

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb hwn i ymgynghoriad y [Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg](#) ar [Flaenoriaethau'r Chweched Senedd](#)

This response was submitted to the [Children, Young People and Education Committee](#) consultation on [Sixth Senedd Priorities](#)

**CYPE SP 110**

**Ymateb gan: Sean O'Neill, Cyfarwyddwr Polisi, Plant yng Nghymru**

**Response from: Sean O'Neill, Policy Director, Children in Wales**

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Beth yn eich barn chi yw'r prif flaenoriaethau neu'r materion y dylai'r Pwyllgor eu hystyried yn ystod y Chweched Senedd? Os oes modd, nodwch eich barn o ran sut y gallai'r Pwyllgor fynd i'r afael â hyn.

What do you consider to be the main priorities or issues that the Committee should consider during the Sixth Senedd? Where possible, please set out your view about how the Committee could address them.

Children in Wales have compiled and submitted responses from the following professional networks we manage and facilitate. These provide more detail in relation to their specific areas of expertise and are to be considered alongside this response.

- **Wales UNCRC Monitoring Group**
- **End Child Poverty Network Cymru**
- **Early Years Action Group**
- **Third Sector Additional Needs Alliance**

We have also contributed to the response from the **National Children's NGO Policy Group**

### **Theme 1: School-age education**

Children have missed a significant portion of the school year, with disadvantaged and vulnerable children missing the most. Many faced multiple barriers, including access to IT, and the cost of digital technology, despite investment from WG to help tackle digital exclusion. Many children will now require additional support to help facilitate social interaction and address mental health challenges, with greater emphasis on pupil wellbeing and pedagogy required.

Socio-economic background continues to have a negative impact on attainment levels, with children in low-income households underperforming compared with their peers. Data shows that boys, children with additional learning needs, care-experienced children and some children with protected characteristics generally achieve lower attainment levels. Young carers have also been affected, having to balance caring responsibilities with schoolwork whilst at home.

Whilst there are many encouraging developments<sup>1</sup>, we are deeply concerned about the impact of the pandemic and the risk of pupils falling further behind. We believe that **reducing educational inequalities** should be a greater priority, and the current work to develop a whole school approach to improving pupil well-being and mental health should be accelerated.

A greater emphasis should be placed on **improving equity in education** and in developing **community schools**, emphasising partnerships and collaboration with third and public sector services. Improvements in **tackling bullying** are required as demonstrated by the children engaged through our report on child and family poverty<sup>2</sup>. Young people are also concerned about future arrangements for assessments and **qualifications**, and **human rights education** should be a mandatory part of the new curriculum.

The **Price of Pupil Poverty** project continues to work with many maintained primary and secondary schools to help identify no and low-cost solutions which support pupils from low-income backgrounds<sup>3</sup>. Working with Regional Education Consortia, the project is raising awareness of the barriers poorer children face and ways in which schools can enhance home-school relationships and identify solutions in respect of the cost of school uniforms, for example.

We fully support calls from the ECPN Cymru for reform of **Free School Meals**, and for the WG to increase the eligibility threshold to ensure that all children whose parents are in receipt of Universal Credit are entitled, and take steps towards universal entitlement.

### **Theme 3: Health and well-being, including social care (as they relate to children and young people)**

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<sup>1</sup> Of particular note is the new curriculum framework for 3-16 year olds; reform of RSE to help promote positive healthy relationships and contribute towards preventing gender-based violence, and the new duty placed on head teachers, school governors and local authorities to promote knowledge and understanding of the UNCRC and UNCRPD

<sup>2</sup> Children in Wales (2021) [Child and Family Poverty Survey Report](#)

<sup>3</sup> Children in Wales [The Price of Pupil Poverty Guides](#)

## **Health Inequalities**

A key priority which emerged from contributions from over 90 organisations to inform our State of Children's Rights in Wales<sup>4</sup> report to the UN was the urgent need to tackle **health inequalities in Wales**. It is evident that the pandemic has served to exacerbate existing inequalities in relation to physical and mental health amongst children, although many of the challenges pre-dated COVID-19. Socio-economic disadvantage is a particular determinant of health inequalities and is a strong correlation with childhood obesity<sup>5</sup>, higher dental decay,<sup>6</sup> smoking rates,<sup>7</sup> lower fruit and vegetable consumption,<sup>8</sup> sport participation<sup>9</sup>, increased exposure to air pollution<sup>10</sup>, and both child & infant mortality rates<sup>11</sup>

In our response to the HSC Committee, we have called for a cross-committee inquiry into health inequalities to examine ways to address the inequalities gap and improve access to primary care and specialist healthcare services for all children.

## **Health advocacy**

We continue to call for enhanced arrangements to enable children to access advocacy provision to support their physical and mental health. Pre-COVID, the previous WG established two task groups to take forward this work, but we are not aware of any work having progressed since then. We support the views reported through the previous Committee's Mind over Matter inquiry that advocacy provision should be extended across all health settings including for children receiving any tier of mental health support.

## **Mental Health**

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<sup>4</sup> Wales UNCRC Monitoring Group (2020) [State of Children's Rights in Wales](#), Children in Wales

<sup>5</sup> Public Health Wales (2018) [Child Measurement Programme for Wales 2017/18](#) (amongst children aged 4-5)

<sup>6</sup> WG (2017) [Taking Oral Health Improvement and Dental Services Forward in Wales](#)

<sup>7</sup> Ash Cymru/Wales (accessed 2020) <https://ash.wales/wales-smoking-statistics/>

<sup>8</sup> Hewitt G., Anthony R., Moore G., Melendez-Torres G.J., Murphy S. (2019) [Student Health and Wellbeing In Wales: Report of the 2017/18 Health Behaviour in School-aged Children Survey and School Health Research Network Student Health and Wellbeing Survey](#). Cardiff University, Cardiff.

<sup>9</sup> Sport Wales (2018) [School sport survey 2018: state of the nation](#)

<sup>10</sup> WG (2020) [Clean Air Plan for Wales](#)

<sup>11</sup> [ONS](#) – in 2018, Infant mortality rates were 3.8 deaths per 1,000 live births in England and Wales compared with 3.9 the previous year but significantly above the lowest rate of 3.6 recorded in 2014. infant mortality rates were 5.7 deaths per 1,000 live births in the 10% most deprived areas in Wales and RCPCH Wales – [State of Child Health](#) Children aged 1-9 years

We draw the Committee's attention to the **National Children's NGO Policy Group** detailed priorities and ask the new Committee to undertake a review of progress against the recommendations from Mind over Matter

#### **Theme 4: Children and young people**

We have published the following reports which will aid the Committee in determining their priorities, and which provide a comprehensive insight into the barriers children face in realising their rights and in safeguarding their wellbeing.

- **State of Children's Rights in Wales**<sup>12</sup>
- **Fifth Annual Child and Family Poverty Survey Report**<sup>13</sup>

We draw attention to these reports as it's not possible to incorporate all of the priorities our member organisations are engaged with within the word-limit of this response.

#### **Children's Rights**

We have submitted a response with, and on behalf of the **Wales UNCRC Monitoring Group** and fully support the recommendations within. Whilst acknowledging the progress being made by the WG following the Committee's 'Inquiry into Children's Rights' and legislation to abolish the defence of reasonable punishment, we believe that the UNCRC should be fully incorporated into law, thus strengthening the current due regard duty.

#### **Care experienced CYP / children at risk**

The number of children in care continues to grow<sup>14</sup>, and the gap between the numbers in Wales in comparison with other UK nations has widened<sup>15</sup>. There are growing concerns in relation to poor outcomes across a range of indicators, and the ability of the current system, described as in crisis<sup>16</sup>, to adequately provide for children whilst in care, and for when they leave. There has been a sharp increase in the proportion of new-borns becoming subject of care proceedings<sup>17</sup> with children more likely to enter

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<sup>12</sup> Wales UNCRC Monitoring Group (2020) [State of Children's Rights in Wales](#), Children in Wales

<sup>13</sup> Children in Wales (2021) [Child and Family Poverty Survey Report](#)

<sup>14</sup> At 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020, there were 7,172 children looked after in Wales which is an increase of 5% on the previous year, and 36% over the past 10 years. 65% of children who enter care do so because of abuse or neglect WG (2020) [Children looked after by local authorities: April 2019 to March 2020](#)

<sup>15</sup> Wales Centre for Public Policy (2021) [Children looked after in Wales: Evidence Briefing Paper](#), Cardiff University

<sup>16</sup> Family Rights Group (2018) [Care Crisis Review](#)

<sup>17</sup> Nuffield Family Justice Observatory (2019) [Born into Care: new-borns and infants in care proceedings in Wales](#), the rate has doubled between 2015 and 2018 and infants less than 1 year old comprised around 30% of all Section 31 cases in Wales.

care from areas of high deprivation.<sup>18</sup> Variations persist in the number of children in care across local authority areas. Commitments to safely reduce the number of children in care have been made<sup>19</sup>, alongside future plans to pilot a universal basic income (UBI) pilot scheme for care leavers and to eliminate profit making from the care system – all of which we welcome.

The pandemic has had a profound impact on the lives of all children, especially those most vulnerable, including children in/leaving care, and those on the cusp of care as the Committee's inquiry into COVID highlighted. Figures show a 20% reduction in child protection orders, with fears that many vulnerable children may not have been seen and identified as being in need of care and support due to lockdown restrictions<sup>20</sup>. The number of Care Orders issued has been lower than for the corresponding period in the previous year. With restrictions gradually eased, there is concern that social services will witness an increase in referrals, placing additional pressure on an already overstretched system.

Fears around worsening mental health, the impact of missed education and the effects of experiencing trauma and distress due to isolation, separation and possible grief and bereavement are also being raised.

The previous PA Committee published recommendation from their inquiry into care experienced children<sup>21</sup> and the previous CYPE Committee took evidence on the impact of the pandemic on vulnerable children. The Committee may wish to consider both reports and the steps taken to address the high level of children in care and the adverse impact of the pandemic on vulnerable cohorts of children<sup>22</sup> and those with protected characteristics.

The Committee will wish to examine what progress is being made in respect of enhancing Corporate Parenting arrangements in line with Recommendation 28 of your report<sup>23</sup>

## **Child Poverty**

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<sup>18</sup> Elliott, M. & Scourfield, J. (2017) [Identifying and Understanding Inequalities in Child Welfare Intervention Rates: Comparative studies in four UK countries. Single country quantitative study report: Wales](#) - Children are 16 times more likely to come into care if they come from the most deprived 10% of areas than the least deprived 10% areas

<sup>19</sup> WG Oral Statement (2018): [Improving Outcomes for Children: Reducing the Need for Children to Enter Care, and the Work of the Ministerial Advisory Group](#),

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-politics-57142970>

<sup>20</sup> BBC News (2021) <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-politics-57142970>

<sup>21</sup> NAFW Public Accounts Committee (2018) [Care Experienced Children and Young People](#)

<sup>22</sup> In addition to children with protected characteristics, we would also include some young carers and children living in poverty (not exhaustive)

<sup>23</sup> Recommendation 28 – CYPE Committee (2021) Impact of COVID-19 on children and young people

We have submitted a response with, and on behalf of the **End Child Poverty Network Cymru** and fully support the recommendations within. We believe that more should be done to both prevent and to tackle child poverty, and continue to be frustrated that there is no delivery plan nor a revised strategy to drive this forward. More should be done to ensure that statutory responsibilities placed on existing public bodies are being monitored and met.

The findings from our report into child and family poverty<sup>24</sup> are unacceptable, and describe yet again, families struggling to meet everyday costs, with the main issues reported being the impact of the benefit system, debt, childcare costs, food insecurity and employment instability/salary levels, leading to an increase in stress and anxiety amongst children.

### **Independent Statutory advocacy**

Children in Wales facilitates the C&YP Advocacy Providers Group who provided written and oral evidence to the previous Committee's 'Inquiry into Advocacy Services'. We have played a leading role in the development of the National Approach to Statutory Advocacy (NASA). Whilst there has been notable progress in its implementation, we believe there is value in an independent evaluation of the NASA to ensure it is delivering equitable access for every care-experienced child and that advocacy provider services are sufficiently independent. We are also concerned that there continues to be a lack of Residential Visiting Advocacy in children's homes which should be a requirement of registration and inspection arrangements.

### **Early Years**

We have submitted a response with, and on behalf of the **Early Years Action Group** and fully support the recommendations within. Delivering a national high quality integrated ECEC system should be a key component to recovery from the economic effects of COVID-19. We ask that the Committee examine the extent to which early years initiatives across government departments are integrated, which support greater shared understanding and communication across sectors to facilitate collaboration, and that budget allocations are scrutinised. The learning during the pandemic should include a specific focus on the lived experiences of babies and young children in the early years.

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<sup>24</sup> Children in Wales (2021) [Child and Family Poverty Survey Report](#)

## **Voice of Children and Young People**

Our Young Wales programme continues to provide opportunities for CYP to engage with policy developments, and throughout the pandemic, they have been consulted and met with a number of WG ministers. Over the past 6 months, young people have identified their top policy priorities as

- Participation and children's rights, including enhancing knowledge, understanding
- Climate Change
- COVID-19 recovery
- Tackling Inequality
- Mental Health and Wellbeing
- Education, qualifications and progression routes into employment & training
- Transport barriers

There is a need to ensure that the voice of younger children is at the heart of policy and decision making, and there should be appropriate and accessible avenues for views to be gathered at local and national levels. In the curriculum framework for children (3–7 years), participation is recognised as one of 12 pedagogical elements, yet there is little evidence that this is being routinely delivered.<sup>25</sup>

## **Family Support**

Families have access to a range of universal and specialist family support services, focused on early intervention and prevention, providing strength-based support to build resilience and self-reliance.<sup>26</sup> These services, complemented by a national parenting advice resource<sup>27</sup> offer a vital link between the home environment, statutory care services and education provision. The pandemic has highlighted the vital work that family support services do in helping families work through difficulties and to emerge stronger. The Committee will wish to consider reviewing the adaptations made by Family Support services during the pandemic and what more needs to be done to create an integrated wrap-around system to ensure children receive a full range of support to help prevent escalation of need.

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<sup>25</sup> Clement, J. (2019) [Spatially Democratic Pedagogy: Children's Design and Co-Creation of Classroom Space](#). A recent evaluation of the Foundation Phase identified children's participation as their ability to 'spontaneously direct their learning or their ability to 'choose which activity to engage with'. However, these participatory practices are framed by spaces that already have predetermined ways of being and overpower the intentionality of the child. Taylor, C. et al. 2015. [Evaluating the Foundation Phase: Final Report](#). Project Report. Cardiff: W/Government

<sup>26</sup> For example, [Families First](#) is a national programme providing multi-agency systems of support with a clear emphasis on early intervention, prevention and tackling child poverty

<sup>27</sup> ['Parenting Give it Time'](#) website providing parenting advice and support promoting the many benefits of positive parenting.

## **Additional Learning Needs**

We have submitted a response with, and on behalf of the **TSANA** and fully support the recommendations within. The previous Committee inquiry and report of the impact of Covid-19 drew attention to the need for sufficient resources to be available to implement the ALN Act<sup>28</sup>; for the full implementation of the reforms, and the need for clarity amongst the workforce, including with regard to IDP eligibility. TSANA have highlight the risk of inequitable access to ALP<sup>29</sup> contingent on the nature of the young person's ALNs.

We very much look forward to working with members of the Committee again during this Senedd term and happy to be contacted on any aspect of our work.

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<sup>28</sup> Recommendation 11 – CYPE Committee (2021) Impact of COVID-19 on children and young people

<sup>29</sup> Additional Learning Provision