



Senedd Cymru
Welsh Parliament



Children, Young People and Education Committee findings

What we found out about how disabled
children and young people are treated
at school and nursery



March 2024

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What we wanted to know



We are the Children, Young People and Education Committee.



We wanted to know how disabled and **neurodivergent** children and young people are treated at school and nursery.

We say **neurodivergent** like this:
new - row - die - ver - jent



Neurodivergent means your brain works in a different way to most people. You may be autistic or have ADHD.



We wanted to know if everyone is treated fairly in nurseries and schools.



We wanted to look at how much schools and local councils are following the law and rules about:



- **inclusion.** **Inclusion** means doing things in a way that means everyone can join in

and



- **accessibility.** **Accessibility** means how easy it is for everyone to join in

What we did



Different organisations and charities helped us find families who could help us with our work.



We talked to 40 different families from all parts of Wales.



We had meetings face to face and online with parents and carers of disabled and neurodivergent children.



We talked to disabled and neurodivergent children too.



We wrote down what everyone told us and what we found out.



Things we asked about

We asked parents, carers and children questions to see:

- if schools and nurseries meet the needs of disabled and neurodivergent children



- what things stop schools and nurseries from making sure everyone is treated fairly



- if families and children can have their say about the support they get in school



- if disabled and neurodivergent children and families have the same choices as others. Things like going to clubs and activities





Good things we found out

Some families said that their child's school gives them very good support.



Some families said that staff know the best way to support disabled children.



When these 2 things happen, they said their child feels happy at school.



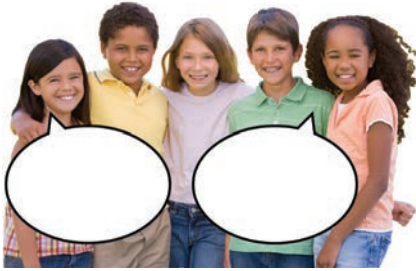
Families told us lots of other things about their child's school life.



There were 3 big things we found out about.

Big thing 1: Inclusion

Fairness



Some families said they did not feel like their children were treated fairly. Things like:



- not being able to join in the same activities and clubs as other children

or



- being asked not to come to school sometimes. This could be if there were not enough support staff there

Local councils



Some families said that they did not feel like they could trust their local council.



They thought that councils only care about how much things cost.



Some families said that councils did not tell them what services could support their child.



Some people said it took too long to get information from the council.

Understanding disabilities



Some families did not like the way some school and nursery staff made them feel.



They said that staff sometimes do not understand how a child's disability can affect their behaviour.

Things like making noises or not joining in everything.



Some disabled children find joining in hard. Making noises helps some disabled children feel calm.



But some staff used words like naughty to talk about these things. Staff did not understand why the children did them.

Learning to speak Welsh at school



Some schools in Wales teach children in both Welsh and English.



Some families we spoke to told us that their child has not had the chance to learn Welsh at school.



They think this is because of their child's disability.



Parents want their children to have the same chances as other children to learn Welsh at school.

Joining in school trips and other activities.



Some families said that their child could not go on school trips because of their disability.



Some families said that when their child went on a school trip, staff worked hard to support them in the best way.

Big thing 2: accessibility

Finding out your child has a disability



When a school finds out about a child's disability from an **expert**, they can give the right support.

An **expert** is someone who knows a lot about something.



Some families said that it took a long time to find out if their child had a disability.



This made it hard for the child to get the right support at school or nursery.



Families worry that waiting for support means their child is not getting the best chances at school.



Support services

To give the best support, different services should work together with schools. Services like:

- speech and language therapy

This supports children with finding the best way to understand other people and say what they need.



and

- occupational therapy

This supports children with doing things in the best way for them.

Things like having a special seat or cup.



Some families said that different support services and schools do not talk to each other enough.

This means that staff do not have enough information to support their child in the best way.

Being at school



Some families say schools think things like exams are more important than **mental health**.



Mental health is how you feel in your mind and how you cope with everyday life.



Some families think their children are given work that is too easy for them.

They think this is because of their child's disability.



Some parents said that there are too many children in a class. This makes it harder for disabled and neurodivergent children to get the support they need.



Some parents think more schools should have a quiet room. This is a room where children can go when they are finding it hard to cope.



Some parents say schools do not have enough things like ramps for wheelchairs and changing tables.

Staff training



Some families think school staff have not had enough training about disabilities. This means schools do not make **reasonable adjustments** for their child.



Reasonable adjustments means making small changes so that someone can use a service.



Some families think there are not enough staff in schools who know a lot about disabilities.

Talking to and listening to parents



Some families think that staff do not listen to what they tell them about their child.



Parents said that some experts thought they knew more about their child than they did.



Some parents think they do not know enough about what happens to their child at school.



They want staff to tell them more about the things that happen when their child is at school.

Support in the school holidays



Some families told us there is no support for disabled children in the school holidays.



They said there are not enough holidays clubs with spaces for disabled children.

Being in school



Some parents of disabled children said their child does not go to school for the full day.



This is because schools are telling parents to take their children home after a few hours.

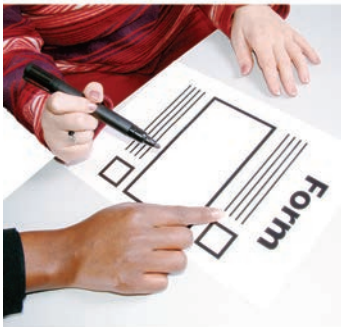


Schools say that this is better for their child.



Parents think it is because schools do not have enough staff to support their child all of the time.

Filling in forms



To get extra support for a child, staff and parents need to fill in some long forms.



Some parents told us that they found it hard to fill in the forms. They did not get support with this.

Money



Some parents said it was not the school's fault if a child does not get the right support.



They think local councils do not give schools enough money to pay for support staff.

Getting to school



Some disabled children use transport like taxis to get to school.



Some parents said that this did not always work in the best way for their child. This is because of things like:

- other children hurting their child in the taxi



- taxis not coming at the best time for the family



- drivers being rude about people with disabilities



Some parents drive their children to school themselves.



They told us this sometimes caused problems. Things like not being able to park in the school car park.



They sometimes had to carry their child a long way to get from the car into school.

Big thing 3: How families feel



Parents not being able to work

Some parents said that not having enough support for their child in school meant that:



- they could not have a job. If their child gets sent home from school there needs to be somebody at home to look after them

or



- they had to do a lower paid job or work less hours

Mental health



Parents told us that not having the right support at school affects their child's mental health.



Some disabled children feel left out and find it hard to make friends.



There is a long list of children and young people waiting for mental health support.



Parents say their own mental health can be affected if their child is not getting the support they need.

Disabled children's rights



Your **rights** are the things you are allowed to do and how you should be treated.



Some parents say not all school staff understand the laws for making sure disabled children get their rights.



Parents think this is because school staff have too much to do.



Because of this, some parents think that disabled children are not getting their rights. Things like keeping them apart from other children in the class.



Parents think that the government does not use money in the best way for schools.



The government needs to pay for staff to have more training about disabled people's rights.

The money that families have

Some parents of disabled children have to buy extra things for their child.



Things like:

- a special bed or table

or

- extra nappies to send to school for their child



These things cost a lot of money. Some families have not got enough money for this.

What happens next



We asked families what they thought should happen to make things better. They told us they think that:



- teachers need more training in supporting children with disabilities



- school staff and experts should work together more



- services need more money from the government



- parents of disabled children need extra time off from their jobs to look after their children



- schools need to talk to parents more about their children

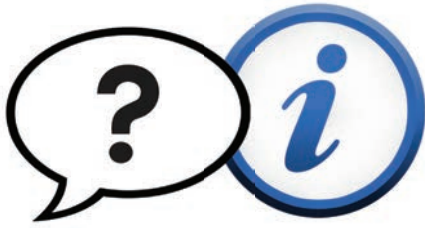


- all schools should have a quiet room for children who need it



- there should be a person who works together with disabled children, their families and schools
This would mean that families with disabled children are supported in the best way.

For more information



Contact us if you have any questions or want more information about our work:



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