

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb hwn i'r [Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg](#) ar gyfer yr ymchwiliad: [A oes gan blant a phobl ifanc anabl fynediad cyfartal at addysg a gofal plant?](#)

This response was submitted to the [Children, Young People and Education Committee](#) for the inquiry: [Do disabled children and young people have equal access to education and childcare?](#)

AEC 17

Ymateb gan: Prifysgol Abertawe, Darlithydd mewn Seicoleg
Response from: Swansea University, Lecturer in Psychology

Background:

As a researcher and lecturer in Psychology at Swansea University, I would like to contribute to this consultation by providing a summary of recent research that I have conducted concerning language development and bilingualism for children with disabilities. This response aims to shed light on the challenges faced by young children with disabilities, language difficulties, and neurodivergent children in accessing adequate provisions and support for Welsh-medium education. The evidence from various studies highlights the importance of addressing these challenges and ensuring that these children receive equal access to educational opportunities.

Research Summary:

Language profiles of Welsh-English bilingual children with Down syndrome

- This study specifically investigated the language development of children with Down syndrome in Welsh-medium environments. The findings indicate that children with Down syndrome can develop bilingual language skills effectively, and that their English language skills were on a par with children with Down syndrome only receiving English-medium instruction.
- These results emphasise that Down syndrome should not be seen as a barrier to bilingualism, challenging the notion that Welsh-medium education may be inappropriate for children with this developmental disability.
- This highlights the need for inclusive educational approaches that promote access to Welsh-medium education for children with developmental disabilities and emphasises the importance of providing them with appropriate support to access Welsh-medium education.

Bilingualism in children with a dual diagnosis of Down syndrome and autism

spectrum disorder

- This study explored the language abilities of children with dual diagnoses of Down syndrome and autism spectrum disorder in Welsh-English bilingual settings.
- Although these children often have more complex needs, the research demonstrated that these children can acquire and develop bilingual skills in line with expectations for their developmental profile.
- These findings again do not support the assumption that complex needs prevent these children from engaging with a Welsh-medium educational environment.

Exploring early years practitioners' experiences, practices, and perspectives of supporting speech, language and communication needs in Wales – ongoing.

- Previous research suggests that there are many challenges in identifying, assessing, and treating bilingual children with speech, language or communication needs within early years settings.
- As a result, bilingual children are at risk of being misidentified with this group being both under and over-referred for speech and language therapy. Recent reviews have highlighted the limited availability of appropriate screening and standardised assessment tools for speech, language and communication needs that are suitable for bilingual children, especially within the Welsh language context.
- This project aims to investigate current practices and experiences in supporting bilingual children within early years settings (e.g., nurseries and schools) in Wales.
- Initial discussions with collaborators have highlighted that there is a need to ensure that there are adequate Welsh-medium educational provisions for children with disabilities or neurodivergent children.

Language development and bilingualism in Down syndrome: parents' perspectives – ongoing.

- Although studies show that bilingualism does not seem to have any negative impact on the language abilities of children with Down syndrome (as above), concurrent studies have reported that parents may be advised to limit exposure to a second language if a child has a language learning difficulty such as a disability.
- As a result, children may not be afforded access to suitable Welsh-medium provisions, and it is unclear to what extent support is currently available for bilingual children in Wales.

- The aim of this study is to collect information on the perspectives and experiences of parents of children with Down syndrome who live in bilingual communities in Wales. This project aims to understand more about challenges, strategies and approaches towards bilingualism and hopes to understand more about the factors that impact parents' decision to raise their children with one or more languages.
- Initial findings suggest that parents receive mixed support, depending on their background and educational provisions available in the area.
- In addition, some parents felt that there was not enough specialist provision to support their child, which included adequate speech and language therapy.

- **Recommendations:**

Based on the evidence presented, it is evident that more can be done to promote equal access to education and childcare for disabled children, particularly in Welsh-medium settings, but also for children attending English-medium settings where additional language classes are typically available. The following recommendations are suggested:

1. **Inclusive Policies and Support:** Develop and implement inclusive policies that ensure disabled children have equal opportunities to access Welsh-medium education and additional language classes. Provide appropriate support, including trained professionals and resources, to assist children with developmental disabilities, language difficulties, and neurodivergent children in accessing suitable educational provisions.
2. **Research:** Provide funding and support for further research in the field of bilingual education for children with disabilities and neurodivergent children, with a specific focus on Welsh-medium provision. This includes funding studies with children who have diverse needs and disabilities, longitudinal studies to evaluate factors contributing to successful outcomes over time, and funding to develop bespoke language assessment tools suitable for bilingual children (such as phonological awareness).
3. **Professional Development:** Offer professional development programs for educators and childcare providers to enhance their understanding of the unique needs of children with disabilities or neurodivergent children and equip them with effective strategies to support their learning and inclusion in Welsh-medium settings.
4. **Awareness and Advocacy:** Encourage awareness campaigns to challenge stereotypes and misconceptions surrounding disabled children's abilities to engage with Welsh-medium education. Advocate for the rights of

disabled children, highlighting the importance of inclusive and accessible educational environments.

Conclusion:

It is essential to recognize and address the challenges faced by young children with developmental disabilities, language difficulties, and neurodivergent children in accessing Welsh-medium education. Whilst conducting the research outlined in this response, parents have highlighted the importance of bilingualism for their families and the benefits of creating an inclusive approach for language provisions that extend beyond language development. The benefits of ensuring inclusive education, promoting diversity and acceptance for disabled children and neurodivergent children may also lead to long lasting changes to the overall well-being and future success of these children.

The evidence from the studies presented emphasises that these children can acquire bilingual language skills and benefit from inclusive educational environments. By implementing the recommended measures, this can ensure that disabled children and young people have equal access to education and childcare, regardless of their individual needs and abilities, fostering a more inclusive and supportive society in Wales.

Links to Relevant Evidence Sources:

- Language profiles of Welsh-English bilingual children with Down syndrome
- Bilingualism in children with a dual diagnosis of Down syndrome and autism spectrum disorder.
- Down's syndrome no bar to bilingualism, study suggests
- Welsh language study reveals Down syndrome is no bar to bilingualism
- Why being bilingual can open doors for children with developmental disabilities, not close them
- Dwyieithrwydd ddim yn anfantais i blant â Syndrom Down