

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 52

Ymateb gan: Tîm Niwroamrywiol Cenedlaethol
Response from: National ND Team

National ND Team Parent feedback to consultation

Question 1

- All schools should be disability aware to the degree that British Sign Language has an importance as much as Welsh. It should form part of the inclusive culture of a school and not be a postcode lottery for families. There should be easy access to all areas for disabled children so they can meet all their social emotional and educational needs. There should be no physical barriers to participation at any stage of their day/activity. Where a learner requires Teaching Assistant support in lessons eg hypermobility/cerebral palsy/learning disability or learning difficulty, this should be provided on a needs led child centred basis. No child should be excluded from participating in social/extra curricular activity due to physical or other disability. Children should all be able to physically access events such as attending school trips or taking part in sporting events. Schools should consider the setting up of paralympic events for the sake of equity for those who are disadvantaged in non paralympic sports. No child left behind or forced to feel 'wrong' and 'different' because of the lack of understanding/inclusivity of a school. It should be a basic Human Right as well as the Rights of the Disabled Child to be treated as an equal. Some children are told they cannot attend school trips or have to travel separately because schools cannot accommodate. This is harmful for their social and emotional wellbeing which does not align to the Whole School Approach.
- Excluding a child from accessing a specific school/education due to the inadequacies of school inclusion or staff professional learning goes against the Rights of the Child (UNCRC Article 28 and 29) to attend their school of choice and has a long lasting emotional impact. The Samaritans Charity published the Hidden Cost of School Exclusion in 2018/2019 and the report highlights the risks of increased risk of suicide for these learners. When we consider the Whole School Approach and the ALN

Reform in meeting needs of learners and protecting the emotional wellbeing of the same pupils, the governance within schools conflicts with these ambitions. It is important that Estyn HMI collaborates now with Welsh Government Education Department and strives to incentivise schools in not only improving their understanding and delivery of inclusive curriculums but that the environment and everyone within the school community is trauma informed, neurodivergent aware and disability friendly to ensure that no child is left behind. We cannot wait for teachers to take up CPD or attend inset days when the impact of their non inclusive practices harms those who are most disadvantaged. What motivation do schools currently have to address their shortcomings? What support do they need? How do they self assess against the gold standard of inclusion? What frameworks do they need to work within that allows their own governance and Government policy to align with the Rights of the Child at the Centre of their focus? We also need to consider the school to prison pipeline and the societal impact that exclusion creates. In a research paper over half of youth offenders were excluded from school (ONS : the education and social care background of young people who interact with the criminal justice system May 2022). The same paper from ONS May 2022 reports that 79% of young people who receive a custodial sentence had been identified with SEN. In Newport Local Authority there is a MATRIX platform that provides a framework for the ALN Reform, from universal support to need for referral to specialist services. This digital platform supported by the LA advice helpline for schools within Newport Borough should be rolled out across Wales. Areas such as Bridgend which are seeing the highest rates of school exclusion, school absence (highest levels of poverty within Rhondda Cynon Taf) with families being part of the cyclic systemic failure due to the lack of neurodivergence awareness, inclusion frameworks, whole system working and innovations to reach at risk families ie children living in poverty/low income families, refugees, Gypsy Romani and Traveller groups. Improving access to education is therefore multifactorial and we require the embedding of the The Right Way (Childrens Commissioner for Wales) framework to bring the voice of learners to the centre of policy and focus. More importantly the most disadvantaged learners and those at risk of exclusion to steer the school in providing an accessible inclusive environment for all. We must also be aware of the research Prof Ann John et al (Jan 2022) on the risk of poor outcomes for self harm and other mental health disorders for neurodivergent learners not accessing education.

Question 3.

- The impact on the emotional wellbeing of families has been commonly raised by members of Parents Voices in Wales when a child has not been cared for within an inclusive environment. Many of these families are low income due to the parents and carers being unable to work due to the additional care their child needs before during or after school. When there is a disparity in understanding between the parent and the school this ultimately impacts on the whole family. Parents may be neurodivergent or disabled themselves and carry a heavier load in managing situations where the learner is unable to access the same level of education as peers of the same age. Qualities of inclusion differ between units and mainstreams in schools assuming that only those with learning or physical disability have needs. Often a disparity in opinion on the needs of the child between families and schools can cause a breakdown in relationships impacting both the learner and the parents. It is vital that the voice of the learner is central to the coproduction of a plan to meet needs of those who need extra and for schools to view the whole child in their support provision. Schools need to be adequately funded and resourced along with appropriate levels of training in neurodivergence and disability to ensure that everyone in the school is a safe trusted adult who understands to meet the needs of every child. Collaboration with families is central to understanding each learner who requires support. Parents Voices in Wales reports that 100% of the parents/carers have a negative impact to their mental health and wellbeing due to the challenges they have faced in obtaining support for their children/young people. 76% report having to visit the GP for their mental health in 2019. Nearly half of the parents in the group report losing income due to the challenges the families have faced.

Question 4.

- Schools have limited to no provision for mental health support. While some schools have an Elsa scheme this is not enough to cover the whole school. All teachers should have training dealing with mental health as this spans right from separation anxiety at the school door right to school refusal and self harm. My son has been let down by this as there wasn't enough resource and on numerous occasions has self harmed at home and school and there is no easy place to get support with that. It's often fobbed off as he will grow out of it. Parent 2 We urgently require a sustainable model for working with third sector at a time that demand is outstripping capacity in Wales for mental health support. Learners who are neurodivergent are more likely to be absent from school or excluded from

school limiting their ability to access school based mental health provision. there is variability across Wales with the inreach teams working with schools and this can range from providing training to schools on emotional wellbeing to creating a referral pathway into CAMHS or ND. Not all areas have ND in reach teams. Where CAMHS are signposting families back to school where the learner does not meet the threshold criteria for CAMHS the waiting lists have moved to schools where learners are hitting crisis during the waiting times. We know that learners with disability/learning disability have higher risk of mental health problems, NICE 2016, Cooper 2007 as outlined in MENCAP website suggest 15-52% prevalence of mental health disorders. This requires a whole system approach where these learners have open access to mental health support but also that their needs as a family are being met so they do not travel down the mental health spectrum in the first place. It should be a mandatory requirement that the whole system supports families within schools 'Team Around the Family' to ensure the most vulnerable are protected and to just provide support to those families who shout the loudest. We have to be more proactive in meeting needs earlier and review support on a graduated response and needs led basis.

Question 5.

- School funding has been cut meaning they are not able to provide the accessible learning needed for disabled children. Children who are dyslexic do not learn in the same way yet are let down and left to fail because there is not enough teachers to teach these children in a way they can learn. The new statements are not good because the ownership is passed to school. No one checks this and the help may not even be provided. Why should parents have to be the ones who are always put on the spot to check the school are doing what an IDP says it should? What recourse is there now if they are not? It just feels like something else that is only easier for LA and Welsh government.

Question 7.

- Information is non existent. Everything I have done and managed to get in place for my son has been because I have fought. Fought tirelessly to overcome rejections and waiting lists and my son wanting to kill himself because he's been made to feel like a failure in the school system. Something is very wrong if this is how we are leaving our young people to feel. Information needs to be readily accessible and any type of assessment or needs based support needs to be spoken about and have regular check

ins and not just with parents but with a professional who can also check to see the young person isn't being failed. Disabled children need an advocate who isn't just their parent. Another adult who is on their side and does not concern themselves with budgets they are just there to make sure the child has what they need.

Question 9.

- There is hardly any provision for disabled young children. My son can't just go to a normal youth club or scouts or any of them because they would not understand his needs. He needs a specialist setting who will understand his needs and provide play based or skills based support to bring him into a sense of normality. Instead he feels locked inside the house.
- We require smaller nurturing education alternatives for those who are at risk of school absence. Many neurodivergent learners will flourish in these environments. There seems to be mainstream or special needs units which a focus on strict criteria for access. Families are having to travel long distances to find the right placement for their child because their local school cannot meet their needs or because they cannot access the ALN unit at their school. There is again a focus on severity rather than need or the pupil voice. Low income families again being discriminated against in this process especially those with siblings in other schools makes the dynamic impractical and stressful. Wales needs now to fund places for missing middle learners who would benefit from a more smaller nurturing bespoke education eg Carnegie Centre in Cardiff Local Authority. This is important because not only meeting the Rights of the Child to education but meeting their educational potential using a strength focused approach which will protect their emotional wellbeing. A research paper by Prof Ann John et al Jan 2022, 'Association of school absence and exclusion with recorded neurodevelopmental disorders, mental disorders or self harm : a nationwide, retrospective study highlights the risk factors of those with neurodivergence not accessing school.

Other feedback

Children and young people are excluded from aspects of education due to their neurodivergence as there are a limited number of places in specialist provision. Without a suitable placement they flounder in mainstream and are frequently excluded or stop attending due to the high levels of anxiety they experience. With the right environment, suitably trained staff, adequate support and a

flexible curriculum neurodivergent children and young people can be engaged, flourish and achieve.

Children are regularly excluded from extra-curricular activities due to a lack of understanding of their differences or a lack of support to enable them to access provision safely.

I would suggest that families do feel that they have been affected by direct, indirect or discrimination arising from disability. One area of concern has been that the only route to diagnosis was via schools. Due to many children managing to get through the school day by masking schools would not agree to make a referral where they didn't see a problem in school. Some schools didn't feel that they had the evidence needed for a referral due to non-attendance. It is not unusual for schools to think that the problem is with the parents and their ability to parent. Relationships between parents and schools are regularly fractured and very difficult to repair.

Lack of or limited access to education is extremely detrimental to children and young peoples mental health. They will experience social isolation, increased friction within the home, deteriorating relationships with friends and family, area at increased risk of exploitation etc.

Physical health also suffers due to prolonged periods of time indoors, poor sleep etc.

Life chances are greatly impacted by not having the opportunity to reach or evidence their potential. This also impacts on their self-esteem and confidence. The barriers for schools and childcare providers in offering accessible provision are a lack of access to the finances needed to increase the number of specialist placements, reduce class sizes, improve learning environments, train staff etc.

Parents/carers of neurodivergent children are consulted and informed of the choices in education or childcare available to them. The issue is that due to lack of placements not all options are available to all.

I would say parents of neurodivergent children receive effective information and support from local authorities and schools. The education engagement team support schools, parents and children where there are placement breakdowns.

Neurodivergent children and parents of neurodivergent children don't have the same level of choice as other children and parents. While neurodivergent children can access their local comprehensive in the same way as their peers it may not offer the appropriate level of support. Parents will then need to apply for their child to access a more appropriate placement in a school out of the catchment area. This leads to issues with transport, not being with children from

their primary school and losing contact with existing friendship groups who live in their local area.

Access to before and after school provision becomes even more important if the child or young person is not in the comprehensive school nearest to their home.

There isn't adequate provision for neurodivergent children. While parents have choices they are limited and not all options are available to all. Parents will regularly find themselves in the position of being aware of an option they feel would be more suitable but being unable to access it due to demand and sometimes the need for a diagnosis.

Preschool children don't necessarily have difficulty finding a placement, but they do have difficulty keeping the placement due to lack of understanding of the child's differences. Flying start offer inclusive provision but access to it is dependent on where in the borough children live. BCBC offered free autism training to all preschool provision (nurseries and creches), childminders and before/after school provision.

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