

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb hwn i ymchwiliad y [Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg i weithredu diwygiadau addysg](#)

This response was submitted to the [Children, Young People and Education Committee inquiry into Implementation of education reforms](#)

IER 39

Ymateb gan: Unigolyn

Response from: Individual

Nodwch eich barn mewn perthynas â chylch gorchwyl yr ymchwiliad. | Record your views against the inquiry's terms of reference.

As both the parent-carer of a learning-disabled, autistic child and a PhD researcher on the subject of the law and human rights in relation to learning disabled and/or autistic children and young people in Wales, I am perhaps in the fairly unique position of having a foot in each camp so to speak: both professional and personal. I am concerned that children's rights are not truly embedded within schools as should be the case. The duty of due regard to the UNCRC and indeed, the UNCRPD, is now incorporated, not only in relation to Welsh government ministers, as per the Rights of Children and Young People (Wales) Measure 2011 (in relation to the UNCRC), but through sectorial legislation, namely the Additional Learning Needs and Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018, which has extended the duty to Head Teachers, Governors, local authorities and so on.

Children who have additional learning needs, in mainstream environments, do not enjoy true equitable experiences with their peers. In order to keep children with more severe additional needs within mainstream settings, so that they may access the curriculum and opportunities that other children of their age have, parents are having to jump through significant hoops to bridge obvious gaps in funding and resources. For example, parents cannot leave their children in school at lunchtime or break time and have to collect them, as there is no support to keep them safe, help them eat and go to the toilet etc. during such times. They often cannot attend breakfast or afterschool clubs as there is no additional support for them. If parents would

like their children to take part in extra-curricular activities such as swimming lessons, they may find that they have to attend these activities with them or that they simply cannot go or be part of it, which then separates them further from peers, highlighting their difference and underscoring the status quo that these children and their parents cannot expect the same opportunities, as just a fact of life.

There has been much emphasis placed on inclusive education policy and practice as a human right specifically, within the UNCRPD. However, on a personal level, similarly to many parents I know, I have had to remove my child from state-maintained, mainstream education and, when faced with the inadequacies of the maintained special school, I fought very hard for him to be placed in an independent school that provides specialist tailor-made programmes for autistic children. Since his placement at this school, all of his funding is going into him essentially - to providing him with the specialist intensive one-to-one interaction he needs, toilet-training, teaching skills of independence and speech and language therapy every single day, for example. More than this however, I no longer have to constantly attend meetings at school or with health teams such as SALT and OT's, or intervene to try and enable him to access wider aspects of school life such as P.E. lessons, trips out into the community, residential trips in the summer, cycling lessons, swimming lessons and so forth. These are all carried out in a safe and inclusive manner with all the children supported at the level they need, to keep them safe and deliver the curriculum in a way that they can access it and learn to their fullest capacity.

Whether it is the new curriculum or the old, the resources are simply not there after austerity, to provide a truly inclusive education for children with more severe additional learning needs, within a mainstream environment. Providing for such children requires a whole new approach to even the building, safety, staffing ratios, toilets for incontinence etc. and sensory needs to name but a few. This kind of provision can not be simply bolted on, or added into, the one size fits all method of schooling that is still entrenched in society, regardless of any change in the legislation. It is a societal, grass roots change that would need to happen to change the way that education is both conceived of and delivered in order to provide a truly

inclusive experience where children were accepted for who they are no matter what their challenges or disability, so that they can reach their full potential. Society will never stop viewing these children as 'less than' whilst success criteria is measured in exam results or sports day wins, or whether they will be doctors or lawyers. Parents in mainstream schools will continue to feel resentment that budgets, already stretched painfully thin are being increasingly allocated to support children with additional needs and this is beginning to cause animosity as the political rhetoric coming out of Westminster (which unfortunately reaches Wales too) is hell-bent on pitting people against each other, with 'SEND' children as they refer to them there, being targeted currently as the next in a long line of othering and hatred of vulnerable groups that are 'costing too much money.' It is of course very short-sighted as underinvestment in these children and families will result in parents giving up work, families breaking down, more families slipping into poverty, mental health problems for both parent-carers and children (including siblings) and all of these children not reaching their potential to do the best they can as adults.

These children will never be seen and understood whilst they have to be segregated to enjoy the same rights to school life as other children, without additional needs. On a practical level and as a good start, schools need to be doing more to incorporate conversations about disability and difference into every-day learning and teaching, not only in the odd PSHE/assembly/RE lesson etc. Disability and difference needs to be part of all school resources, books, learning experiences etc. so that these children grow into a more accepting society that doesn't feel challenged or shocked when confronted by severe learning disabilities and any associated behaviours or mannerisms for example, in the street or any other public space.

I took the difficult decision to give my son the best life he can have in society as it is currently, which is non-inclusive as a whole. But I do feel there is a lot more that can be done through the curriculum to ensure that teachers, head-teachers, governors and local education authorities are challenged to think differently about children with disabilities and how they can either enable or disable such pupils further, by their actions or inactions. The approach needs to be more holistic than it is currently - for example,

provision for lunch-times and break-times so these children are safe and supported to navigate school is simply not available. Provision in terms of sensory rooms or places that are sensorially sanitised to enable them to have a rest, before being immersed once again in the hustle and bustle of school life, are an essential component for these children if they are to be able to learn in an inclusive environment. Otherwise, we will always have the need for segregation and for places like the school my child attends, which means that children without experience of people with learning disabilities, grow into adults without experience of people with learning disabilities and society continues to be divisive, discriminatory and built around structural inequalities that further perpetuate the cycle forever more.