle to get a referral, and then having to wait up to 2½ years for the appointment, in which time your child will have changed and the challenges will be different.

24. Parents felt very strongly that their children were not able to meet their full potential and that their children's rights were not being met. One parent said they are just asking for the same opportunities as other children but that their child has to take "a different route to get there."

4. Childcare provision

25. One parent described having to travel from outside the RCT area to access the ASD Rainbows provision. They have chosen to travel this distance because they "get specialist intervention here." As a result they are now not able to access an ASD Specialist in their own

local authority because they have paid for ASD Rainbows. As a result their child will have to go into mainstream school provision without support. They said it was “all about the budget”.

26. Staff highlighted that the Childcare Offer is only available if both parents are working.

5. School provision

27. Concerns were raised about the level of training for teachers in mainstream settings. We were told that these teachers are not suitably trained. One parent was concerned about knowledge and expertise for teachers in early-years provision. They said their child at the age of three was described as “manipulative” by a teacher. They said this was because the teacher didn’t know what they were dealing with and therefore couldn’t look after them safely. Another parent said that their head teacher “didn’t have a clue”

28. Parents shared their experiences of trying to secure support in schools. One parent said that provision “always starts with the least amount...” and as a result their children are being traumatised. They said that their child had been “damaged by the system”, and that having been let down previously, their child no longer trusts the school. They said their child has had no education as there is no setting that will support them. They said the only point that discussions on support only happens when their child is failing. They also said as parents they have been “purposefully given false information.”

29. We heard that in some instances “good reports” will be produced by professionals such as Educational Psychologists setting out the support that is needed. Families then believe this will be implemented, but it is not. In other instances support will be put in place and children will start to thrive, but that the support is then removed because “the schools think the job is done.” But as it is the support that is enabling the child to thrive, it needs to be maintained. One parent described how they were not told when there was a change in support, and the family started to wonder why their child was regressing, but the school hadn’t informed them. Then they had to challenge it. There were frustrations generally about support or adjustments being put in place and then just being removed by the school.

30. Concerns were raised about the limited resources available to schools and the resulting rationing of services and support. We were told that in one instance a teacher in a meeting with a family said they could not provide the support because they needed to provide support for older children. A parent said that schools are having to make decisions about where to target support, and because their child doesn’t have behavioural issues they do not get prioritised for support. They said that schools should not have to be making these types of decisions.

31. We heard that there is a struggle to get IDPs put in place because “schools don’t want to do them.” Even in instances where children have an IDP, it’s not always followed. Parents spoke of their frustrations that if the IDPs were followed their children would thrive in mainstream education. One parent said the adjustments were not “even massive, and that if they were put in place would enable their child to thrive in mainstream provision. We were told that minimal changes can make a massive difference, but they are not implemented.

32. We also heard that the waiting times to access support were “beyond a joke.” Parents said this was particularly galling, after the long time and challenges in securing a diagnosis in the first instance.

33. Safeguarding concerns were also raised when children and young people are out of school. One parent described having no contact from their school or local authority when their child was out of school for a sustained period. When their child was out of school for a nine month period, they had to ask the local authority to come and check on them. Also, when children are off for sustained periods of time, parents / carers may have to stop work altogether or reduce their hours.

34. Parents spoke of the challenges of those high functioning children who will mask issues in school, but when coming home start to “unravel”. They said it becomes infuriating as people think you are making it up, and that you become “that parent”. One parent described their head teacher saying to them “I have 450 other pupils to look after.” They said “schools are fire-fighting and our kids are collateral damage.” We also heard that it can be damaging to the parent / carer’s relationship with their child, because the child starts to lose trust in the parent / carer as safe people because they are “making them go somewhere they don’t feel safe.” We heard these children are in “fight or flight mode.” Others told us that their children said things like “I wish I didn’t exist, why are you sending me to jail?”

35. Parents talked of being constantly judged by the school, while at the same time the school does not help them. We were told that families are encouraged to go to mainstream provision, but that mainstream schools don’t want these children, because they see them as “naughty”. Families are “constantly” being given negative feedback on their children, when it’s not their children’s fault. A parent said the teachers were getting frustrated with their three year old and had no understanding of why they were behaving in a particular way, or how to help them. Others said they were “constantly” being made to feel that their child “is an impediment.” Another said staff simply said “we don’t know what to do” with them.

36. One parent said that for their child’s school “it is better for them when they are not in.” They said that for some even though home education is not their choice they feel that it is the

only option. They said that this is despite the fact that their children have a right to an education and a right to being in school.

37. We were also told that schools do not apologise when they make a mistake. Parents compared it to how children are taught to say sorry when they make a mistake. They said there is a lack of respect. One parent described how their child was accused of doing something at school, which was out of character. Their IDP stated that they would always be accompanied, but at this point they were not. As their child is non-verbal they could not give their account of what happened, it was just assumed that they had done what they were accused of. They described this as “direct discrimination” because they are non-verbal.

38. We told that children and their families don't have a choice in terms of school provision. If you are offered a place in a specialised unit, you are not able to visit it before making a decision. This was compared to the opportunities other children and their families have in making choices about non-specialised provision.

39. Concerns were raised about access to Welsh medium provision. A parent said that they had to place their child in an English medium school, because the Welsh medium provision “was not capable of teaching my autistic child”. They said they had to choose their child's well-being over their language. They said that there was no progress within Welsh medium provision, and that the system “has been the same for years.”

40. One parent described the challenges they have and how they impact on the rest of the family, and in particular siblings. As their child doesn't sleep, it can affect the older siblings' attendance, as they can't then get them to school. The School Attendance Officer visited the family, even though the school was aware of the wider issues, and their offer of support was to provide a breakfast club place for the other children. However, this would just place additional stress as the family would then have to get the children to the same school at two different times, which would actually make life more difficult. It also caused additional stress because they were worried they could be taken to court and fined. They said there was a need for support for siblings.

41. We heard examples of how schools don't make adjustments in terms of schoolwork and wider school activities. One parent said their child was given the same homework as those without additional needs. They said that by trying to include him, they were actually excluding him as this was all work that he could not even attempt. All that needed to happen was to give him specific homework which took account of what he can do. We also heard of a child who was struggling with a playground game, and when staff were asked to explain how the game is played staff said they didn't have time. The headteacher said all children should have to face

humiliation. In another instance, a child was concerned about starting primary school, and the school agreed to a visit to the classroom before starting, which would have made a huge difference, but it was never organised.

42. We also heard about issues around school visits and leisure activities. Parents said that in advance of such activities schools do not get in touch, and this always has to be initiated by parents. It was suggested that “schools would prefer us to keep them at home.” Another parent said “it’s implied it’s not suitable for [them] to attend” meaning that they can’t enjoy the same experiences as their peers. One parent described their child’s experience at a sports day. They had to walk a nearby leisure centre, no transport was provided despite their child needing it. They then could not participate in the sports events because of having to walk to the venue, they had therefore walked to an event where they couldn’t participate. This was particularly challenging, as one of their child’s triggers is disappointment.

43. Parents described education as “very exclusive” and that inclusivity is only available “if you fit into a box.” But we were told it is very damaging to make children fit into particular boxes. One parent described the differences they see in how their two children are treated, with one accepted because their needs are very visible, and their other child’s needs not accepted because they mask.

Sparkle - focus Group

15 September

Committee attendees:

- Jayne Bryant MS
- Naomi Stocks, Clerk (note taker).

1. Background

- 1.** This visit was facilitated by Sparkle, the official charity of the Serennu Children's Centre in Newport, Nevill Hall Children's Centre in Abergavenny and Caerphilly Children's Centre. They support children and young people with disabilities and / or development difficulties and their families living in Gwent.
- 2.** The session was held following a request from Sparkle to enable the Committee to speak directly with families for the Committee's inquiry "Do Disabled Children and Young People have equal access to education and childcare?" Sparkle advertised the session across their social media feeds.
- 3.** This note provides a summary of issues discussed and raised.
- 4.** We note that there will have been some people who would have wished to come and share their experiences but were unable to do so because they were looking after their children.
- 5.** Over 25 people attended. The Chair of the Committee, Jayne Bryant MS, attended, alongside the Clerk, Naomi Stocks (who took the notes.) The Committee is very grateful to all those who came and shared their experiences.



6. We heard a broad range of experiences covering different ages, types of disabilities, level of support needs and educational and childcare experiences. The unifying theme was a clear passion to ensure that children and young people could access the full range of education and childcare opportunities. This was accompanied with frustration and anger about how the current systems do not deliver even on basic needs. A number spoke of how a child's right to an education was simply not being met. For those children who are able to access education or childcare, their experiences and opportunities are far more limited than those of their non-disabled or neurotypical peers.

7. We heard repeatedly that equality and inclusion does not exist. Many people compared the experiences of their disabled child, with their non-disabled children or peers, to highlight the stark differences in experiences. This inequity stretches beyond education and childcare, and is prevalent in all aspects of their life. Someone said that the issues raised during our discussions, were the same that were being raised twenty years ago. Another said it was reflective of how we treat disabled people more broadly in society, and they called for them to be treated as a child first and foremost, with their disability as a secondary factor.

8. We also heard of a lack of joined up working between different agencies and support services. People talked of differing criteria for support across different local authorities, schools or support organisations, and a confusing mix of different funding streams. They said that families are regularly passed from one organisation to another, and it is difficult to understand exactly who is responsible. Additionally, there were concerns about how far removed decision makers were from the child and their family, and that it is difficult to get the child's voice heard in these decision making structures.

2. Statutory school provision

9. Some felt that how welcoming, inclusive and accessible a school is, is more dependent on the characters of the staff rather than the systems underpinning the school system. People described how the system is setting children and young people to fail.

10. Concerns were raised about children and young people who "fell into a grey area". We heard of a number of children whose needs did not require a specialised setting, but were struggling within a mainstream setting. People talked of the "big gap" in criteria between mainstream and specialised support. We were told that education in a mainstream setting and that in a specialised setting are "totally different".

- 11.** Parents called for a clear and consistent route to children and young people being able to access Education Other Than in School (EOTAS). They wanted more transparency about the range of options that might be available, highlighting that EOTAS can be appropriate for children who are in the “grey area”. One parent described how they had to use a FOI request to access the local authority’s EOTAS policy. They said decisions were still being made based on diagnosis rather than need and said a GP letter had not been considered sufficient.
- 12.** One parent described their child as being “forced” into mainstream provision which is not meeting their needs. Another said their child needed to be a specialised setting but that this was not being listened to. One family member described how their primary school has “done brilliantly coping within the resources they have”, but that the children are now refusing to go. They’ve been advised that if they apply for a place in a specialised setting, they may get a place next September, and thereby they losing out on even more education.
- 13.** Another parent described how their child has missed six years of primary school because the local authority has not provided an accessible school place. They described how the first placement, lasted only six weeks, because the child was not treated normally. In the second school, 12 points of disability discrimination were upheld. While they are now in secondary school, there are issues around transport, toilet access and lunchtime facilities, all of which are causing the young person to be segregated from their peers. The care plan and IDP are not been followed so opportunities such as blended learning are not happening.
- 14.** One person described the EOTAS panel as the “real power broker” but that they have no information on who sits on it. The school, the family and the learner are not allowed to represent themselves at the panel, yet this panel makes all the decisions including transport provision and level of specialist support.
- 15.** They went onto describe their child’s case, who had been diagnosed with autism, ADHD and dyspraxia. Their child had been a top student, but it all “fell apart” after the pandemic, and they’ve been unable to attend school. Their child then became physically disabled, and despite letters from around 30-40 consultant level professionals, the panel said there wasn’t evidence her needs weren’t being met. Yet the school said that they couldn’t push the wheelchair, so they would need 1:2:1 support just to get between classes. It got very challenging, and the school did not develop a plan to support their child. When they started putting things in writing to the school it “got turned on me” and social services got involved. They said they had a “year of hell, instead of fighting for my child, I had to fight to provide I was not hurting my child.” They said that they had a good social worker and that they were vindicated in the end, but that the

process was much worse than dealing with the onset of the their child's serious physical disability.

16. We heard a number of families talking about the impact of emotionally based school avoidance, and a lack of appropriate support. One parent described how a number of schools had told them to "off-roll" but that this was all being done verbally, so that there was no paper trail. They felt that their child would benefit from "Nurture" provision, which would provide the required emotional and social support their child needed. However, there is no such provision for children and young people who do not display challenging behaviour. As a result their child has been out of school for two years. They noted that this absence has saved a lot of money for the school, and that the local authority is currently not meeting their legal requirement to provide schooling for their child.

17. We were told that children are being physically excluded from the school estate because of their disabilities. Parents described authorities not seeing a child but "something different? One parent asked why aren't we ensuring that they are fully included right from the outset of their lives? We also heard that the numbers of children and young people with disabilities are increasing.

18. Parents said that accessibility starts outside the school gate, which schools often forget. They talked of the challenges of being able to drop off their children, with a lack of safe parking places, or access to disabled spaces outside schools

19. We also heard about disabled children and young people not being able to access residential opportunities. We heard that children in Learning Resource Bases are not offered any residential trips. But even those in mainstream settings, may not be able to go. One parent described how their child was barred from going because there would not be sufficient support. They had offered to go themselves, but they could not get a DBS check completed in time. They felt it would have been a great opportunity for their child, and the fact they couldn't go was upsetting for the whole family. They called for a more person-centred approach, and suggested setting aside some money that can be accessed to enable disabled children and young people to access residential activities.

20. We heard about the lack of choice for disabled children and young people. It can be difficult to find a school that is inclusive and accessible, and therefore unlike non-disabled peers, these children often just have to go to the school that most closely meets their needs even if it's not the school they would particularly chose.

School funding

21. Issues of school funding and the impact limited budgets is having on school decisions were raised repeatedly. Families said a whole school approach was needed, and schools should be “fully funded” to deliver this. We heard that governors have limited options in managing budgets, and that deficit budgets cannot be set. Therefore with other costs increasing, one of the few options available is reducing teaching assistants (TAs). Yet, TAs “do wonderful work”, and provide support for children with ALN which a teacher who has responsibility for up to 30 other children cannot. This was also linked to changes with the ALN system, people described how statements had acted as a safety net because the money followed the child, but recent reforms mean this safety net has been lost.

22. One person described schools are “operating on a shoestring” financially. Another accepted that schools can only work within the budgets that they have. However, they also noted that while the local authority say schools should accept reasonable adjustments to support education, they do not actually provide them.

23. We heard that schools can often be reliant on support from charities and volunteers, especially those who may have specialised knowledge in supporting specific disabilities or conditions.

Staff training and capacity

24. Issues of training for school staff was raised. Specific issues highlighted included the need for SENCOs to have mandatory training, as well as TAs. It was suggested that specific training should be included in education related degrees and masters. This is important because teachers in mainstream settings will also be dealing with children with ALN. People described the “real impact” having staff with the right skills and experience has on their children. We were told that it was important that there were “trusted adults around them who understand their needs.”

25. One parent called for more training specifically for staff in learning resource units. They said that their eight year old who has a ADHD diagnosis has not had a “full on education”. Even in a Learning Resource Unit, their diagnosis is not taken into account and staff say that they are “naughty” when the behaviour is because of the child’s ADHD.

26. We heard that it was important for educational professionals to have training and time to explore their own unconscious biases including on disability. We were told that unless this happened, the culture in schools would not change.

27. Protected time for ALN support was raised. We heard of a number of examples where SENCO responsibilities were just done “on top of” the postholder’s teaching job. As a result a

child with ALN couldn't access this support because SENCO was unavailable due to their teaching commitments. We were also told that some times teachers are not being paid for this additional responsibility.

ALN reforms

28. Funding for the current ALN reforms was raised. There was concerns about how long the ALN funding would be ringfenced. People were concerned, because previously the autism budget was ringfenced for a couple of years, but eventually the ringfence was removed.

29. One parent described having to threaten to go a tribunal to get a statement. Another said that their child was refused an IDP, which then had a direct impact on their child's mental health and wellbeing, resulting in an attempted suicide.

30. We heard comparisons between the previous and new systems. One parent described the experiences her elder child with ASD had, and that of her younger child who is on the new system. When the older child transitioned from a Learning Resource Base into mainstream provision, the funding followed seamlessly, enabling the child to dip back into the additional support from the LRB when needed. This helped support the transition to mainstream provision.

31. However, as their younger son is now also transitioning from a LRB into mainstream there has been a lot of discussion with the school about the funding sources. (This didn't happen with their elder child.) This is because the funding for those in the LRB who have an IDP, comes from the local authority, but the school itself will have to fund any further support their child needs. They said that their child needs to be in mainstream provision, the LRB is not meeting their needs, but they still need some additional help. The ALNCO has said that the school is scrapping the barrel in terms of budget.

32. In comparing the two new systems, they said that the paperwork is an improvement on the old system. They felt that the length of some of the key documents, such as a learner's statement, meant that teachers did not have time to go through them in detail. The statement often became very outdated, citing that when their child was 15, the statement still included details that related to when their child was diagnosed at two. The IDPs they felt were "largely positive, more concise and more about the child in the here and now."

Diagnosis, assessment and support

33. Numerous parents talked of having to access private healthcare in order to access diagnosis and assessment. This was primarily because of the length of NHS waiting lists. This was for a range of different conditions including ADHD, autism and dyslexia. It also ranged from

medical diagnosis but also support from allied health professionals such as occupational therapists, psychologists, speech and language therapists. For many going private meant accessing a range of different professionals through this route, with the costs attached to seeking a range of different professional advice. Someone said they were now considering accessing private healthcare in order to secure a diagnosis, with this likely to cost around £6,000 in total.

34. Even in those instances where support is provided, there can be hidden and additional costs. For example, one family described how they had finally secured a funded communication device, only for it to break down regularly, and the high costs to repair it have to be paid by the family.

Tribunals

35. A number of families talked about their experiences with tribunals. We heard from a number of people the view that the money local authorities are spending on tribunals could be redirected and spent on providing support. It was highlighted that 70% of tribunals are successful.

36. A child's right to education was highlighted, yet, parents are having to fight to have this basic right met. Somebody said that the biggest issue they face in securing their child's education is the local authority. There was concern that local authority staff don't have sufficient training or awareness in disability.

37. One described having to provide all the reports in medical terms, despite there not being a person with a medical background on the panel. Another told us of having to go private for a diagnosis and the school and local authority not accepting it because it wasn't done through the NHS. Yet the NHS waiting lists were too long. As the local authority would not accept this diagnosis, they had to go to tribunal, which cost them £17k, and was successful. This was financed through remortgaging their house. They questioned why the local authority had not accepted the private diagnosis in the first instance, especially when it was the same Doctor who would have done the assessment in the NHS.

38. We heard of one particular case, where as a result of a family going through the legal route to secure appropriate accessible and inclusive education, they can now only communicate with their local authority and school through solicitors. This includes simple conversations such as letting the school know when their child has an appointment and will be late to school, or even other contact with the local authority such as requesting a new food caddy for recycling. The expense of this for the local authority was highlighted.

Exclusions

39. We heard of examples of children being excluded because of their disabilities. One family cited an example of being called in by the headteacher and told that the school didn't want "this type of child" in their school. Their child has autism.

Learner Transport

40. Issues around accessible learner transport were raised. People said that the learner travel provision needs to be more clearly spelled out, so that it's clear what people can access.

41. As well as hearing about issues around pre-16 transport, we heard about post-16 provision. People described there being "no clear direction". Difficulties arise in making post-16 choices because the transport offer is not known. Some described finding out what transport would be available only the week before the new term or "even the day before."

42. One parent described having to pay £178 a week for an accessible taxi for their child to go to college. They highlighted that if they were living in a different local authority they would have fully funded transport. When they raised this, they were told that their child "shouldn't be enrolled in college when I knew I had no transport." As a result they have had to change their working patterns so that they can take their child to college, with an accessible taxi picking their child up. This is still costing £88 a week. The inconsistencies across local authorities is "spurring" the parent on to continue fighting for their child.

43. The young person said simply "it's discrimination – I can't get on a bus...how am I suppose to get to college without transport?" They highlighted that non-disabled young people can access subsidies to reduce the cost of transport, and asked why this wasn't also available to disabled young people.

Post-16 provision

44. While post-16 provision is outside of the scope of the inquiry it was raised as an area of concern by families. We were told that support in a school setting stops at 16, meaning some children can't go onto sixth form provision. This was described simply as "discrimination".

45. There was concern about the length of funding available for support, an example was given where a young person "over performed" and therefore was not able to get funding past the initial two years. The family said that if their child had failed the funding would have continued. They said that while the Welsh Government have said that there's nothing in the

relevant framework that this funding is only available for two years, the small print means it's actually very difficult to get additional funding.

3. Childcare provision

Pre-school provision

46. There is not enough pre-school provision available to disabled children. Families described nurseries not taking on their children because they could not get sufficient funding for the additional support that would be needed. A particular challenge is the need for more staff.

47. One parent described having to pay for private childcare provision to help her child socialise with other children, yet this funded provision was available for non-disabled children.

48. Another parent described securing a place at nursery for their physically disabled child. However, following promising discussions with the nursery, and a settling-in period, they were informed the day before the provision was due to start that the nursery couldn't support the child. There was no opportunity to discuss this further with the nursery, so they had to find another childcare provider at very short notice. Despite the challenges of pursuing a complaint both in terms of the time, but also the "headspace" they did so. They got no response from the nursery directly. They contacted Care Inspectorate Wales but found their response insufficient. CIW's position was that the nursery had been apologetic and just hadn't realised the extent of the child's needs. The parent was frustrated that no alternative was provided. Despite subsequently securing a placement, whenever the setting had staffing issues, their child could not go in, impacting on the parent's ability to work.

49. The parent said "accountability was key" and suggested this could be improved by making more data publicly available to show when children and young people leave nursery or school places. This data should include information as to why children and young people are leaving their nursery or school. It was suggested that movement between settings both in the pre-school and school sectors because of a lack of support "happens all the time...it is not recognised and it goes under the radar."

50. One parent described how they had to take a career break when their baby was born during the pandemic. Due to the nature of their job, and because their child was clinically vulnerable they couldn't return. This was a job that they loved. When they have since tried to find childcare it has been difficult. During settling in sessions, their child was being placed with babies, despite being a pre-schooler. While their child is physically delayed, she is cognitively the correct age. Nurseries told them that it was not financially viable to take their child.

- 51.** They have since received support from Early Years Wales, who have been “great”. EYW assessed what the level of need was, and provided their child with the opportunity to attend nursery. The family wanted to increase the hours, but EYW wouldn’t fund additional sessions, and the family were not allowed to pay for additional sessions. They are now unable to find wrap around care for the school nursery provision. In their case, they are able to fund further provision, but they are being prevented because “it’s not allowed”. They said “accessibility, quality....nothing tangible comes out of these words.”
- 52.** They said it was incredibly difficult to get a clear understanding of what support they were entitled to, and how to access it. They wanted a clear pathway which shows who is responsible for what, and who is accountable for ensuring this provided. They highlighted that the school is trying to be as inclusive as possible, but that there are limited funds available.
- 53.** There are also issues around timeframes and deliverables not aligning. For example, they accessed an educational psychologist who could then feed into the IDP. However, the assessment cannot take place until the June before the academic year starts in September, which is close to the transition period. It meant the school had 45 days to create an IDP, and the “clock stops at the summer holidays.” They said if they hadn’t been working with the school for the previous year, their child would not have been able to start until October. While acknowledging that children’s development does change rapidly, they felt this alignment needed to be looked at.
- 54.** The importance of early diagnosis and intervention was highlighted. People also highlighted that the need to secure appropriate childcare is often at the same point that families are discovering that their child is disabled. One parent described how their experiences fighting for childcare then affected how they approached securing a school placement. They were “terrified” and “shaking” when looking around schools because of their difficult experiences with childcare. (see paragraph 48.)
- 55.** Ensuring support is put in place as early as possible was emphasised, because if not or if it is lost, the child never gets that chance again with their education. We heard of delays to diagnosis, including a wait of seven years to get a ASD diagnosis for one child, and three years for another child.
- 56.** Issues with the catchment areas for Flying Start were raised. One parent believed that if they had access to Flying Start provision, their child would have been diagnosed earlier. (The postcode based access to Flying Start was also highlighted, with people describing how Flying Start provision can stop midway along a road.) People said what might make sense on a map “doesn’t make sense” in real life.

Wrap around and holiday provision

57. We were told of a lack of appropriate wrap-around and holiday club provision for disabled children and young people. We heard of how children are being turned away from breakfast and after school clubs because of their disabilities or additional learning needs. The impact on parents and their ability to work, or care for their other family members was highlighted. One parent said they can only work term time, while others talked about having to stop working altogether. One person described that because of the children's needs they are "prisoners" at home because they cannot leave the house.

58. The recent report by Contact looking at [holiday club provision for disabled children](#) was highlighted. It calls on UK Government and local authorities to ensure that at least 15% of activities funded through government holiday and food schemes to be specifically for disabled youngsters. Parents also called for a percentage of all funding for play, sports and culture to be targeted at disabled children and young people. They also wanted to see penalties if this did not happen.

59. We heard that one of the barriers to holiday provision can be the fact that more staff are needed to provide the right level of support, and that such temporary posts are not easy to recruit to.

60. We heard that families are reliant on services provided by the third sector, and centres like Sparkle. Concerns were raised about the level of funding that these groups have, while there was a clear call for expansion of provision. Families called for disabled children and young people to be "more included" in provision. They also called for more local authority provision.

61. The adequacy of provision when available was raised, with one person highlighting that just because something is badged as "inclusive" that doesn't mean it actually is.

4. Impacts of unequal provision

62. A very clear theme amongst everyone who spoke was that they were constantly fighting to get their children and young people the support they need. One parent said that they have had to "fight, fight, fight all the time" and was now "losing the will to fight" in their latest battle to secure funding for learner travel.

63. The emotional toil this takes was clear. One person said they knew of several people who have attempted suicide because of stress and anxiety. Others described having to go onto antidepressants. They also said that this emotional stress was then having an impact on their

children. One young person said at the end of the session that until today they hadn't realised the impact that challenges of securing their education was having on their parent.

64. We heard of instances where families have been reported to social services (see also paragraph 15). One said that they were reported because their child had been violent in school, which was the direct result of the child's additional learning needs. They said that schools are not meeting their children's educational or social needs. Families are often having to deal with the same challenging behaviour that schools don't know how to deal with. This then has a significant impact on the whole family. They felt that when social services are blaming parents, the fault lies at the education system.

65. We heard terms such as "gaslighting", while others said that "parent blame is a big thing". People said these referrals to social services are "so harmful. One described of a head teacher accusing a family of harassment and that they were then referred to the police.

66. We heard repeatedly of the wider impact unequal access can have on a family, many have had to either reduce their working hours, change jobs, or stop working altogether. One parent described the importance of working not just to increase the household income but also for their own mental wellbeing.

Agenda Item 8.7

Welsh Parliament

Children, Young People and Education Committee

Do disabled children and young people have equal access to education and children – discussion group

15 September

1. Background

- 1.** This session followed a discussion with parents as part of the Committee's visit to Ysgol Bryn Derw in July 2023. Members of the Committee were invited to discuss issues around childcare in more detail with parents, including with those who had experience of setting up childcare provision.
- 2.** We note that more parents may have wanted to attend but could not because of childcare responsibilities. We also acknowledge that there will be others who may wish to contribute to our Committee's work in other ways but will not be able to either because of a lack of time, or because of the
- 3.** 6 people attended. The Chair of the Committee, Jayne Bryant MS, attended with the Committee Clerk, Naomi Stocks (notetaker.) The Committee is very grateful to all those who came and shared their experiences. Everyone spoke with great passion about their children, and their experiences.



2. Oakhill ASD Childcare

- 4.** Oakhill ASD Childcare is Newport's only ASD specific school holiday childcare provision. It was established after the school asked the governors if they wanted to set up childcare provision. Initially, it was wrap around provision, but parents said that holiday care was the more significant issue. This was because school transport is not available for wrap-around provision, and maintaining routines is more challenging in the holidays.
- 5.** Oak Hill ASD Childcare was established in 2020, with the pilot scheme running in October 2020. This went really well, and was particularly needed because of the pandemic restrictions meaning children had been at home a lot. This was then followed with more provision in February 2021 half term. It then ran in summer 2021. However, it was a "constant treadmill" to fund and run the service. It was clear it was not sustainable to run it purely on a voluntary basis, so they decided to focus on summer holiday provision as this was the most needed. It was then run for the summer 2022 holidays, but as a manager could not be recruited, one of the trustees (who had the right skills and experience) stepped in.
- 6.** Following the Summer 2022 provision, it was agreed that an all-year manager was needed because it too difficult to recruit someone just for the summer holidays. The Manager could then also be undertaking assessments throughout the year, and would understand what support the provision needed to provide. (Previously assessments had been done by a different person.) It is important for the scheme manager to assess the child at school and at home to ensure the provision can meet their needs. It is important that assumptions are not made about a child's individual needs.
- 7.** Even with a full time post, it has been difficult to recruit because of CIW requirements for such a post holder. They must have playworker qualifications, have experience of managing a childcare setting and have an understanding of ALN.
- 8.** The challenges around recruiting staff was highlighted, partly because it's transient work, so there are only certain types of people applying. This combined with the requirements to have a playwork qualification makes it challenging. Also because of the transient nature of the work, they cannot provide apprenticeships or access free courses to get potential staff the qualifications. Staff are often students, who often have personal experiences or contact with autism. However, some staff can surprised at the level of support needs, for example having to change a teenager's nappy.

- 9.** CIW has provided an exemption to waive the requirement for all staff to have a playworker qualification. Without this written exemption they would have been able to open in Summer 2022. However, the Manager and Deputy Manager must hold this qualification.
- 10.** They are licensed for up to 16 children and young people. Most of the children come from Ysgol Bryn Dewr, and have complex needs. In the first year, they averaged between 6 and 8 children and young people per session. They did not run at capacity because they could not recruit enough support workers, and because of the pandemic. In 2021, 10 children and young people attended. They were able to recruit students from Cardiff University, but then they did not have enough physical space for more children and young people. The school has subsequently provided more space.
- 11.** Whilst most childcare settings run up to 11, Oakhill provides spaces for children and young people between the ages of 3 and 19. This wider range of ages provides additional challenges. Teenagers are not just physically different to the younger children, but they have different interests. For example, older children may want to play with Lego, but this may present a choking hazard to younger children. However, having more space will enable Oakhill to increase capacity
- 12.** The provision has been very successful and has a waiting list. Asides from the recruitment issues, there are also funding challenges. It costs between £40-50k for the summer holiday provision. All the funding comes from grants. For example they have received money from the Children and Communities Grant, but this is a small fund to cover the whole of Newport, and much of it is taken up with children in mainstream settings. They also have received National Lottery Funding for the full time Manager post.
- 13.** While parents pay as they would in a mainstream setting, the fees don't cover the costs of 1:2:1, 2:2:1 or even 3:2:1 support. The ethos is always about providing high quality and safe care. Social Services has allowed some parents to use their direct payments to cover the costs, but this is not widely advertised. Direct payments in themselves are a stressful and difficult thing for parents / carers to administer and use.

3. Experiences of families

Childcare

- 14.** We heard of the challenges over the 2023 summer because Oak Hill had not run. One parent described being offered four, three hour sessions over the whole of the summer. Dates for this childcare was only offered on 17 July. When questioning the dates offered they were told

“tough luck, it’s not respite, it’s play, it’s not childcare.” They compared this with the choices and availability for a non-disabled child. They said saying disabled children and young people just “get no choice.” People said they can’t chose where they go for childcare and can only take what limited provision is offered.

15. One parent said that the school holidays were too long for children in specialised settings, and called for the length of holidays to be looked at for this cohort of children and young people. They said their needs were very different to those in mainstream settings, and there should therefore be differentiated holidays.

16. Parents called for more flexible holiday provision, including it going beyond the age of 12. One parent described their child who could go to mainstream provision but “won’t be given the chance...”

17. Childcare is also important to ensure that parents and carers have time to spend with their other children and family.

18. People called for a closer link between education and childcare, while saying creating these closer links doesn’t mean that childcare needs to become education. We heard that schools want to keep a clear distinct line between school and childcare. It was highlighted that childcare provision is more strictly regulated than school provision, citing that a teaching assistant can be employed in a school setting without any qualifications, yet a similar post in childcare must have certain qualifications. We heard of the need for a more blended approach between education and childcare.

19. It was suggested that empty school buildings could provide an opportunity to offer provision in spaces that would be familiar to children and young people. Even if they weren’t available for childcare, it would be helpful if these spaces were accessible to families during the summer period.

20. One of the trustees at Oak Hill said however that rent still has to be paid to school. There is still significant cost, which is why they run as a charity, as it wouldn’t be financially viable as a business. They would like to run provision for the whole of the summer holiday, but it’s not practical.

21. People raised concerns that training and qualifications, such as the playwork qualification, does not cover how children with ALN play, which is often quite different to their peers without ALN. They suggested the need for a complex needs play course, that would could cover different ways to play, triggers, and de-escalation. They also flagged the differences between a

teaching assistant role in a mainstream setting compared to one in a specialised setting saying it was a “different world”. They called for training that suits the setting.

22. One of the parent / trustees for Oak Hill said it shouldn’t be the responsibility of a charity, and volunteers to run such provision. They said that the provision is great, but “we can’t take it to the next level...” . They said it’s particularly disheartening that the children they cannot take at Oak Hill are already children who have been turned away from mainstream settings. They asked where do they go, if even specialist settings can’t accept them?

23. They talked about how these children are simply not seen, but as a parent they often “push ourselves to go out” to make sure that their children are seen. Other parents talked about how they will have to think carefully about where then can go to public places such as parks with their children, often having to go very early in the morning. They described being a “hidden part of society.”

24. Other suggestions that could help improve availability of childcare included enabling teaching assistants to be employed in the summer to work in childcare provision. It was flagged that teaching assistants are not paid over the summer holidays, so this could be a helpful additional income.

25. There was also discussion about the expectations that are being placed on staff. It was highlighted that such jobs are often minimum wage or living wage, yet have to provide a high level of care. They said while people are aware of these issues for older people’s care, the same issues are prevalent for children and young people and are less well known.

26. One parent described the approach taken in Australia, where parents pay for their childcare provision, but there is a sliding scale of subsidy depending on how much you earn. They also indicated that SEN children in Australia get 1:2:1 support.

School provision

27. Despite the challenges in securing a diagnosis the number of children being diagnosed has increased, yet at the same time, mainstream settings increasingly will not take these children on.

28. People raised safeguarding concerns about the lack of contact when their child stays at home. They said if their child does not go to school, no one checks on them, or provides support while they are away from school. One person said “the school was sucking the funding for him, but no one got in touch.”

29. We were told that provision within special schools need to takes account of individual children’s needs. One parent said introducing Welsh can be challenging for children who already have language difficulties.

30. One parent said it was important to acknowledging that parenting and educating children with these types of disabilities and conditions is different, and that changes are needed to ensure these differences are reflected in the education system and the wider support.

Support from statutory services

31. Parents shared their wider experiences. We were told that families often don’t know what support they are entitled to, and don’t know what they can ask for. They said that the advice and paperwork you receive does not set out clear information about the support that can be accessed. Not all families have a social worker, and it can be difficult to get such support. People described “families falling apart” because of a lack of support, and that it was the “luck of the draw” in terms of who gets support. Even those who do get support from social services can find that the support patchy and variable. One person described a social worker saying they were “disabling their child by claiming” social work support was needed. We were told that “no-one is doing anything” and that families “can’t win.”

32. People described “mysterious criteria” with no clear rationale for the decisions that are made. We heard that it was unclear how decisions could be made when there had not been full assessments undertaken, or detailed discussions with the child / young person and their family.

33. They described the challenges in accessing support such as over-night respite. One person described knowing a family that bought a caravan so that the parents could have somewhere to sleep, and in particular to ensure that the parents could maintain employment.

34. We were told that the amount of paperwork that has to be completed is exhausting and draining. The nature of the forms, often mean families have to talk about their children in very negative terms. We heard that a reduction in the levels of bureaucracy would help free up families to spend more time supporting their child. They called for improved streamlining and better coordination between different services. Processes need to be simplified, and families should not have to beg for the basics that non-disabled children and young people get automatically. We also heard that local authorities need to more open to feedback.

Impacts on the wider family

35. There was a very strong theme around the impacts on the household finances, as well as the wider emotional and wellbeing impacts from parents and carers being unable to work.

People described being told that they had to stop working to look after their child, yet the system does not help support families financially to do this. One parent described how the need to work part time was not understood or supported by the DWP.

36. One parent described how they had to leave their career when their child was born and has not been able to work since. As well as losing their career, they have also lost their future pension. Their husband had also lost their job. They said “childcare, what’s that?” explaining that when they had tried to find childcare, childminders would be willing to help but could not afford to take their child on because they needed dedicated 1:2:1 support. We were told that once your child has received a complex diagnosis “everything is striped back”. Another parent also described having to give up their work and career.

37. Parents told of us of the financial and wider emotional impacts on their families because of a lack of support. We were told that four out of five parents of disabled children divorce, and that this then has a negative mental impact on children. Stopping work also has a broader impact on a parent and the family, particularly in terms of mental wellbeing. One parent said “I like my job, it gives me a break.” Another parent said that as a result of having to stop working, they now have no pension, meaning the state will have to support them for longer. They said it’s much better to have accessible childcare and support so parents can go back to work, and it saves the state money in the longer term.

38. They said that there is an emphasis from the Welsh Government to reduce poverty, and child poverty. However, they said that poverty goes beyond financial poverty, but also poverty of the quality of life. They said many families just don’t have any quality of life. Families struggle particularly with the long school holidays. If they are working, they can’t take six weeks off work, and the children and young people struggle with a lack of routine and continuity. It is exactly this need that Oak Hill was established to fill.

39. Parents described the “very different experience” of having a child with ALN. They said “you don’t get tea breaks, there is no respite.” They described how they have to provide support 24 hours a day. One parent said “it’s like having a baby, but they are very large!”

40. We heard of examples where children in school are receiving 2:2:1 or 3:2:1 support, but the families are expected to provide this support at home on their own. This can be particularly challenging in single parent households. They said if it is acknowledged more support is needed in the school setting, why doesn’t this translate into more support at home. We were told that “families are being broken...”

41. Although outside the scope of the inquiry, issues around post-16 choices were raised. We heard that there was nothing local for one young person, and that it is likely they will have to go away.

Other issues

42. There was a clear frustration that no-one outside of the families cared about their children, or what happened to them. We heard that these are children and young people whose voices are not heard. Even in those instances when children and young people do make their views heard, this is not acted upon. One parent told us of a very concerning situation where their child was trying to demonstrate through their behaviour their distrust of a professional, but because they could not verbalise this, it was not taken seriously.

43. They talked about misconceptions of how an autistic child or young person will behave, or present. This can be both with professionals and also the wider public.

44. We also heard wider issues around the lack of support for these children. One person described issues getting suitable medical support for their child, which they said would not have been so difficult if their child had been neurotypical. They had to threaten to submit a complaint in order to get appropriate support.

45. We also heard about a lack of accessible and inclusive play areas. Parents talked about how soft play centres, trampolines, outdoor parks are often the places that their children when asked want to go to. But the accessible sessions for these places, if they are run, are often too early or late in the day. As they become older, these options become more narrow as these facilities are not suitable. Even spaces such as Sparkle don't meet older children's needs.

46. In closing, one parent put it powerfully, "I did everything society wanted me to do, and everything was taken away. It's not [their] fault, [they are] the apple of my eye. Everyone else is trying to screw us over."

Agenda Item 8.8

**Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc
ac Addysg**

**Children, Young People
and Education Committee**

Vaughan Gething MS
Minister for Economy

Senedd Cymru

Bae Caerdydd, Caerdydd, CF99 1SN
SeneddPlant@senedd.cymru
senedd.cymru/SeneddPlant
0300 200 6565

Welsh Parliament

Cardiff Bay, Cardiff, CF99 1SN
SeneddChildren@senedd.wales
senedd.wales/SeneddChildren
0300 200 6565

23 November 2023

Employability

Dear Vaughan,

During your recent statement in Plenary: [Progress Update on the Plan for Employability and Skills](#) I highlighted some of the challenges for parents and carers of children and young people with disabilities and / or additional needs in securing and maintaining paid employment. This has come to our attention through our inquiry: [Do disabled children and young people have equal access to education and childcare?](#) We have heard some powerful personal testimony from families about the impact this is having on their wider families not just in terms of household income but also the wider wellbeing impact that can arise from employment, which I share below.

Thank you for your positive response to my question during this statement, when I asked what actions were being taken as part of the employability and skills plan to ensure that these parents and carers can either continue in employment or can secure employment. I welcomed the information you gave on the possible support for these parents and carers provided through Communities for Work+ and ReAct+.

While the Plan includes actions around the expansion of the childcare offer, we have heard that even for those parents / carers who are currently eligible (and many of these parents / carers are not currently eligible), they cannot secure appropriate, inclusive childcare, so cannot take up the Childcare Offer. (On a separate note, we have also heard from childcare providers that the Childcare Offer does not cover the costs of providing additional support that some children need.)

Please could you outline how the actions in the Employability and Skills Plan can support the ability of parents and carers of disabled children and young people to secure and maintain employment, and what, if any further work will be done in this area?

Our inquiry was launched earlier this year. The scope of the inquiry covers all childcare and statutory school provision from 0-16, and encompasses neurodiversity; physical, sensory and/ or learning disabilities.

I would also like to highlight that the impact of a lack of inclusive education and childcare has on a parent / carer's ability to work has come through organically from the evidence, and was not a specific part of our terms of reference. It is therefore possible that if this had been included in the terms of reference, we would have gathered even more information. However, the fact that this has become a clear theme throughout the evidence suggests it is a big issue for children, young people and their families.

Alongside our formal written and oral evidence, we have been speaking to families more informally, both through visits to special educational needs schools, and to the Serennu Centre in Newport and ASD Rainbows in Mountain Ash. We have also been bringing in examples from our casework as individual Members of the Senedd.

Our Citizen Engagement team have conducted 40 family interviews covering 20 local authority areas in Wales. While we are still finalising the summary note of this work, we can share with you some of the relevant stories. We have been hearing very powerful testimonies from children, young people and their families of the impact unequal access to education and childcare has on every aspect of their lives, and the longer term impacts this unequal access can have. I have included some examples in the annex. We hope that these can be used in further development of support to help people secure and maintain employment.

We are concerned that for many of the families we have spoken to they will face a combination of all of these issues. We are also acutely aware that our evidence gathering has only allowed us to take a "snapshot" of evidence, and that there will be families who may be experiencing other issues which we are not aware of.

We also wrote to the Chair of the Equality and Social Justice Committee to help inform their recent work looking at the Welsh Government's Draft Child Poverty Strategy. I am also copying this letter to the Chair.

Due to the cross cutting nature of these issues, I have also copied in the Minister for Education and Welsh Language, Minister for Social Justice and the Deputy Minister for Social Services (all of whom will be giving evidence to us on this inquiry on 29 November 2023.)

We would appreciate a response by 4 January 2024.

Thank you again for consideration of this important issue.

Yours sincerely,



Jayne Bryant MS

Chair

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.



Annex 1: Evidence from the Committee's information gathering

Barriers preventing parents and carers from working

We have a number of personal testimonies from families who are either unable to work at all or cannot work the number of hours they would like because they cannot access the right type of childcare. This issue continues for many families as the child gets older and goes to school.

Accessing inclusive childcare

We heard powerful testimony from a parent who worked in paediatric nursing, who is currently on a career break from a job they love because they have been unable to secure appropriate childcare. When they did eventually find some childcare, they were unable to increase the hours, despite being willing to pay for this themselves. The parent continues to be unable to work because they now cannot secure wrap-round provision from the school nursery provision.¹

Mudiad Meithrin quoted a single parent who "had to stop working because there was no funding available by now for her child with intensive needs to attend wraparound care on school premises". This parent said that it was easier when their daughter was younger but "now I cannot work because there isn't suitable childcare or anywhere that offers wrap around care for her school". The parent has described the loss of work as a "double blow" because of both the financial and mental health impacts.²

Even in those instances where childcare is secured, there can still be issues. One parent described securing a childcare place. There was a number of successful settling in sessions, yet the day before the childcare started, the provider told them they could not support the child. The parent said she was fortunate her employer was supportive but flagged both the practical and emotional impacts of losing out on a childcare placement the day before it was due to start.³

Mudiad Meithrin highlighted the impact staffing issues for childcare providers can have on being able to provide regular and sustainable childcare. They said parents had told them that staffing was often the reason their children couldn't attend as regularly as other children, and that this inconsistency "will cause problems for working parents / carers..."⁴

¹ [CYPE Committee, Note from Sparkle Focus Group, 15 September 2023](#)

² [Written evidence, AEC.51 Mudiad Meithrin](#)

³ [CYPE Committee, Note from Sparkle Focus Group, 15 September 2023](#)

⁴ [Written evidence, AEC.51 Mudiad Meithrin](#)

One of the parents who took part in our family interviews described how childcare did not work out for their family:

"... I struggle to find a place that can deal with his needs [...] not a lot of places can do that [...] I tried child care and he was there twice and they just couldn't make it work, I had to keep picking him up."⁵

We have heard of the struggle to juggle working responsibilities, and the pressure this places on families. One parent told us that their son who is eligible for 12 hours of early years education, only receives 5 hours, and in terms of childcare, is entitled to 17 hours but gets nothing:

"I am left doing a full time job on 5 hours childcare a week. ...is missing out on the early years foundation phase he's entitled to. He spends large parts of his days unstimulated in front of screens as I have no other way of keeping him occupied so he doesn't cause disturbance while I take work calls, many of which are of a sensitive nature. I work with victims of domestic violence and modern day slavery.

As a full time working parent I am reaching crisis point. I have no family members who can care for... I cannot use a childminder as... is impulsive around roads and runs very fast and there is a high risk he would run into a road and a childminder be unable to catch him. I own my own home with a mortgage. I cannot stop work as won't be entitled to benefits."⁶

Stakeholders also raised concerns about limited inclusive childcare provision. The Royal College of Occupational Therapists said:

"Our members are concerned that private nurseries are difficult for children with special education needs and disabilities (SEND) to access to enable parents to go to work. They suggest there is inequitable access to funding for the additional support or equipment necessary to include children with additional needs in settings across Wales - some areas will fund equipment/support while others will not."⁷

While Early Years Wales flagged that families often have to fund the shortfall of funding:

"If a child needs additional adult support or resources to attend childcare, this can often be limited, for example, if a local authority scheme only offers 5 hours one to one support a

⁵ CYPE Citizen Engagement (published note to follow)

⁶ [Written evidence, AEC.04, Individual](#)

⁷ [Written evidence, AEC.30, Royal College of Occupational Therapists](#)

week but the child needs to attend for 15 hours to enable the parent to work how is this shortfall managed.”⁸

Oxfam Cymru said that childcare “remains one of the main reasons for women to be economically inactive.” They said that 25.5% of economically inactive women are not working because of family and homecare responsibilities.⁹

Accessing inclusive school provision

Even when children reach the age to access statutory school provision, families are finding they have to be available throughout the day, making work often impossible.

One respondent to our consultation described the ongoing struggles they have had in accessing education for their son who has brain damage following a brain tumour.

“He is inprimary has one to one support for 7.5 hours a week!!!! There have been horrendous behavioural issues in school to the point..... stays in school 20-30 mins unsupervised then has to be collected. The only way.... remains in school currently is if myself or my son go in with him, stay with him, supervise him, try to teach him and ultimately take responsibility for him.

“I was working but had to give up my job as what employer will let you leave after 20 minutes on a repeated basis. Childcare options for children with needs are very limited, I'm a single parent with no local family support and am ex husband who is very intermittent in his commitment to my son.”¹⁰

Another parent told us that their child is often “kicked out of school” because the staff cannot cope, and they are repeatedly contacted to come and pick her up. As a result it’s impossible for the parent to work, as they don’t know when they will be called by the school.¹¹ For another parent the reduced timetable their child follows means:

“I have had to give up work – I'm classed as a carer, if there were options out there for me I would have taken them, I loved to work but the reduced timetable made things very restrictive. Now we have to survive on benefits.”

⁸ [Written evidence, AEC 53, Early Years Wales](#)

⁹ [Written evidence, AEC 57, Oxfam Cymru](#)

¹⁰ [Written evidence, AEC 12 Individual](#)

¹¹ CYPE Citizen Engagement (published note to follow)

They went on to say that they would be happy for their child to follow a reduced timetable if it was accompanied by “wrap around care” where they are not learning but under the care of the school. This would enable the parent to access work opportunities.¹²

The Third Sector Additional Needs Alliance also highlighted the impact of reduced timetables or exclusions can have on a family’s ability to work:

“But we know that where pupils are regularly excluded, actually, parents are far more likely to only be able to work part time because they know that they’ve got to keep picking them up, and I think SNAP alluded to that—that parents were being disciplined in work. So, an exclusion for a child, apart from them missing out on so much socialisation, let alone education, really has an impact on the whole family and the parents as well.”¹³

One of the parents who took part in our family interviews was asked if they are able to work under the child’s current school hours, replied saying “no one would want me for like two hours a day, no one.”¹⁴

Oxfam Cymru quoted a parent who said:

“If you have a disabled child, it is impossible to work full-time. Childcare for disabled children is next to non-existent. School holidays are impossible. They don’t even get the same amount of time in school as non-disabled children. Her school day is 30 minutes shorter every day; she has 2.5 hours less schooling per week than her nondisabled sibling! We have to use hours meant to be for respite to cover the gap between school finishing (early because she doesn’t get a full school day - why??) and work finishing. Disability discrimination at its finest.”¹⁵

The All Wales Forum also told us about the other care factors that could impact on a parent / carer being able to work:

“... That lack of specialised support—and this is extensive, because that specialised support could be tube feeding, it could be toilet changes, it could be sensorial needs, it could be specialised autism support—the lack of that means that the parent is going to have to have an impact on their own life and employment, having to come and pick up the child early, being reprimanded both from the school and their job, but also it’s watching your child struggle through years of education and having to make the decision of, ‘Am I going to

¹² CYPE Citizen Engagement (published note to follow)

¹³ [CYPE Committee, 7 June 2023, Record of Proceedings, paragraph 292](#)

¹⁴ CYPE Citizen Engagement (published note to follow)

¹⁵ [Written evidence, AEC 57, Oxfam Cymru](#)

watch my child struggle or am I going to put my well-being in second place, my job, my interests, my life, and stay at home and home school my child?"¹⁶

We are also hearing examples of families feeling that they have no choice but to homeschool their children:

"I've always had to homeschool my child. The schools around where we live wouldn't take them and the nearest school was so far away logistically it wouldn't make sense, we would have spent all day travelling back and forth and with my child's disabilities, that wouldn't be possible." Ceredigion¹⁷

Accessing after-school and holiday childcare

There are also significant issues with families being able to secure inclusive after-school and holiday club provision. Parents and carers have described being only able to work in jobs that offer term-time working, or having to stop working altogether. You may wish to be aware of the report by Contact on [holiday club provision for disabled children](#).

Adele Rose-Morgan, who is an inclusive education campaigner gave evidence on behalf of Learning Disability Wales and described trying to access childcare for her son:

"On childcare, we eventually moved him to a unit for deaf children, because we found out late that he was deaf, and there was a breakfast club there. He could only go there with support, and the support came from a fund outside of education. And at one time, the funding criteria changed, and my husband's wage had gone up a little bit, so it was outside the criteria. So, the headmistress called me in and said, 'Look, you're no longer entitled to this but we will pay it'—out of the parental contributions that they used to collect. I just couldn't do that, so I used to just pay for the breakfast club. I used to give £10. It was one day a week, just so he had that social inclusion. I also refused a taxi. I insisted on taking him, and I was able to do it. He was my youngest, and we were able to have a second car, so it worked. He started and finished at different times. That posed a problem because the private childcare within the school didn't start their session until 10 minutes after he'd finished, and they weren't sure, because he would need one to one, whether it would cost a lot more. I applied for a job and I couldn't pursue that because I couldn't work out the childcare around that."¹⁸

A parent who is a member of the Swansea Parent Carer Forum said:

¹⁶ [CYPE Committee, 7 June 2023, Record of Proceedings, paragraph 296](#)

¹⁷ [Written evidence, AEC 05 Third Sector Additional Needs Alliance](#)

¹⁸ [CYPE Committee, 7 June 2023, Record of Proceedings, paragraph 122](#)

*" My child is now 12. He still needs childcare. At the same age I was able to leave his sister for short periods of time. He cannot access holiday schemes, childminders as he would need 1:1 care and the cost makes this inaccessible and he is too old for private nurseries. Breakfast clubs and after school clubs are not an option because the school cannot afford to cover 1:1 and still run these. I can't work as a result"*¹⁹

While a parent who provided their views via a questionnaire circulated by Sparkle said:

"My daughter only attended primary school part time in reception as the LA only provided funding for 16 hours 1:1 support and school refused to allow her to attend outside of the hours she had 1:1 funding. This meant I was unable to work as she was only attending until lunchtime each day."

Impacts on families

As you can see from the examples above, parents are having to give up jobs / careers in order to look after children. In some cases because of the caring responsibilities across the family, both parents / carers have had to give up work. The strain of coping with these pressures can result in the breakup of families which will have an impact on household income.²⁰ We were told that four out of five marriages with a disabled child fail.²¹ Sparkle said that relationships often break down because parents cannot spend "quality time together or share experiences" because they are often "ships in the night" missing each other because one parent will work when the other is at home, because they cannot work at the same time because of a lack of childcare.²²

One respondent described the particular impact on their family:

*"...Because of his needs I was not able to find any childcare for him at all. This meant his father had to give up work to care for him and this eventually helped contribute to the breakdown of our nuclear family as financial pressures were building. The rate of divorce in families with a child with disabilities is far higher than the average population because of the isolation from society and lack of support that other parents can access."*²³

In the research they have done, Sparkle have highlighted:

"Parents talk of finding jobs that fit around their family commitments, rather than jobs they are qualified for or would enjoy. Many parents work at supermarkets because they can work

¹⁹ [Written evidence, AEC 55 Swansea Parent Carer Forum](#)

²⁰ [CYPE Committee, Note from Oak Hill Focus Group, 15 September 2023](#)

²¹ [CYPE Committee, Note from Ysgol Bryn Derw school visit, 29 June 2023](#)

²² [Written evidence, AEC 36, Chair, Sparkle](#)

²³ [Written evidence, AEC 31 Individual](#)

*around school hours or late in the evenings when another parent is home. These are specific employment restrictions and considerations that families with typically developing children may not face.*²⁴

The challenges of securing employment that fits around caring responsibilities will also be a much longer-term issue for these families:

*"Another parent commented that when someone has a child with a disability their expectations surrounding parenting have to change; most parents expect that when their child is around 12/13 years old, they'll be able to spend an hour home alone after school, meaning the parent can work typical '9-5' hours. However, parents of children with disabilities are not able to do this due to their child's high support needs; they describe their child's lack of cognitive development as essentially meaning they care for a 12/13 year old toddler, and as they have no sense of danger they cannot be left alone for any time. Parents therefore have no choice but to be at home with their child if they cannot source appropriate childcare, limiting their employment options and the number of hours they can work."*²⁵

This will also have an impact on parents / carers ability to work, along with the additional costs that can come from home education.

Longer term impact on household incomes

As well as reducing income in the present these issues result in a long term impact on household income. In particular, in relation to overall household income, pension income or causing restrictions on a family's ability to buy or rent their preferred home in their preferred area. One parent said they hadn't been able to work for 15 years because of a lack of appropriate childcare, and that as a result they have no pension resulting in the need for more state support. They said if they had been able to access childcare, they would have been able to work reducing their reliance on state support and saving the state money.²⁶ We were also told that not being able to work limits future opportunities and that "it changes your future."²⁷

Entrenchment of disadvantage

We are aware that families with disabled children are more likely to be living below the poverty line, and that this then can create additional barriers to them accessing inclusive services and support that meet the child's and wider family needs, further entrenching disadvantage longer term.

²⁴ [Written evidence, AEC 36, Chair, Sparkle](#)

²⁵ [Written evidence, AEC 36, Chair, Sparkle](#)

²⁶ [CYPE Committee, Note from Oak Hill Focus Group, 15 September 2023](#)

²⁷ [CYPE Committee, Note from Ysgol Bryn Derw school visit, 29 June 2023](#)

Organisations such as Disability Wales raised concerns about the impact faced by disabled children who have to live both with the impact of their disability and their poverty, and what this can mean for children's educational outcomes. They cited differences between the number of disabled people leaving education without qualifications and those who are not disabled.²⁸

"It is well established that educational outcomes for disabled people differs to non-disabled people. In Wales, from June 2020-2021, 37.9% of nondisabled people's highest qualification was a degree or equivalent, compared to 21.5% of disabled people. In the most even statistics, 21.6% of non-disabled people's highest qualification was a A-level or equivalent, compared to 20.7% of disabled people. 18.8% of non-disabled people's highest qualification was GCSE grade C or above or equivalent, compared to 24% of disabled people. 9.4% of non-disabled people's highest qualification was another form of higher education, compared to 7.3% of disabled people. 5.9% of non-disabled people had no qualifications, compared to the significantly higher 16.4% of disabled people."²⁹

Clearly educational outcomes can have a life-long impact on a person's opportunities to earn money, so that this is another angle that needs consideration within the Child Poverty Strategy. The intersectionality of these issues also needs careful thought and should be addressed within any strategy seeking to reduce child poverty.

In relation to provision for childcare, Oxfam Cymru called for this, particularly for the provision of childcare and early education access for "children from different ethnic backgrounds and disabled children." They said that only by "recognising and addressing" these children's "unique needs and challenges" can we ensure that childcare and early education is "truly inclusive and equitable."³⁰

²⁸ [CYPE Committee, 7 June 2023, Record of Proceedings, paragraphs 64- 65.](#)

²⁹ [Written evidence, AEC 09 Disability Wales](#)

³⁰ [Written evidence, AEC 57, Oxfam Cymru](#)



**Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc
ac Addysg**

**Children, Young People
and Education Committee**

Lee Waters MS

Deputy Minister for Climate Change

Senedd Cymru

Bae Caerdydd, Caerdydd, CF99 1SN
SeneddPlant@senedd.cymru
senedd.cymru/SeneddPlant
0300 200 6565

Welsh Parliament

Cardiff Bay, Cardiff, CF99 1SN
SeneddChildren@senedd.wales
senedd.wales/SeneddChildren
0300 200 6565

21 November 2023

Learner Travel

Dear Lee,

Our Committee is currently looking at whether disabled children and young people have equal access to education and childcare? This is a wide-ranging piece of work, looking at all aspects of education and childcare from 0 – 16. As you can see from the terms of reference, the scope covers physical, sensory and learning disabilities and neurodiversity.

Alongside taking formal oral and written evidence, we have also been hearing directly from families across Wales about their experiences. These personal testimonies have been incredibly powerful and have identified a wide range of issues that children, young people and their families face in accessing inclusive and accessible education and childcare, and the impacts of this unequal access. We will be exploring many of these issues with the Minister for Education, Minister for Social Justice, and the Deputy Minister for Social Services when they give evidence to us on 29 November 2023.

However, as one of the key issues relates to the issue of transport, we wanted to pursue these issues directly with you. This evidence base also builds on evidence we gathered during our inquiry on Pupil Absence, and work by the Children's Commissioner, Children in Wales and most recently, the Welsh Youth Parliament.

The evidence we have gathered

We have heard from individual families and stakeholders how a lack of accessible, inclusive and affordable learner travel creates barriers for children, young people and their families to access

education and childcare. We also heard that good learner transport can help build independence, and provide a social space outside of school and the home for children and young people.¹

The All Wales Forum said that a lack of accessible transport impacts on both the children and wider family in a way that “we don’t necessarily understand the extent of, especially in rural areas.”²

One parent told us:

“I feel that money is placed above the welfare of the child in the scenario of transport.”³

Estyn told us that in their recent thematic report looking at the new additional learning needs system, they had identified as one of the barriers “challenges in transporting children and young people to access education and childcare provision which meets their needs.” They also highlighted that children with additional needs often cannot access extra-curricula activities because of transport restrictions.⁴ Both of these issues were also raised in the discussions we had with families.

A parent involved in the Swansea Parent Carer Forum said that breakfast clubs are “not possible” if a child uses shared transport, because the other children they share transport with may not attend, and that the same applies for after school clubs.⁵ UCAC told us that an additional barrier is that “any provision offered outside school hours can lead to financial implications for schools, as it is the school and not the local authority that must fund any ‘reasonable adjustments’ made for activities that take place outside school hours.”⁶ The Children’s Commissioner said that this lack of transport for after school provision increases children’s isolation and drives “all of their social life outside of school to be completely online.” She said that not being able to access after school activities has an impact both on children and young people’s physical and emotional wellbeing.⁷

Simply getting learner transport in place in the first instance can be challenging. As one family said:

“At another provision like this we used to be offered two session for three hours a week. I had to travel such a distance to get there and back and by the time I had done this it wasn’t worth coming home in between. I had hoped to spend some time with my daughter but in

¹ [School visit note 3 – 29 June 2023, paragraph 15](#) and [School visit note 1 – 29 June 2023, paragraph 19](#)

² [CYPE Committee, 7 June 2023, Record of Proceedings, paragraph 272](#)

³ Citizen Engagement – notes of interviews (not published yet)

⁴ [Written evidence, AEC 48, Estyn](#)

⁵ [Written evidence, AEC 55, Swansea Parent Carer Forum](#)

⁶ [Written evidence, AEC 67, UCAC](#)

⁷ [CYPE Committee, 18 May 2023, Record of Proceedings, paragraph 46](#)



the end it just couldn't work because there is no time allowance for the travel. I was then eventually awarded transport.”⁸

For another family, transport issues factored in their decision to home educate:

“I've always had to homeschool my child. The schools around where we live wouldn't take them and the nearest school was so far away logistically it wouldn't make sense, we would have spent all day travelling back and forth and with my child's disabilities, that wouldn't be possible.”⁹

While for another the pandemic led to their transport being removed:

““Because of the pandemic, the school transport was suspended, which means we had to take our child to school, which we could do whilst we were working from home, but the transport service didn't start again, even after lockdown was lifted and schools had reopened and were back to normal, until we threatened judicial review. It shouldn't be like this; my child has a right to access school.”¹⁰

Other families talked about the fight to get transport to the most appropriate school for their child. One parent told us that having secured a place at a school that was the most suited to their autistic child, but not the nearest school, the local authority “point blank refused transport even though legal advice said we were due it as it was named in our statement.” As they could not afford a lawyer, they had to pay for transport “which was a challenge.”¹¹

We heard from others about a lack of consistency in decision making by local authorities. At one school visit, we were told of a case with two children living in the same house, but only one child was offered transport.¹² Others raised concerns about a lack of clarity around who is eligible for learner travel provision.¹³

We heard concerns about the quality of transport and escorts where learner travel is made available. For example, we heard that taxi drivers or escorts may have limited knowledge of how to deal with ASD children and young people. We also heard that the transport contracts to provide learner travel are not particularly attractive, especially for those contracts for children with additional needs.¹⁴ Parents told of us “massive safeguarding issues with transport”, and we were told of cases where

⁸ Citizen Engagement – notes of interviews (not published yet)

⁹ [Written evidence, AEC 05 Third Sector Additional Needs Alliance](#)

¹⁰ [Written evidence, AEC 05 Third Sector Additional Needs Alliance](#)

¹¹ [Written evidence, AEC 08 Individual](#)

¹² [School visit note 3 – 29 June 2023, paragraph 15](#)

¹³ [Note – Sparkle Focus Group, September 2023, paragraph 40](#)

¹⁴ [School visit note 2 – 29 June 2023, paragraph 15](#)

background checks where not undertaken. We also heard concerns that the procurement process allows sub-contracting which can dilute the quality of the provision.¹⁵

One parent called for all "escorts and drivers to also receive ALN/disability training, along with escorts to be trained in total communication techniques."¹⁶ While other parents asked whether there was any guidance on the recruitment of taxi escorts, highlighting that a lack of training can cause "direct harm to the child."¹⁷

One family shared their specific examples about a lack of communication between the school and the escort:

"What I want to know when he comes off the bus and he's screaming I want to know what is wrong. For example, it stipulated that my child doesn't go into the school hall, however the other day they did sports day in the hall because they had bad weather and he was screaming coming off the bus. I looked in the communications book and I knew it'd say that he'd been in there. The escort didn't know. There is no communication and you are left to just guess what has happened. And there have been many instances like that."¹⁸

While another shared an example of challenges when a child has to share transport with another child who is physically abusive:

"Nothing was done, until one day the children came home hysterical because they had been hit and had their hair pulled out and I complained and said I didn't feel that they were safe. Transport always wants evidence, it's disgusting that they don't listen to what you say. I had to put my children in a taxi with this child until the other child was violent and until that point, nothing could be done."¹⁹

While post-16 provision is outside of the remit of the inquiry, we have received evidence on this issue, and in particular transport issues. The National Autistic Society told us that they were concerned that autistic learners who often attend further education beyond the age of 19 are "not currently served by legislation". They highlighted inconsistencies across different local authorities, with some local authorities providing learner travel to colleges and sixth forms on a discretionary basis. They called for this to be brought into the scope of the Learner Travel Measure "to ensure it better aligns with the Additional Learning Needs Act."²⁰ Natspec said that learners with additional learning needs who are

¹⁵ [School visit note 2 – 29 June 2023, paragraphs 34-36](#)

¹⁶ [Written evidence, AEC 33, Individual](#)

¹⁷ [Written evidence, AEC 66, Joining the Dots Parents and Carers](#)

¹⁸ Citizen Engagement – notes of interviews (not published yet)

¹⁹ Citizen Engagement – notes of interviews (not published yet)

²⁰ [Written evidence, AEC 05 Third Sector Additional Needs Alliance](#)



attending a specialist FE college face disadvantage because of a “lack of fit-for-purpose post-16 education transport policy...”²¹

This also echoed with some of experiences we heard directly from parents. One parent told us when their child started at further education college they were quoted a cost of £178 a week for an accessible taxi, yet if they had lived in a neighbouring local authority, this cost would have been met by the local authority. When they raised this, they were told that their child “shouldn’t be enrolled in college when I knew they had no transport.” They then had to change their working patterns so they could take their child to college, with the taxi picking them up. This still costs £88 a week. The young person told us that it was simply discrimination, because they cannot get on a bus.²² We also heard from other parents about issues with post-16 transport, with one family having to “go to the papers and bring in a solicitor”.²³

What are your views on the evidence we have gathered? Does this reflect your understanding of the issues across Wales, and the impact it can have on access to education and childcare?

Pupil Absence report

In our [Pupil Absence report](#) we recommended that the Welsh Government ensures that decisions on learner travel are driven by the individual and specific needs of children and young people. We said that the Welsh Government should ensure that local authorities are funded to deliver a learner first approach to learner travel. We also said that the current review of the learner travel measure should be radical in looking for innovative solutions. While we were pleased to see this recommendation was accepted in principle, the narrative was short on reassurances that our recommendation would ultimately be delivered upon.

Could you outline the Welsh Government’s current position on our recommendation?

Petitions

There are also a number of petitions currently under consideration by the Petitions Committee on which link to these issues:

[Provide free public transport for all secondary school pupils](#)

[Provide free and accessible public transport for under 18s in Wales to lower carbon emissions and boost growth](#)

²¹ [Written evidence, AEC 38, Natspec](#)

²² [Note – Sparkle Focus Group, September 2023, paragraph 42](#)

²³ [Written evidence, AEC 08, Individual](#)

For school transport guaranteed for all comprehensive children

In responding to the first petition listed above, you said following the initial review of the Learner Travel Measure which was concluded in 2022, further work had started on the wider review of the measure, and that “Key findings and examples of good practice from local, national and international research will inform advice due to be submitted for me to review this summer.”

As we approach the end of the year, can you advise what has happened since this advice was submitted to you over the summer? What will be the next steps, and when will they result in change on the ground for learners across Wales? While we acknowledge the complexities around learner travel and the ongoing financial challenges faced across the public sector, we believe there is a real need for pace and urgency when dealing with this important issue.

Children’s Commissioner

As you will be aware the Children’s Commissioner has repeatedly recommended that public transport should be free to children and young people. In her most recent annual report, the Commissioner called for the child poverty action plan to “include a commitment to a free public transport pilot for children and young people under 18 within this Senedd term.” This builds on similar recommendations made previously by the Commissioner.

In her evidence to the Committee’s current inquiry, she said that “disabled children aren’t always provided with safe accessible transport to education” which certainly chimed with the evidence we have heard directly from parents. She also said that while she was pleased that the review was ongoing she was “...disappointed with the slow progress which has been the case for many years.”²⁴ She said it was an issue that “makes such a fundamental difference” to children and young people.²⁵

We would welcome your views on the Commissioner’s recommendation for a free public transport pilot for children and young people under 18 within this Senedd term.

Children in Wales

In Children in Wales Annual Child and Family Poverty Survey findings report 2023, transport costs and availability were identified as one of the top 5 poverty related issues. This was the case in both rural and urban areas. The report indicated that as families struggle with increasing household costs, they are reducing the number of days their children are attending school, because they cannot afford to take their children five days a week. Practitioners in responding to the survey noted that the costs of transport “directly correspond to the rise in flexible schooling requests, or in some cases, full-time

²⁴ Written evidence, AEC 01, Children’s Commissioner for Wales

²⁵ CYPE Committee, 18 May 2023, Record of Proceedings, paragraph 45

home schooling.” This then has broader impacts on children, who become more isolated, and can fall behind on school work. Children in Wales also said that reduced attendance affects parents, with increased food costs, stress and anxiety, and reduced available for work. The practitioners call for free transport for all learners in full time education; increased accessibility and availability of school transport.²⁶

What work is the Welsh Government doing to alleviate the cost of living pressures on transport costs for children, young people and their families?

Welsh Youth Parliament

In the recent report by the Welsh Youth Parliament Climate and Environment Committee, Sustainable Ways, they said that it was clear that fares are one of the biggest issues that stop young people from using public transport more than they do now. They called for the introduction of free public transport under the age of 25, along with a number of other measures to improve access to sustainable transport for children and young people.

What are your views on the recommendations made by the Welsh Youth Parliament?

Financial pressures on local authorities

Finally, we are aware that as local authorities consider their budgets for the coming financial year that any discretionary learner travel provision that they currently provide may be at risk. We are conscious that local authorities are carefully considering any non-statutory service or provision.

As an example, we know that Rhondda Cynon Taf Council are considering a review of the learner travel provision. At their Cabinet meeting on 20 November they considered a report which looked at three options:

- a. Status Quo;
- b. Provide mainstream English, Welsh and Faith primary and secondary school and college transport in line with statutory distance criteria;
- c. Remove all discretionary provision.

The report outlines that the preferred option is option b, which would result in savings of approximately £2.5m a year. Such changes would mean “approximately 2,750 pupils no longer receiving access to free Home to School transport.” It also states that this would mean that the

²⁶ Children in Wales. Annual Child and Family Poverty Survey Findings 2023: School Transport: Summary

Council would be meeting the requirements of the Measure “with 18 of the 22 Council’s in Wales already adopting the statutory distance requirements.”²⁷

While we are not commenting on the specifics in RCT, we use this as a case study to highlight discussions that may be happening in other local authorities.

Clearly, as we have recommended previously and have reiterated in this letter, we believe it is important that local authorities are able to make a learner first decision on learner travel, rather than being driven by financial imperative. We understand the financial pressures that both local authorities and Welsh Government are under, but believe that affordable and accessible learner travel is critical to children and young people being able to attend and flourish in school.

To what extent is the Welsh Government monitoring changes in local authority provision as a result of financial constraints; and the impact that is then having on learner engagement and attendance?

I would appreciate if you could provide a response by 3 January 2024.

I am copying this letter to the Welsh Youth Parliament Climate and Environment Committee; Petitions Committee and the Minister for Education and Welsh Language.

Yours sincerely,



Jayne Bryant MS

Chair

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.

cc: Jack Sargeant MS, Chair Petitions Committee

Jeremy Miles MS, Minister for Education and Welsh Language

Welsh Youth Parliament, Climate and Environment Committee

²⁷ Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council, Cabinet meeting, Item 4, Review of the Council’s Home to School Transport Policy, 20 November 2023.

Agenda Item 8.10

Date/Dyddiad: 14 November 2023

Ask for/Gofynnwch am:

Telephone/Rhif ffôn

Your Ref/Eich Cyf:

My Ref/Fy Nghyf: DRT/AMB/S23/40556

e-mail/e-bost

chiefexecutive@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk

The Vale of Glamorgan Council
Civic Offices, Holton Road, Barry CF63 4RU
Telephone: (01446) 700111

Cyngor Bro Morgannwg
Swyddfeydd Dinesig, Heol Holton, Y Barri CF63 4RU
Ffôn: (01446) 700111

www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk



Jane Bryant MS
Chair
Children, Young People and Education Committee
Welsh Parliament
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1SN

seneddchildren@senedd.cymru

Dear Jane,

WELSH GOVERNMENT (WG) FUNDING OF THE FAMILY DRUG AND ALCOHOL COURT (FDAC) PILOT

Thank you for your correspondence in relation to the above.

The Cardiff and Vale of Glamorgan Family Drug and Alcohol Court pilot was funded by Welsh Government for a period of 2 years which concludes at the end of November 2023. As the programme for parents can last for approximately 20 weeks, it was necessary to ensure that all parents had the opportunity to complete the full programme within the timescales of the pilot and so the project stopped taking new referrals in June /July of this year.

Welsh Government also funded CASCADE to undertake a research evaluation of the pilot and the outcomes of that evaluation will be available in early 2024.

It is anticipated that the outcomes of the evaluation will help shape and inform the future planning of drug and alcohol services for parents going through the family courts within Wales.

Some confusion may have arisen regarding your impression that the funding of the pilot was withdrawn. Due to the time discrepancies between the end of the pilot and completion date of the CASCADE Evaluation report, Cardiff and Vale of Glamorgan local authorities requested that Welsh Government consider extending the FDAC pilot funding for a period of 1 year. This was to allow sufficient time to circulate, review and

consider any learning from the Evaluation report prior to the cessation of the pilot and the disbanding of the team.

As this hadn't been factored into WG budget planning it was decided by WG that any extension to the pilot was not feasible within their current budget constraints and that any decisions regarding the future of FDACs in Wales should be informed by the evaluation.

Although no new referrals were accepted into the FDAC pilot from July 2023 (to ensure that all families were timetabled to conclude within the FDAC pilot timeframe) a small number of families may require an extension to the 'Trial for Change' stage of the programme and if this is agreed this date would surpass the pilot end date.

For these families a community intervention plan will be recommended with FDAC trained staff from the regional Integrated Family Support team continuing to support the family through the FDAC process.

I hope this clarifies the position in relation to the temporary nature of the funding of the FDAC pilot by WG, the necessity to conclude the programme in a safe way for families and the intention that any future plans in relation to FDACs in Wales will be informed by the research that has been commissioned by WG.

Yours Sincerely



Robert Thomas
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Agenda Item 8.11

Senedd Cymru

Bae Caerdydd, Caerdydd, CF99 1SN
SeneddCyllid@senedd.cymru
senedd.cymru/SeneddCyllid
0300 200 6565

Welsh Parliament

Cardiff Bay, Cardiff, CF99 1SN
SeneddFinance@senedd.wales
senedd.wales/SeneddFinance
0300 200 6565

Y Pwyllgor Cyllid

Finance Committee

Chair, Children, Young People, and Education Committee
Chair, Climate Change, Environment, and Infrastructure Committee
Chair, Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee
Chair, Economy, Trade, and Rural Affairs Committee
Chair, Equality and Social Justice Committee
Chair, Health and Social Care Committee
Chair, Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee
Chair, Local Government and Housing Committee

14 November 2023

Dear Committee Chairs,

Draft Budget 2024-25

I wrote to you in April, setting out the Finance Committee's pre-budget engagement work. On the 12 July, the Committee held its annual Plenary debate on the Welsh Government's Spending Priorities for the forthcoming Budget, and I am grateful to all that contributed. I am now writing to provide a further update on scrutiny of the Draft Budget 2024-25.

Consultation and timetable

The Finance Committee has issued its pre-budget consultation, on behalf of all Committees, which closes on 30 November. The responses to the consultation will be available on our webpage.

Due to the UK Government's Autumn Statement that will take place on 22 November, the Minister for Finance and Local Government (the Minister) has confirmed that she will publish the outline and detailed Draft Budget together on 19 December. The Minister will appear before the Finance Committee the following day on 20 December for an initial evidence session.

Budget focus

The focus of this year's budget is likely to centre on the impact of the cost of living crisis, inflation and

the transparency of the Welsh Government's financial decisions. In addition, the Finance Committee has identified a number of areas which it would like to see the focus of scrutiny, namely:

- what impact inflationary pressures have had on revenue and capital budgets and how this has changed affordability of previous plans;
- how resources should be targeted to support economic recovery and what sectors in particular need to be prioritised;
- to what extent alleviating climate change should be prioritised in supporting economic recovery;
- how budget allocations support aspirations of the Net Zero Wales plan;
- Welsh Government policies to reduce poverty and the impact of cost of living crisis and gender inequality;
- the approach to preventative spending and how this is represented in resource allocations (preventative spending is defined as spending which focuses on preventing problems and eases future demand on services by intervening early);
- sustainability of public services, innovation and service transformation;
- how evidence is driving Welsh Government priority setting and budget allocations;
- how the Welsh Government should use taxation powers and borrowing;
- support for businesses, economic growth and agriculture post-EU transition;

In addition, the following areas were identified as priorities during the Committee's stakeholder and engagement events during the summer term:

- the need for services to collaborate to meet the challenges facing the NHS and social care sector;
- that local government needs sufficient resources to deal with mounting demands;
- that more support should be provided for those studying and working in the education sector;
- that a focus on community-led solutions and prevention is needed to tackle the root causes of poverty and inequality;
- that there needs to be a move away from ad-hoc funding for the voluntary sector;



- that there should be a focus on turning Wales's potential for green energy into reality.

We hope our engagement work, and forthcoming public consultation, will complement and inform the work of policy Committees and I would encourage you to use some of the areas outlined above as the focus for your budget scrutiny.

If you have any questions about any aspect of the Draft Budget process, please feel free to contact me or the Clerk to the Finance Committee, Owain Roberts, 0300 200 6388, seneddfinance@senedd.wales.

Yours sincerely,



Peredur Owen Griffiths
Chair, Finance Committee

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.





Jayne Bryant MS
Chair of the Children, Young People
and Education Committee
Welsh Parliament
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1SN

Thursday 16 November 2023

Dear Chair,

Subject: Equality and Human Rights Monitor: Is Wales Fairer? 2023

I am writing to bring to your attention our landmark report into the state of equality and human rights in Wales in 2023. This report focuses on the Welsh context and sits alongside our report on Britain which we have laid in the UK Parliament and published today (16 November) In particular, we would like to highlight findings and recommendations relevant to you as Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee.

Bydd y Comisiwn yn croesawu gohebiaeth yn y Gymraeg a'r Saesneg.

The Commission welcomes correspondence in Welsh or English.

Ff/T: 029 2044 7710

E: correspondence@equalityhumanrights.com

Tŷ'r Cwmnïau (Llawr 1af),
Ffordd y Goron, Caerdydd, CF14 3UZ

Companies House (1st Floor),
Crown Way, Cardiff, CF14 3UZ

equalityhumanrights.com

Following on from our last “Is Wales Fairer?” report in 2018, the Equality and Human Rights Monitor: Is Wales Fairer 2023 draws on the comprehensive data outlined in our to assess progress on equality and human rights over the last five years across Wales.

Overall, we have found that there have been significant challenges to equality and human rights over the last five years including:

- the profound impact of the COVID-19 pandemic
- the UK’s departure from the European Union
- the period of high inflation as well as the economic impact of the war in Ukraine

These events have exacerbated some persistent, long-term inequalities. For example, the data shows that whilst more young people have been reporting mental health conditions since 2010, the numbers rose further during the pandemic and remain high.

These events have also been a catalyst for new trends. For example, the increase in home working has benefitted parents, older and disabled people,

Bydd y Comisiwn yn croesawu gohebiaeth yn y Gymraeg a'r Saesneg.

The Commission welcomes correspondence in Welsh or English.

Ff/T: 029 2044 7710

E: correspondence@equalityhumanrights.com

Tŷ'r Cwmnïau (Llawr 1af),
Ffordd y Goron, Caerdydd, CF14 3UZ

Companies House (1st Floor),
Crown Way, Cardiff, CF14 3UZ

equalityhumanrights.com

and those with caring responsibilities.

You can read the full report on our website. I would particularly like to draw your attention to some of our findings where we have seen that:

- The education attainment gap at foundation phase level between disabled and non-disabled children has widened and disabled adults are less likely to be employed than non-disabled adults.
- There has been a drop in the proportion of rape offences recorded against women that result in charges. Black or mixed ethnic people are more likely to have experienced sexual assault in the past year than other ethnic groups.
- There are significant equality and human rights data gaps in Wales, particularly for the protected characteristics of religion, gender reassignment, and sexual orientation in all areas of life and additionally for race in the areas of tertiary education and health.
- The proportion of public appointments of people from ethnic minority backgrounds has increased in recent years and women's representation in local government and as chief executives in public appointments has risen.

Our report also sets out recommendations to address these findings, including for:

Bydd y Comisiwn yn croesawu gohebiaeth yn y Gymraeg a'r Saesneg.

The Commission welcomes correspondence in Welsh or English.

Ff/T: 029 2044 7710

E: correspondence@equalityhumanrights.com

Tŷ'r Cwmnïau (Llawr 1af),
Ffordd y Goron, Caerdydd, CF14 3UZ

Companies House (1st Floor),
Crown Way, Cardiff, CF14 3UZ

equalityhumanrights.com



- The Welsh Government, local authorities and schools should address the widening attainment gap between disabled and non-disabled children and the under-representation of disabled people participating in and completing apprenticeships.
- The Welsh Government, police forces and other members of the Wales Criminal Justice Partnership Board should better understand ethnic disparities in experiences of sexual assault and ensure that charge rates for hate crimes, sexual assault, and rape are appropriate to reported and recorded levels.
- We recommend that the Welsh Government and all public bodies identify how they can better understand issues and fill evidence gaps by the protected characteristics of religion, gender reassignment, and sexual orientation to meet the needs of their communities.
- To increase diversity in political representation and to ensure that diversity data is collected, the Welsh Government and the Senedd Commission should call on the UK government to commence section 106 of the Equality Act 2010 in relation to Senedd elections, to transfer the powers to do so, or to legislate for the Senedd electoral arrangements.

As you will be aware, public authorities are required under the [Public Sector Equality Duty \(PSED\)](#) to publish specific and measurable equality objectives.

Our recommendations are designed to support the development of these objectives and help ensure that this legal obligation can be performed in a way

Bydd y Comisiwn yn croesawu gohebiaeth yn y Gymraeg a'r Saesneg.

The Commission welcomes correspondence in Welsh or English.

Ff/T: 029 2044 7710

E: correspondence@equalityhumanrights.com

Tŷ'r Cwmnïau (Llawr 1af),
Ffordd y Goron, Caerdydd, CF14 3UZ

Companies House (1st Floor),
Crown Way, Cardiff, CF14 3UZ

equalityhumanrights.com



that is strategic and focused on the most significant equality challenges identified by the data.

I would encourage you to consider how our findings and recommendations can inform the work of the Committee and support scrutiny of the actions and progress of Welsh Government and public bodies in Wales to address inequalities.

We would be keen to discuss these findings and recommendations in more detail and would be delighted to offer you a meeting at your convenience.

Yours sincerely,

Rev Ruth Coombs

Head of Wales, Equality and Human Rights Commission

Direct telephone: 029 2044 7720

Bydd y Comisiwn yn croesawu gohebiaeth yn y Gymraeg a'r Saesneg.

The Commission welcomes correspondence in Welsh or English.

Ff/T: 029 2044 7710

E: correspondence@equalityhumanrights.com

Tŷ'r Cwmnïau (Llawr 1af),
Ffordd y Goron, Caerdydd, CF14 3UZ

Companies House (1st Floor),
Crown Way, Cardiff, CF14 3UZ

equalityhumanrights.com

Jane Bryant AS
Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee

Jane.bryant@senedd.cymru

17/11/2023

Dear Chair,

Post-compulsory education and the Welsh language: the learners' voice

Today I've published a research report into the experiences of post-16 learners in Welsh-medium or bilingual education in schools and further education colleges across Wales. Over 1,000 young people contributed to the research, which provides valuable insights into their views and experiences, including their reasons for choosing Welsh-medium education, their views on the provision and their intention in terms of their future education and careers.

The key findings are presented below and a copy of the full report is attached for your information.

Key findings of the research:

- The majority of Welsh speakers over the age of 16 who were surveyed in schools and further education colleges are proud that they can speak Welsh, and see the language as an advantage for their career prospects.
- Opportunities to study through the medium of Welsh are important for Welsh speakers when choosing a place of study, as well as opportunities to use Welsh as part of everyday life at school or college.
- The majority of learners surveyed in schools and further education colleges state that their experience of Welsh-medium or bilingual education is good or very good.
- Of the Welsh speakers who intend to continue their education after leaving school or college, only 40% intend to stay in Wales. For Welsh speakers who intend to

Comisiynydd y Gymraeg
Siambrau'r Farchnad
5-7 Heol Eglwys Fair
Caerdydd CF10 1AT

0345 6033 221
post@comisiynyddygyymraeg.cymru
Croesewir gohebiaeth yn y Gymraeg a'r Saesneg

comisiynyddygyymraeg.cymru

Welsh Language Commissioner
Market Chambers
5-7 St Mary Street
Cardiff CF10 1AT

0345 6033 221
post@welshlanguagecommissioner.wales
Correspondence welcomed in Welsh and English

welshlanguagecommissioner.wales



Comisiynydd y
Gymraeg
Welsh Language
Commissioner

continue studying in Wales, the opportunity to study in Welsh or bilingually will be an important factor in choosing their next place of study.

- The research highlights differences between school and college learners, in terms of their perception of their ability in Welsh, the language medium of their education and their attitudes as regards the importance of the Welsh language.
- Learners' main reasons for not choosing to study subjects through the medium of Welsh were:
 - the perception that their English language skills were stronger and that studying through the medium of English was easier for them;
 - that a subject (or subjects) were not available in Welsh;
 - the perception that their further studies were likely to be in English or that there were better study prospects in English.

The report concludes that careful consideration must be given to how to support and strengthen Welsh language provision in the post-16 education sector, particularly in the context of developing the language skills of the future workforce.

We hope that this research will contribute to the development and expansion of post-16 education through the medium of Welsh, thereby increasing young people's opportunities to develop their Welsh language skills and use the language in education and beyond. We hope therefore to contribute to reaching the targets of the Cymraeg 2050 strategy.

We trust that the report will be of interest to you and we would welcome an opportunity to discuss it further.

Yours sincerely,

Efa Gruffudd Jones
Welsh Language Commissioner

Copi at: SeneddPlant@senedd.cymru



Post-compulsory education and the Welsh language: the learners' voice

17 November, 2023

Key findings at a glance

- The vast majority of Welsh speakers over the age of 16 who were surveyed in schools and further education colleges are proud that they can speak Welsh, and see the language as an advantage for their career prospects.
- Opportunities to study through the medium of Welsh are important for Welsh speakers when choosing a place of study, as well as opportunities to use Welsh as part of everyday life at school or college.
- The vast majority of learners surveyed in schools and further education colleges state that their experience of Welsh-medium or bilingual education is good or very good.
- Of the Welsh speakers who intend to continue their education after leaving school or college, only 40% intend to stay in Wales. For Welsh speakers who intend to continue studying in Wales, the opportunity to study in Welsh or bilingually will be an important factor in choosing their next place of study.
- The research highlights differences between school and college learners, in terms of their perception of their ability in Welsh, the language medium of their education and their attitudes as regards the importance of the Welsh language.
- Learners' main reasons for not choosing to study subjects through the medium of Welsh were: the perception that their English language skills were stronger and that studying through the medium of English was easier for them; that a subject (or subjects) were not available in Welsh; that their further studies were likely to be in English or that there were better study prospects in English, in their opinion.

Introduction

The post-compulsory education and training sector plays a crucial role in ensuring linguistic progression for learners. This is the period that bridges statutory education and the world of work, and it contributes directly to the aim of creating long-term Welsh speakers.

This research was intended to learn about the views and experiences of post-16 learners in Welsh-medium or bilingual education in schools and further education colleges across Wales. The aim was to find out their reasons for choosing Welsh-medium education, their views on the provision and their intention in terms of their future education and careers.

Sample

Purposive sampling was used to obtain feedback from young people in schools and further education colleges that provide education through the medium of Welsh or bilingually. Schools and further education colleges were contacted in a cross section of areas and learners were interviewed via an online questionnaire in early 2023. 1063 individuals responded from 37 different education establishments, including five further education colleges and 32 schools. 637 respondents were Year 12 or 13 learners in schools and 426 attended further education colleges. Respondents were asked to note their ability in Welsh, on a five-point scale, and their response is shown in Figure 1 below.

As the purpose of the questionnaire was to gather the views and experiences of learners who were likely to receive some of their education through the medium of Welsh, the discussion below, in many cases, focuses only on the response of fluent Welsh speakers and those who can speak a fair amount of Welsh. This also allows for a fairer comparison between the outcomes of school and college learners.

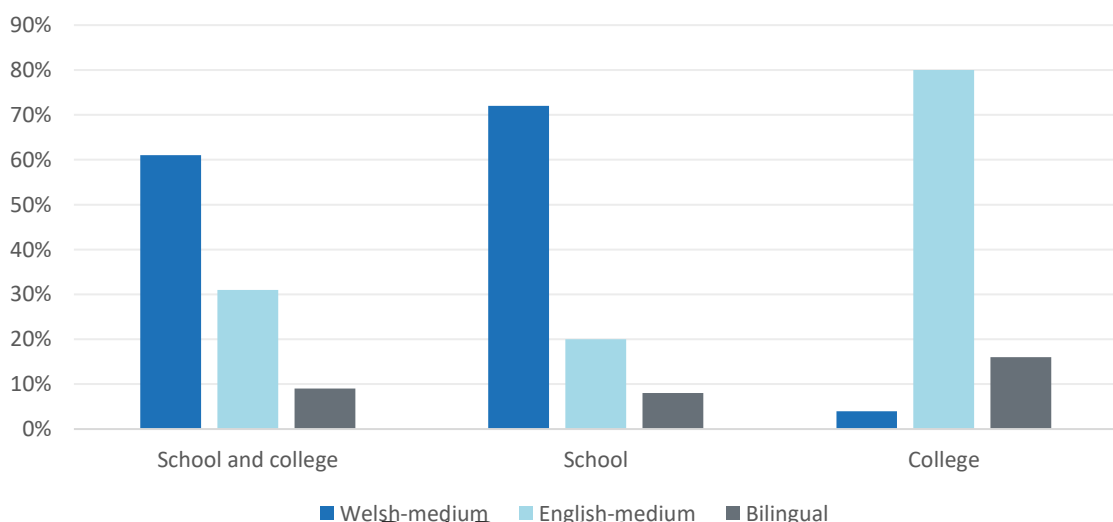
Figure 1: Learners' perception of their ability in Welsh

	Total	School	College
I am fluent in Welsh	70%	93%	35%
I can speak a fair amount of Welsh	9%	5%	15%
I can speak a little Welsh	8%	0%	20%
I can say just a few words	8%	0%	19%
I cannot speak Welsh	4%	0%	10%

Language medium of study

Respondents were asked what subjects they were studying, and in which language they were studying those subjects.

Figure 2: The percentage of subjects fluent Welsh speakers and those who can speak a fair amount of Welsh study through the medium of Welsh, through the medium of English, or bilingually

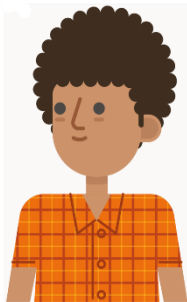
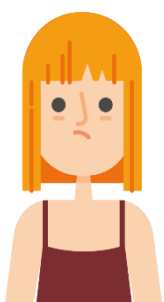


Considering all the fluent Welsh speakers and those who can speak a fair amount of Welsh, we see that they studied 61% of their subjects through the medium of Welsh. When comparing school and college learners with each other, however, there is a big difference between the percentage of subjects that school learners studied through the medium of Welsh (72%) and the percentage that college learners studied through the medium of Welsh (4%). There was also a big difference between the two cohorts in terms of the percentage of subjects they were studying through the medium of English. 33% of fluent Welsh speakers and those who can speak a fair amount of Welsh studied all their subjects through the medium of Welsh. This equated to 44% of school learners and only 1% of college learners who responded to the questionnaire, which is another marked difference between the two cohorts.

Context for the above results is found in Welsh Government statistics on Welsh-medium and bilingual learning activities in post-16 education during 2021-22.¹ That year, 15.2% of school sixth form activities, and only 0.2% of further education institutions' activities, were Welsh-medium. When comparing activities labelled as bilingual, we see that 5.9% of school sixth form activities were in that category and 3.7% of further education institutions' activities.

The questionnaire asked fluent Welsh speakers and those who can speak a fair amount of Welsh, who weren't studying every subject through the medium of Welsh, for their reasons for not doing so. Three main replies became apparent.

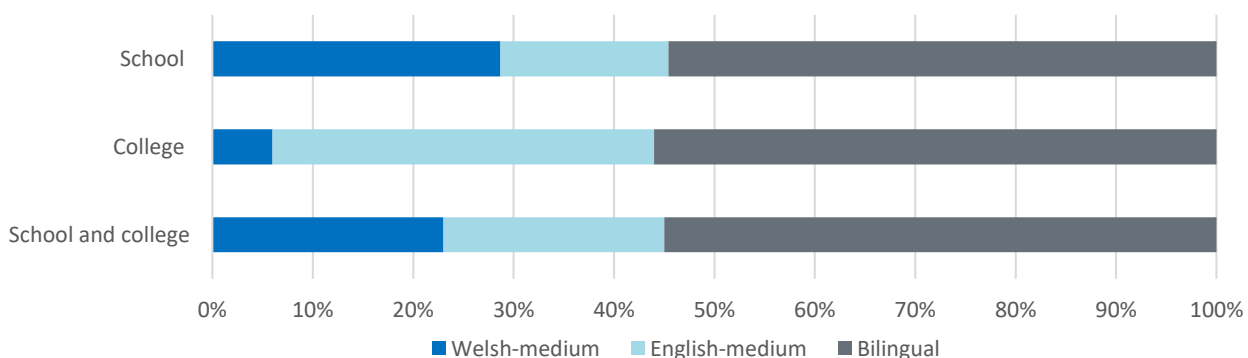
Figure 3: The three most common reasons why fluent Welsh speakers and those who can speak a fair amount of Welsh do not study through the medium of Welsh



- A perception that their English language skills are stronger and that studying through the medium of English is easier for them
- Subject/subjects are not available in Welsh
- A perception that further studies are likely to be in English or that there are better study prospects in English

The fluent Welsh speakers and those who can speak a fair amount of Welsh were asked whether they would prefer to study through the medium of Welsh or English or bilingually.

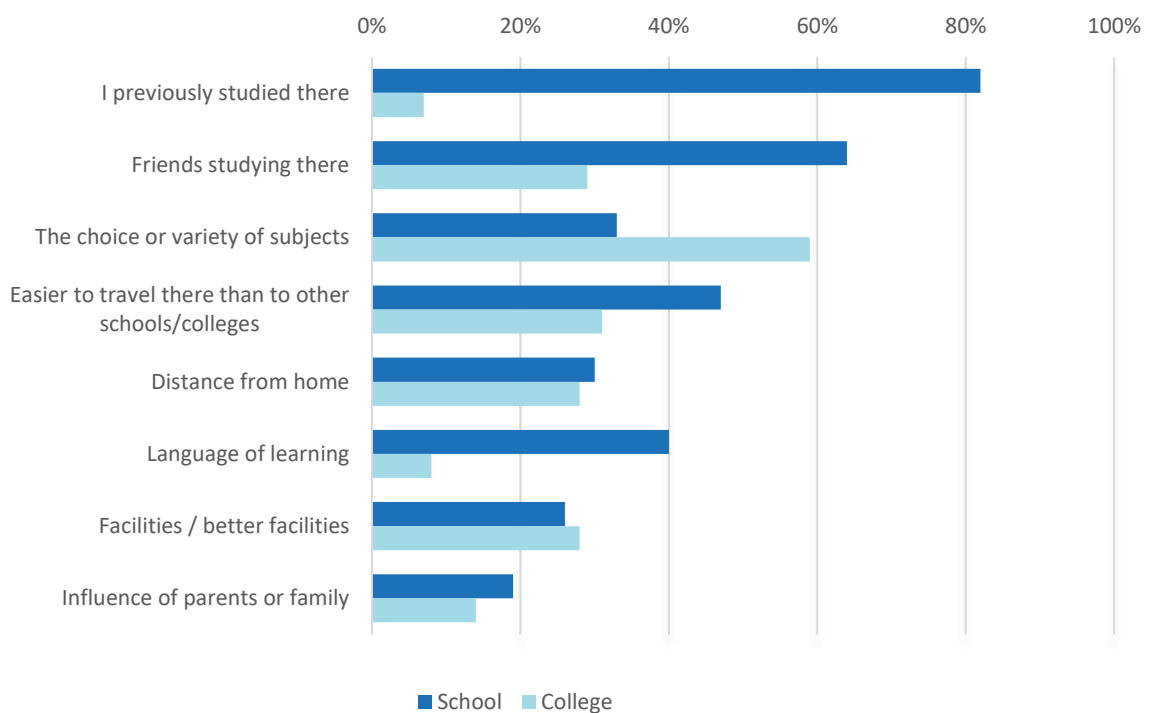
Figure 4: The ideal language medium of fluent Welsh speakers and those who can speak a fair amount of Welsh



The fact that over half of the fluent Welsh speakers and those who can speak a fair amount of Welsh state that they favour bilingual education raises further questions. For example, what does bilingual education mean to those learners? Bilingual education can vary considerably in terms of how and when both languages are used. The outcomes of that education can also vary considerably, in the context of learner attainment in both languages and the evidence that it is Welsh-medium education that is most likely to ensure that learners have strong skills in Welsh and English. It is important to consider these results in the context of learners' views on the importance of the Welsh language to them. These statistics must be treated with caution therefore and further research carried out with post-16 learners in order to establish what bilingual education means to them.

Reasons for choosing a place of study

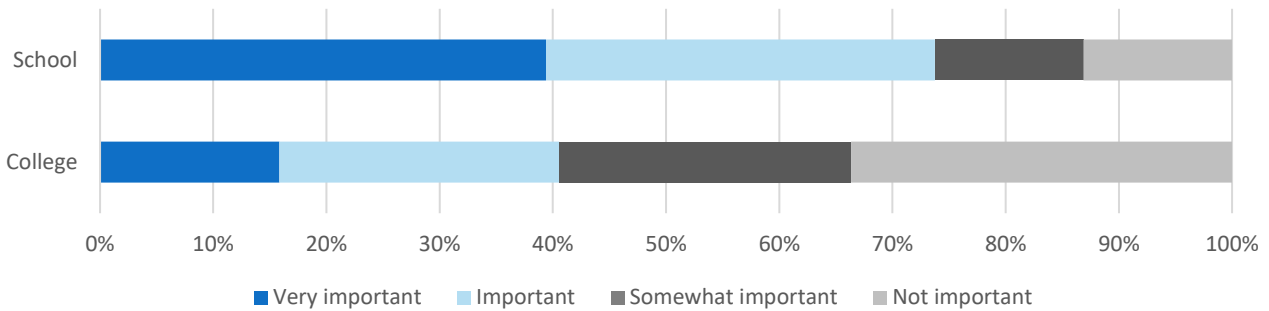
Figure 5: Learners' most common reasons for choosing their place of study



The figure above shows some interesting differences between learners at school and further education colleges, in the context of their reasons for choosing their place of study. For example, the language of learning is a factor identified by five times more school learners than college learners. In addition, the choice or variety of subjects is seen as a factor identified by over half of the college learners, compared to a third of the school learners.

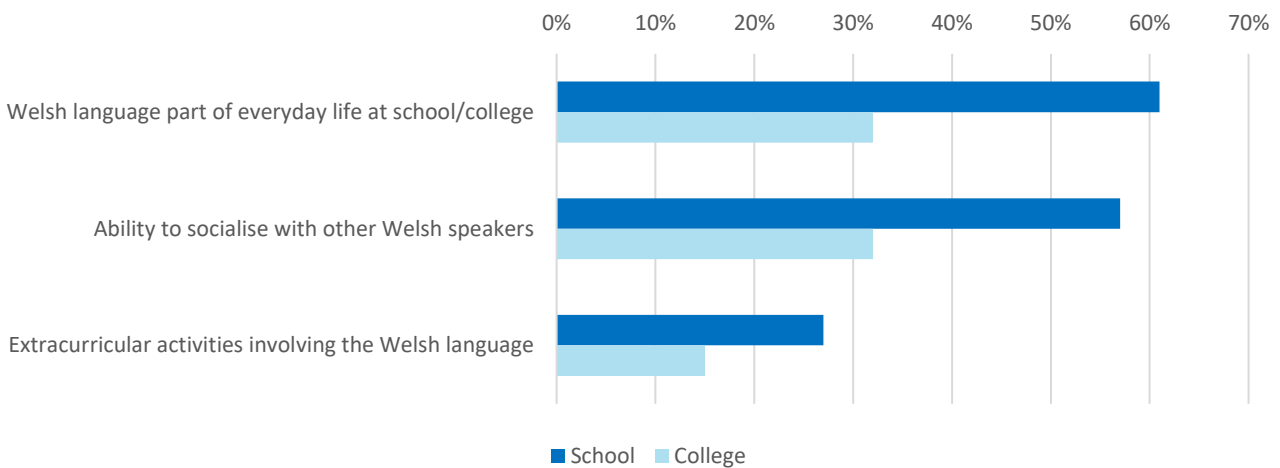
The sample was asked how important it was to them that the school or college they chose offered an opportunity to study through the medium of Welsh. For 65% of fluent Welsh speakers and those who can speak a fair amount of Welsh, the availability of Welsh-medium provision was important or very important when selecting a place of study. Among the school learners, this was true of 73% of fluent Welsh speakers and those who can speak a fair amount of Welsh, compared to the equivalent figure of 41% for further education college learners. Their response is shown below.

Figure 6: The importance of Welsh-medium provision to fluent Welsh speakers and those who can speak a fair amount of Welsh when choosing a place of study



They were also asked about the importance of other opportunities to use the Welsh language and the learners' response is shown below.

Figure 7: The percentage of Welsh speakers and those who can speak a fair amount of Welsh who noted that the following matters were important to them when selecting a place of study



Experiences and opinions regarding Welsh or bilingual education

Learners were asked to describe their experience of studying through the medium of Welsh or bilingually, and their response is shown below.

Figure 8: The experience of fluent Welsh speakers and those who can speak a fair amount of Welsh in schools

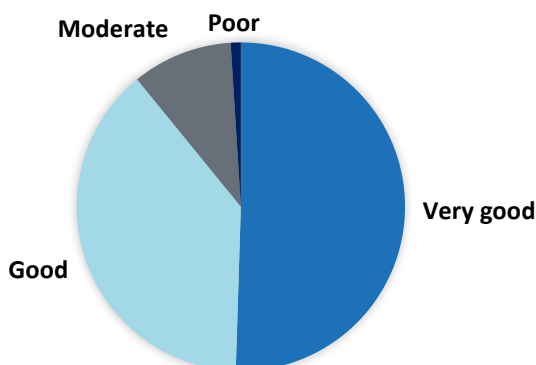
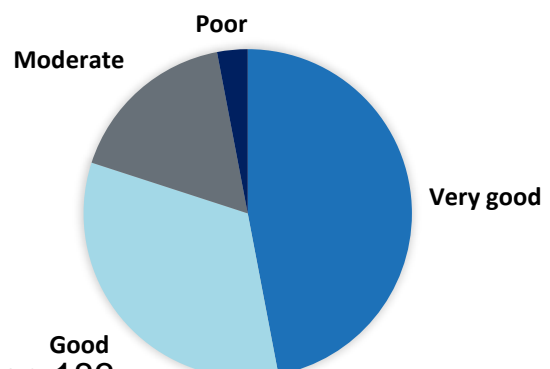
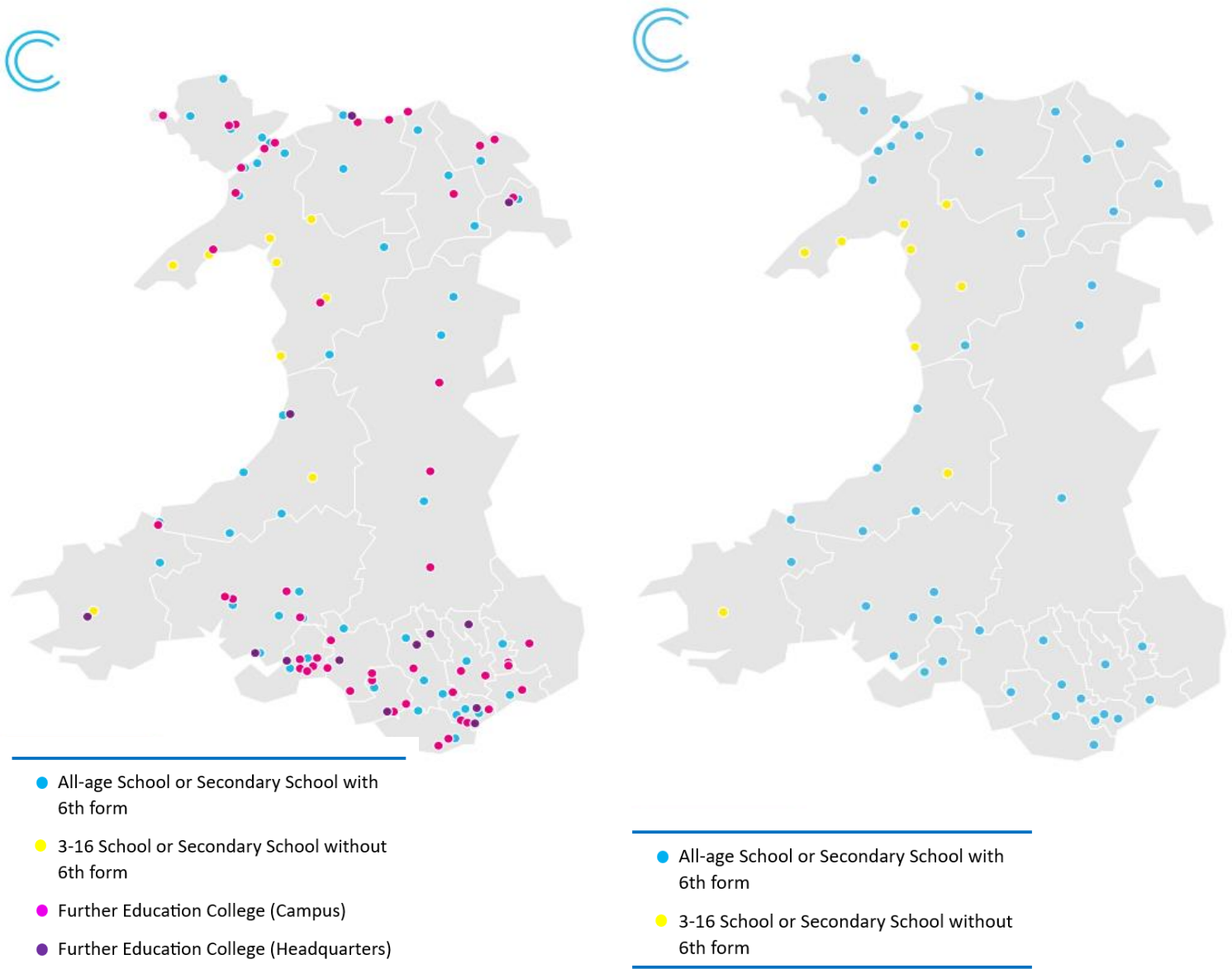


Figure 9: The experience of fluent Welsh speakers and those who can speak a fair amount of Welsh in colleges



90% of fluent Welsh speakers and those who can speak a fair amount of Welsh who attended schools said that their experience was good or very good. The corresponding figure for further education colleges was 80%. For learners at schools and further education colleges, the main reasons for noting that their experience was good or very good were good teachers, good support and that the education through the medium of Welsh was excellent.

Figure 10: Schools and further education colleges providing Welsh-medium or bilingual education, based on a mapping exercise in 2021



The questionnaire asked learners to what extent they agreed with the statement that there were sufficient opportunities to study through the medium of Welsh in their area. 60% agreed or strongly agreed. The proportion of positive responses varied according to the region where learners studied. In mid Wales 78% of learners agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, and it should be noted that the vast majority of responses came from the west of the region. In north Wales 68% of learners agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. In south-west Wales the proportion was 57% and in south-east Wales 47% of learners agreed or strongly agreed. The maps above show the location of schools and further education colleges in Wales that provide Welsh-medium or bilingual education. There is a clear lack of post-16 provision in several areas.

Using the Welsh Language in the future

Respondents were asked to what extent they agreed with a number of statements about using the Welsh language in the future and their response is shown below.

Figure 11: The percentage of fluent Welsh speakers and those who can speak a fair amount of Welsh in schools and colleges who agreed or strongly agreed with the statements below

	School	College
I'm proud that I'm able to speak Welsh	96%	92%
Being able to speak Welsh will help in my career or with my job prospects	87%	80%
I am confident that I have skills to use Welsh in my career	93%	81%
I am confident that I will use Welsh in my career	60%	58%

The vast majority of fluent Welsh speakers and those who can speak a fair amount of Welsh were proud that they could speak Welsh and considered their language skills to be advantageous to them in the context of their career prospects. A high percentage of them were confident in their Welsh language skills for their careers but, significantly, a lower percentage were confident that they would *use* those skills. This raises a question about learners' perception of opportunities to use the Welsh language in the workplace and suggests a need to discuss that and to raise learners' awareness of the opportunities that could be available to them in the future.

Respondents were asked whether they intended to continue their education after leaving their current place of study and whether they intended to do so in Wales.

Figure 12: The intentions of fluent Welsh speakers and those who can speak a fair amount of Welsh in terms of continuing their education after leaving their current place of study

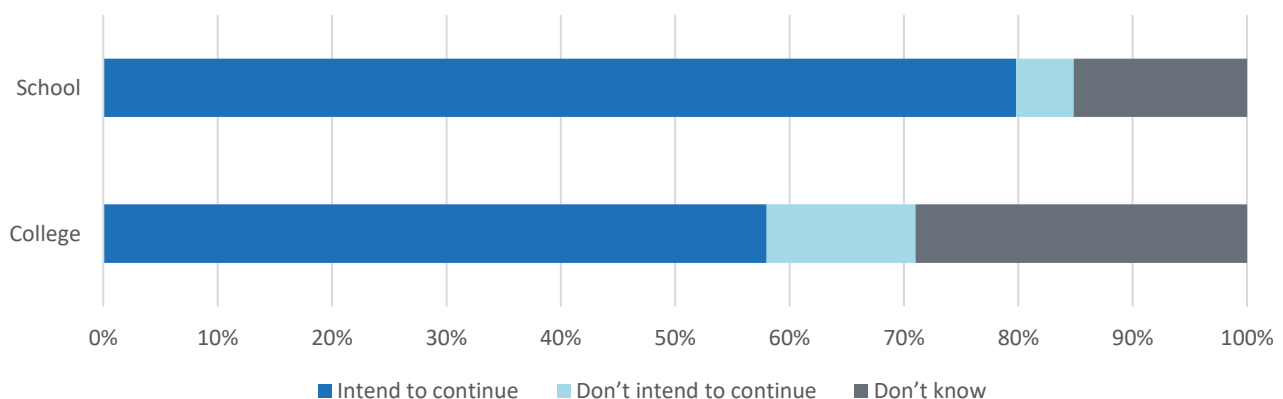
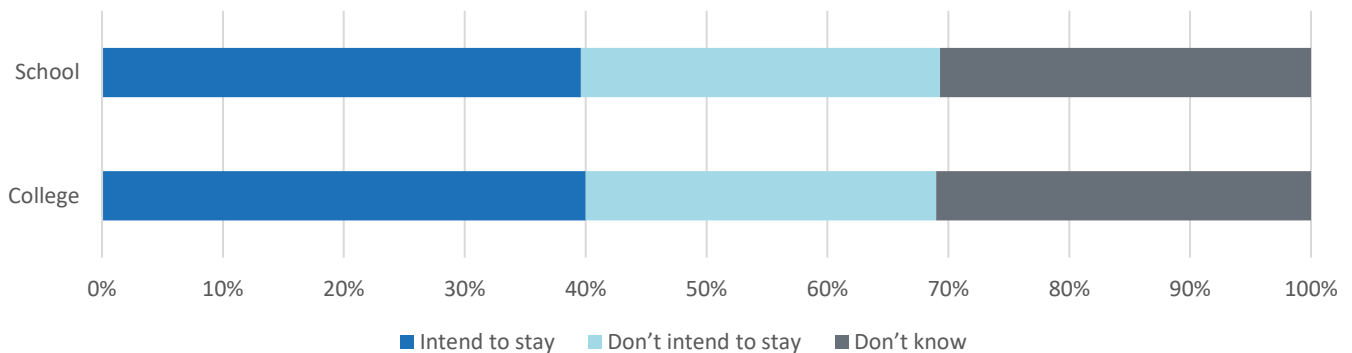


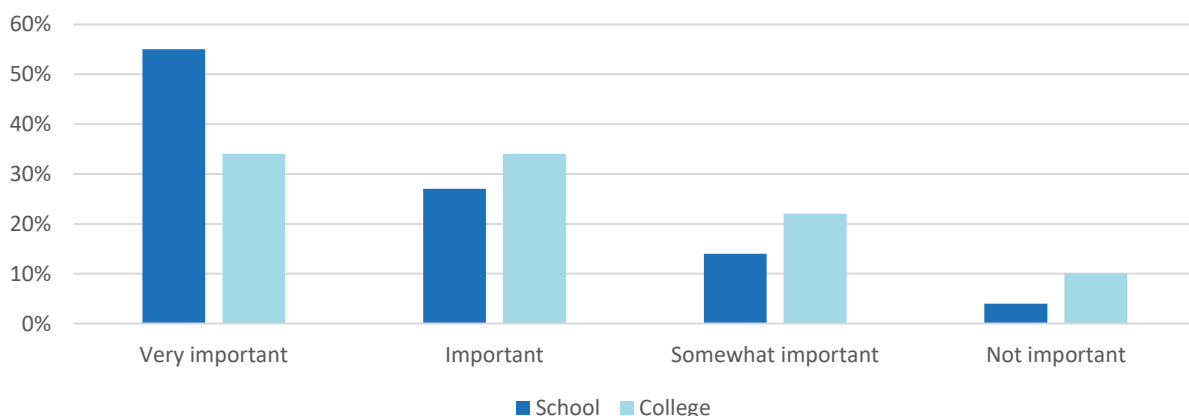
Figure 13: The intentions of fluent Welsh speakers and those who can speak a fair amount of Welsh, who wish to continue their education, in terms of staying in Wales



Only 40% of school and college learners who are fluent Welsh speakers and those who can speak a fair amount of Welsh intend to stay in Wales. Context for this figure is found in Welsh Government statistics on the cross-border flow of students in 2020/21.² These statistics show that 62% of undergraduate and postgraduate students from Wales went to universities in Wales, while 37% went to universities in England. In the same year, 95% of students from England went to universities in England and 95% of students from Scotland went to universities in Scotland. This shows that a substantial percentage of students from Wales leave their country to study, compared with the situation of students from England and Scotland.

The questionnaire respondents who are fluent Welsh speakers and those who can speak a fair amount of Welsh, and who said that they intended to continue studying in Wales, were asked how important it was to be able to study in Welsh or bilingually in their next place of study. 79% of school learners intend to continue their education after leaving school. Of the 40% who intended to stay in Wales, 82% of them, the vast majority, noted that being able to continue to study through the medium of Welsh or bilingually was very important or important to them. 58% of fluent Welsh speakers and those who can speak a fair amount of Welsh in further education colleges were planning to continue their education after completing their course. Of the 40% of these learners who intended to stay in Wales, 68% considered that being able to continue to study through the medium of Welsh or bilingually was very important or important to them.

Figure 14: The views of fluent Welsh speakers and those who can speak a fair amount of Welsh regarding the importance of being able to continue to study through the medium of Welsh or bilingually in their next place of study



² [Cross border flow of full-time students by level of study in Wales](#)

Main findings and considerations

Importance of the Welsh language and education through the medium of Welsh

- The **results show very clearly the importance of the Welsh language to learners in Wales**. The vast majority of Welsh speakers are proud to be able to speak the language (Figure 11). They also note that opportunities to study through the medium of Welsh are important when selecting a place of study, as well as opportunities to use Welsh as part of everyday life at school or college and with their friends (Figures 6 and 7). These findings are significant in the context of future planning of post-compulsory provision.
- Also very positive was the clear message from the majority of learners across Wales that their **experience of Welsh-medium or bilingual education was good or very good** (Figures 8 and 9).

Differences in the situation of the Welsh language in schools and colleges

- The research highlighted **differences between school and college learners, in terms of their perception of their ability in Welsh, the language medium of their education and their attitudes as regards the importance of the Welsh language**.
- Differences in provision in both types of organisation must be taken into account when interpreting the above outcomes, and also when **developing future policies in post-compulsory education**.

Barriers

- **Learners' reasons for not choosing to study subjects through the medium of Welsh** need to be considered further. The **lack of Welsh-medium provision**, particularly in more vocational areas, is a difficulty that the post-16 sector needs to address. This will include ensuring that there is a **sufficient number of staff with Welsh language skills to teach the whole range of subjects** in this educational stage. It is important to recognise that the Cymraeg 2050 strategy³ and the *Further Education and Apprenticeship Welsh-medium Action Plan*⁴ aim to address these issues.
- As Figure 3 suggests, the **lack of confidence among learners in their Welsh language skills compared to their English language skills** is a matter for further consideration in the context of the linguistic attainment of learners within the education system in Wales. Linked to this is the perception of some learners that English language skills will be most advantageous to them for further study. This highlights a need to raise learners' awareness of the opportunities that are available to them to use their Welsh as they continue their education, and the advantages of doing so. It also underlines that which was indicated by the responses to the questionnaire, that is, that less than half of the learners who are fluent Welsh speakers and those who can speak a fair amount of Welsh intend to stay in Wales (Figure 13).

Bilingualism

- The fact that over half of the fluent Welsh speakers and those who can speak a fair amount of Welsh state that they favour bilingual education raises further questions as to **what exactly is meant by**

³ [Cymraeg 2050: A million Welsh speakers \(gov.wales\)](https://gov.wales/cymraeg-2050)

⁴ [towardscymraeg2050.pdf \(colegcymraeg.ac.uk\)](https://www.colegcymraeg.ac.uk/towardscymraeg2050.pdf)

bilingual education (Figure 4).

- The above matters must be considered in the context of **learners' perception of the importance of the Welsh language to their careers and the extent to which different language models of education are likely to develop the skills needed by employers in Wales**. As noted above, the outcomes of bilingual education can vary greatly in the context of learner attainment in both languages, and it is known that it is Welsh-medium education that is most likely to lead to strong skills in Welsh and English. It must be ensured that the linguistic attainment of all learners is supported robustly and practically at every stage of their education, and **Welsh language provision in the post-16 sector needs to be strengthened in order to achieve that**.

Supporting progress and progression

- The Welsh Government's Cymraeg 2050 Strategy states that 'young people will need to be aware of the benefits of continuing to develop their Welsh language skills for the workplace and the importance of using the language regularly in order to maintain fluency and confidence'.⁵ **Increasing the numbers studying post-16 qualifications through the medium of Welsh will be vital in order to ensure effective progression from statutory education to further education and the world of work**.
- It is clear that Welsh speakers see their Welsh language skills as an advantage to them in the context of their career prospects. A high percentage of them were confident in their Welsh language skills for their careers but, significantly, **a lower percentage were confident that they would use those skills** (Figure 11). As discussed above, this suggests a need to discuss learners' perception of opportunities to use the Welsh language in the workplace. The responses also highlighted the **importance of continuity of Welsh-medium or bilingual provision as learners progress to further studies** (Figure 14). These results emphasise the importance of increasing opportunities to use the Welsh language in the workplace, which is one of the Welsh Language Commissioner's strategic priorities. Consideration should also be given to whether providing more opportunities to study through the medium of Welsh would be a means of increasing the numbers who choose to continue to study in Wales and reduce the numbers of skilled young people who leave the country.

Strengthening the position of the Welsh language in the post-compulsory sector: looking to the future

- The results raise **significant questions about how to strengthen Welsh language provision in the post-compulsory sector and what the direction of public policy will be** in this area. These questions are extremely timely, considering that the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research is currently being established. An important development took place in 2017 when the *Review of the Activities of the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol* was published.⁶ The report recommended that the Welsh Government extend the role of the Coleg to become a recognised national strategic body for the development of the Welsh language across the higher education, further education and work-based learning sectors. Following this the *Further Education and Apprenticeship Welsh-medium Action Plan* was published in

⁵ [Cymraeg 2050: A million Welsh speakers \(gov.wales\)](https://gov.wales/cymraeg-2050-a-million-welsh-speakers)

⁶ [review-of-the-activities-of-the-coleg-cymraeg-cenedlaethol-the-task-and-finish-group-s-report-welsh-language-and-welsh-medium-education.pdf \(gov.wales\)](https://gov.wales/review-of-the-activities-of-the-coleg-cymraeg-cenedlaethol-the-task-and-finish-group-s-report-welsh-language-and-welsh-medium-education.pdf)

2019. The plan is based on the vision that all learners should be enabled to maintain or develop their skills in the Welsh language. The plan places clear responsibilities on a number of partners over the short, medium and long term in relation to six key strategic areas, including increasing staffing capacity, improving provision and expanding resources. The Coleg has established a Post-16 Strategic Board which includes representatives from further education institutions, apprenticeship providers and employers, and ensures that learners' voices are also heard. These developments are very welcome and the Coleg needs to be supported in its efforts to bring about far-reaching changes in the provision of post-16 Welsh language education.

- In general terms, the post-16 education sector must act positively to support the development of the Welsh language skills of young people in Wales, at all levels of proficiency. In order to do this, it **will be necessary to address some of the obvious barriers that prevent some learners from studying through the medium of Welsh** and ensure that there are opportunities to study through the medium of Welsh in all types of post-16 education institutions.
- As well as strengthening provision in the further education sector, careful consideration must also be given to how to support and build on the provision where it is currently at its strongest. In most areas of Wales, **that provision is at its strongest in schools, and national consideration needs to be given to the role of Welsh-medium and bilingual schools in the post-compulsory education landscape of the future.** This should include planning and collaboration at a regional level between schools and further education colleges to ensure that adequate provision is available and is being promoted in order to increase the number of post-16 learners in Welsh-medium education across Wales. It is vital that this strategic planning takes place in the interests of the Welsh language, and reinforces the strong provision that currently exists in schools.
- Finally, there is a need to consider the **messages conveyed to learners about the value and importance of Welsh language skills** and how to support learners to make the most of the provision available. As part of this, it should be ensured that any bilingual provision and Welsh language provision fully support the linguistic attainment of all learners, and it is essential that this **is considered in the context of developing the language skills of the workforce of the future.**



Agenda Item 8.14

**Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc
ac Addysg**

**Children, Young People
and Education Committee**

Jack Sargeant MS
Chair, Petitions Committee

20 November 2023

Dear Jack,

Petition P-06-1341 Accessible guidance for parents and schools to help develop plans to support children with additional learning needs

Thank you for your letter dated 6th October, it was noted and discussed at our meeting on 25th October.

Members were grateful to you for bringing this petition to our attention. As you are aware we are conducting an inquiry into equal access to childcare and education for disabled children and young people. The issues raised by the petitioner have been raised throughout our evidence gathering. We agreed that this evidence should be considered as part of the evidence for the inquiry.

If the petitioner is content for you to share their contact information with us, we can advise them how they can submit further information to our inquiry.

Thank you again for bringing this petition to our attention.

Yours sincerely,



Jayne Bryant MS

Chair

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.

Senedd Cymru

Bae Caerdydd, Caerdydd, CF99 1SN
SeneddPlant@senedd.cymru
senedd.cymru/SeneddPlant
0300 200 6565

Welsh Parliament

Cardiff Bay, Cardiff, CF99 1SN
SeneddChildren@senedd.wales
senedd.wales/SeneddChildren
0300 200 6565



Vaughan Gething AS/MS
Gweinidog yr Economi
Minister for Economy

Jeremy Miles AS/MS
Gweinidog y Gymraeg ac Addysg
Minister for Education and Welsh Language



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Jayne Bryant MS Chair
Paul Davies MS, Chair
Economy, Rural Affairs and Trade Committee

20 November 2023

Dear Jayne,

As requested by the Children, Young People and Education Committee, please see further information below on Post 16 Education and Skills, following the joint scrutiny session on 5th July.

Drop off rates for apprenticeships - *During the session, we asked about the decrease in people completing their apprenticeships, for which the competition rates dropped from 80.9% in 2018-2019 to 66.3% in 2021-22. During the session, the Minister for Economy said that the initial evidence indicates that cost of living pressures are one of the main factors for this decrease. He also indicated that this was an issue of concern, and that “we still want to understand how far, and is it more than the cost-of living crisis or not.”*

Our response: The labour market has become more fluid for people in lower paid occupations such as those in social care, where individuals are finding it easier to find higher paid employment in sectors such as retail and hospitality. This might well be why we are seeing apprentices leave to go into employment elsewhere - leaving their employer for higher wages and better terms and conditions.

Careers Wales recently gave evidence to the Economy, Trade, and Rural Affairs Committee on cost of living pressures and the Young Person's Guarantee. It was their view that many young people are giving up apprenticeships to take paid employment elsewhere. Some young people are choosing to take on better paid roles with no training, perhaps without understanding the impact that has on them in the longer term.

We are concerned that the target of creating 125,000 all-age apprenticeships may be affected by factors that are causing this increase in the drop off rate. We note that the timeline for this target has been extended by a year, but are concerned that the wider pressures for people to get into full time paid employment may affect the attractiveness of apprenticeships. The pressure to pay bills right now could over-ride the longer-term financial benefits of a

Our response: Overall, there are three unavoidable factors impacting on the target, including the lack of replacement EU funds, pay and inflationary pressures and increasing costs of frameworks for priority interventions supporting wider Welsh Government priorities. For context, ESF allocations supported around 5,000 apprentices per year.

These factors combined with the extremely challenging 2024-25 budget year situation are going to make our ambitions to achieve 125,000 new apprenticeships extremely difficult, however, we remain committed to delivering a high quality apprenticeship product which is valued by learners and employers. To support this, significant time has been spent enabling providers to plan their delivery. Officials have worked early with the provider network to plan 2023/24 delivery and expand eligibility to reach a wider learner base – while maintaining Minister's focus on quality provision

We will continue to raise awareness of the programme by promoting the benefits to both employers and learners via a range of marketing and communications activity throughout the year. The Apprenticeship Week and the Apprenticeship Awards Cymru provide us with further opportunities to raise the profile of the apprenticeship and promote the key benefits of becoming (and recruiting) an apprentice, showing parity of esteem.

Can you outline what work you are doing to better understand the reasons behind the drop off rates, and if you can commit to share this work with us? We'd also like more information on how the Welsh Government is working to support and encourage take up of apprenticeships as an attractive option particularly during the current cost of living crisis.

Our response: We are developing new statistical methods to add to our understanding of the reasons behind the drop-in success rates. This method would allow us to analyse apprenticeship incomes and more directly examine the link between income and success rates for apprentices. The method is highly experimental, but if it produces results in the near future, we will share the evidence with the committee.

In an addition to this we have been examining using an apprentice's history of free school meal eligibility as an indicator of deprivation, and the link between this and success rates. That work will be published in an article [Using free school meal history as an indicator of deprivation for apprenticeship and adult learning outcomes: August 2021 to July 2022](#) on the 7th of November.

The apprenticeship programme is augmented by a number of initiatives which support and encourage the take up of apprenticeships, for example, in 2023-24 we have invested £1m for Health and Wellbeing support. Improving the Health and Wellbeing of both staff and learners supports quality delivery and is expected to help increase apprenticeship completion rates. This funding enables learners, staff and organisations to access the required support to deliver successful outcomes.

We are committed to removing barriers to getting an apprenticeship and whilst we have made significant progress to improving access to apprenticeships for disabled learners we need to do more. In Wales there still remains too many employers with

negative attitudes to employing disabled people and reports of a lack of support for companies considering the employment of persons with disabilities. Via the Employer Incentive Scheme for disabled apprentices, £0.4m has been provided in 2023-24 to incentivise employers to take on apprentices with disabilities.

There is anecdotal evidence that the requirement for apprentices to undertake Essential Skills Qualifications (ESQs) are hindering achievement. Apprentices are predominately required to take essential skills in literacy and numeracy where they don't already have alternative qualifications, such as GCSEs. We have therefore commissioned Estyn to carry out a thematic review of ESQs undertaken by apprentices to understand, amongst other aspects, the benefits of ESQs and their impact on apprentices.

The national apprentice minimum wage rate is sometimes a disincentive. Careers Wales has examples where people are giving up apprenticeships because they can get a job paying twice the apprenticeship minimum wage. A year one apprentice or those under 19 get National Minimum Wage of £5.28; they can earn double that. So, apprenticeships can be a hard sell to keep people engaged. Sometimes people can earn more in a part-time job than a full-time job.

Low salaries impact on transport costs. We know that jobs with low wages are less attractive when a sizable chunk of the cost are absorbed by travel expenses. Apprentices on the National Minimum Wage rate are particularly vulnerable.

I recently responded to the Low Pay Commission on the future of the Apprentice Rate of the National Minimum Wage (NMW). The Welsh Government believes that the Apprentice Rate should be increased and aligned to the current National Minimum Wage 21-22 rate to help incentivise 16–19-year-olds to start an apprenticeship and influence young people when choosing education and employment options. This is particularly important given the pressures arising from the cost-of-living crisis and inflationary pressures.

A higher rate for apprentices would enhance the profile of 'earn while you learn' training opportunities and help apprentices in meeting living costs. In particular, a higher rate would build parity with young learners in full-time education and address child benefit disparity, where families lose child benefit for children who take up apprenticeships. Any perceived productivity differences between younger and older workers need to be balanced against the longer-term value of the apprenticeship to both the employer and the apprentice.

Further, we are continually working with providers to understand what additional support can be provided to ensure people complete their training. This may include adapting delivery mechanisms to that people achieve sooner or certain elements of the programme are delivered upfront or later to reduce pressure on individuals.

Careers advice - *As raised during the session, concerns around the quality and breadth of careers advice being given to young people with disabilities has been raised as part of our inquiry: Do disabled children and young people have equal access to education and childcare? We will continue to explore this as part of that work, but at this stage, we would welcome further information on how the Welsh Government can ensure that children and young people with disabilities can get the*

best quality careers advice to ensure they can pursue the right education and career opportunities that meet their aspirations.

Our response – We want to ensure that children and young people with disabilities can get the best quality careers advice to ensure they can pursue the right education and career opportunities that meet their aspirations.

Careers Wales has a dedicated careers adviser linked to every special school – they also offer a bespoke employer engagement support to all special schools and PRUs. The offer will include an average of two employer events per setting which will enable them to better meet the needs of learners. All Additional Learning Needs (ALN) young people are offered:

- Impartial guidance and coaching support.
- Relevant careers information group sessions.
- transition reviews for young people with Individual Development Plans (IDPs), with priority given to young people entering the labour market.

Careers Wales also:

- Attend parent events.
- Supports Local Authorities in implementing Transition support.

Digital support specifically targeting ALN young people Careers Wales have:

- Future Jobs Wales (<https://careerswales.gov.wales/future-jobs-wales>) is a targeted section on the Careers Wales website, this includes a section titled 'About Jobs'
- Developed Careers Match Quiz

Six special schools across Wales are taking part in the recently launched Careers Wales Quality Award – an award for schools to support the implementation of careers and work-related experiences (CWRE):

Canolfan Addysg y Bont	Anglesey
Hafod Lan	Gwynedd
Ysgol Bryn Castell	Bridgend
Maes y Coed	NPT
Chepstow	Monmouthshire
Ysgol y Deri	Vale

In 2022 Careers Wales introduced a British Sign Language (BSL) channel in their digital platform and across all of their careers centres.

From September 2022- August 2023 Careers Wales carried out 4,110 interviews with 2,642 young people identified with Additional Learning Needs - Statemented or Statemented Equivalent.

Young people identified with Additional Learning Needs who are planning to progress to College or Training after Year 11 will have a Learning and Skills Plan (LSP) completed by their Careers Adviser to help them identify their needs and aspirations, and ensure that their next lead provider can effectively support them. As part of that process Careers Wales will meet with the young person sometime after to review the LSP, and ensure that it's still an accurate reflection of what they want, and that their identified needs have been met. 2022-23 CW completed 336 LSPs.

Working Wales deliver careers guidance to young people and adults that identify themselves with a disability. Between April and Sept 2023 Working Wales delivered:

- 203 episodes of careers and employability support to disabled young people
- 1,386 episodes of support to disabled adults
- 81 episodes of support to disabled young people and adults supported in prisons
- 17 episodes of support to disabled young people and adults referred by probation

Careers Wales and Working Wales also support traveller young people and adults with careers information and guidance, an example can be seen here:

<https://vimeo.com/792846107/6f28fd688a>

Big Ideas Wales - *We would also welcome some more information on how Big Ideas Wales is promoted, the levels of take-up and the outcomes or any current evaluation on the programme.*

Big Ideas Wales improves awareness of entrepreneurship and self-employment through several routes to reach young people under 25 years, whilst in education, or beyond. Big Ideas Wales is a service delivered as part of Business Wales to raise aspirations, support young people's understanding of business, and enable young people access advice and support to start-up.

Welsh entrepreneurs act as Big Ideas Wales role models and run workshops and events in schools, colleges, universities and with community groups outside education to help young people learn about enterprise and raise awareness of support available to start a business; in 2022/23 they reached 75,210 individuals.

Big Ideas Wales is also promoted via a campaign, which has a dedicated website, digital advertising, social media channels (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram) which provides regular engagement with young people. In 2022/23 the website had 400,000 visitors and is currently followed by 33,874 young people.

In 2022/23, 945 young people accessed business advice and support through Big Ideas Wales and this helped create 329 new businesses.

In July 2022, the Welsh Government launched the Young Person's Start Up Grant targeting unemployed young people. The grant is promoted alongside a package of start up support to assess viability of business ideas. To date 1,145 young people have expressed an interest in the support and 347 grants awarded.

Furthermore, a network of Enterprise Champions operate in all further and higher education institutions in Wales to raise awareness of entrepreneurship, provide practical experience of businesses, and nurture and support young entrepreneurs to start a business. The Champions' network play a key part in working with Big Ideas Wales, wider youth entrepreneurship partners and business. Part of the Young Persons Guarantee, Employment and Enterprise Bureaus in further education colleges support student transition to self-employment; supporting 702 students in 2022/23 to take positive steps towards self-employment and supporting 85 to become self-employed or start a business. The Enterprise Champions at higher education have supported over 1,300 students and graduates to validate and develop their business ideas. The latest published HEBCIS data reported 362 graduate starts in 2021/22 from universities in Wales representing 7.6% of all graduate starts.

An evaluation of the Youth Entrepreneurship Programme 2016-2022 was undertaken by Arad Research. Its conclusions were positive and the recommendations were used to shape the procurement of the Business Wales entrepreneurship & start-up service. [Review of Welsh Government Youth Entrepreneurship Programme 2016 to 2022: final report | GOV.WALES](#)

The evaluation findings noted:

- That the programme has become more agile and responsive since its launch in 2016, having an impact at a local and regional level as well as linking to key national policies and economic and social drivers. Programme flexibility and support for joined up partnership approaches indicate the programme has the potential to support current and future Welsh Government policy, in particular the Young Persons Guarantee.
- The report shows that the programme exceeded its engagement targets in relation to reaching education settings to promote enterprise activities and Big Ideas Wales services. The use of digital technology, especially social media has supported the programme's effective marketing and promotion.
- Big Ideas Wales Role Models were positively received by all audiences and partners and therefore were recommended to be an integral element of future programmes and their potential to engage wider audiences across programme delivery in future has been actioned in future Business Wales services whilst noting the need to address shortages in some sectors ICT/construction and the opportunity to develop Role Models in social enterprise.
- The 1-to-1 advisory support provided by Big Ideas Wales, as well as the annual Bootcamp to Business sessions have been well received and had a positive impact on participants starting a business. The need to provide

enhanced advisory support and wraparound support and events through Big Ideas Wales was recommended in order to meet policy commitments in the Young Persons Guarantee which also takes into account the length of time young people need to progress to start-up.

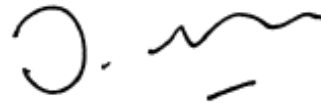
- The report also concluded that future youth entrepreneurship services should consider a hybrid approach to delivery, making use of digital delivery where it can enhance delivery, drive efficiencies and value for money, and increase reach of specialist support and participation across Wales.

I hope this information is helpful to the Committee. I look forward to meeting with you again soon.

Yours sincerely,



Vaughan Gething AS/MS
Gweinidog yr Economi
Minister for Economy



Jeremy Miles AS/MS
Gweinidog y Gymraeg ac Addysg
Minister for Education and Welsh
Language

Petitions Committee

Jayne Bryant MS
Chair
Children, Young People and Education Committee
Tŷ Hywel
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1SN

Senedd Cymru
Bae Caerdydd, Caerdydd, CF99 1SN
Deisebau@senedd.cymru
senedd.cymru/SeneddDeisebau
0300 200 6565

Welsh Parliament
Cardiff Bay, Cardiff, CF99 1SN
Petitions@senedd.wales
senedd.wales/SeneddPetitions
0300 200 6565

21 November 2023

Dear Jayne

Evidence session for Petition P-06-1358 Review the inadequate funding for Schools in Wales

The Petitions Committee took evidence regarding the above petition at our meeting on 13 November 2023. This was an informative and concerning session which highlighted the increasingly difficult financial situation faced by schools across Wales.

We heard from governors and head teachers, who shared the challenges they are facing when trying to deliver their statutory responsibilities while facing real-terms budget cuts, plus increasing additional learning and health needs among their pupils.

With policy committees about to start the budget scrutiny cycle, we thought that the best thing we could do as a Petitions Committee would be to share this session with those committees about to take a closer look at education funding. We believe that the evidence we received would be invaluable for your committee.

We appreciated the wealth of knowledge and expertise shared by the panel who raised a number of concerning issues. These included:

- concerns about the current funding model for schools and the inequity of funding between schools;
- the number of schools setting deficit budgets with more predicted to do so next year;
- the inability to offer permanent contracts to teaching support staff;
- reducing support for children with additional learning needs;
- the negative impact on subjects offered or school activities; and
- a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of school staff and governors.

Further information about the petition, including related correspondence, is available on our website at: <https://business.senedd.wales/ielssueDetails.aspx?Ild=41888&Opt=3>

If you have any queries, please contact the Committee clerking team at the e-mail address below, or on 0300 200 6454. I would be grateful if you could send your response by e-mail to the clerking team at petitions@senedd.wales.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jack Sargeant". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a horizontal line that ends in an arrowhead pointing to the right.

Jack Sargeant MS
Chair

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.

