



Children, Young People and  
Education Committee  
seneddchildren@senedd.wales

Tuesday 20 June 2023

Dear Children, Young People and Education Committee,

**Subject: Additional information -**

I would like to thank the Committee for the invitation to provide oral evidence on the 18<sup>th</sup> of May 2023 regarding the **inquiry on education access for disabled children and young people**.

We promised the Committee to provide further evidence in relation to

- 1) education access in rural areas, and
- 2) assessments and specialist provision.

We contacted Francesca Wright of SNAP Cymru who kindly provided the following information and examples for the Committee.

SNAP Cymru is a national charity, unique to Wales, founded in 1986. Its main aim is to advance the education of people in Wales and support their inclusion.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.snapcymru.org/>



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“From events we’ve done, we know that provision in rural and also coastal areas is much more limited, so children, particularly in mid-Wales often end up having to travel a long way to school, rather than being able to be educated in their local community. Parents from our more rural events recently reported to us “We need specialist schools for neurodiverse children academically average or able but needing smaller class sizes” and “It’s a rural area, provision is often a 3 hour round trip from home” and “There is not enough ALN provision between mainstream and Specialist settings, lots of children fall into a black hole”. Another example is that Ceredigion and similar counties have a high number of children who are Electively Home Educated, not because the parents really want to home school, they just feel they have no option, as there is very limited specialist provision available and no special schools. We have become aware of an increase in the number of children who are EHE increasing in many areas in Wales incidentally, however, we don’t think we have robust enough evidence to show that this is a problem particular to rural areas. We see the example in our casework from towns and cities too.

“Additionally, parents and carers report finding it much harder to get independent information and support when living in a more rural area.

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The Commission welcomes correspondence in Welsh or English.

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“Regarding your second question on the increase in families wanting to access specialist provision, our perspective on this is that it’s very possible that schools and LA’s are not able to do enough, early enough. Parents and carers would be far happier waiting for assessments if their child’s needs were being met in the meantime. Many families come to us at the point where provision has broken down so significantly, their child is on a reduced timetable and the school are persistently reporting they can’t meet the needs of the child. Often this is linked to lack of staff, funding etc. If schools were better resourced, to be able to provide highly targeted support to these children initially to meet their needs and keep them in school, then parents wouldn’t be pushing for specialist placements. But when they are constantly called to collect their child from school, sometimes on a daily basis their trust in the school being able to meet their child’s needs becomes eroded, they can cling onto the idea that a diagnosis is the only thing that will rectify the situation, and then they see specialist provision as the only option to stop the constant exclusions. We’ve worked with many families where parents have had to give up work as a result, reporting the school can’t meet their child’s needs and that all specialist provisions are full, or that their child doesn’t meet the criteria. We need to get

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much better at resourcing significant support for these children earlier to avoid situations where their mainstream placement becomes untenable due to failure to meet their needs, for whatever reason.

“We also still hear about a small number of schools telling parents they can’t support their child as they don’t have a diagnosis, which directly goes against the ethos of the new ALN code and the equality act. This simply isn’t the case, and again, without support at the earliest stage, situations tend to escalate when more professionals have to become involved, services like ours are accessed and parents and carers feel that the damage to their child’s education has already been done. They then look to specialist provision as they feel they have no other options.

“I can give you a very quick case study that I dealt with last week. An LA asked us to provide disagreement resolution for them as a parent wanted an independent specialist placement for her child and the LA felt that their own LA specialist provision could meet need. On investigation, the parent was dealing with daily calls from their highly specialist behavioural provision to collect her child, there were constant incidents and issues and regular exclusions. Parent reported she felt on edge daily waiting for the phone to ring. Rather than

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addressing these issues and supporting parent to work with school to look at why the exclusions were happening, their stance was simple. Parental request wasn't appropriate, and a revised statement issued with the LA placement named was going to be issued. Therefore, this parent is now likely to make an appeal to tribunal for the Independent specialist placement if that goes ahead.”

Francesca Wright SNAP Cymru

<https://www.snapcymru.org/>

If the Committee requires further information in relation to the inquiry from the Commission, please let us know.

Yours sincerely,

Ruth Coombs

Head of Wales

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