

Comisiynydd Plant Cymru Children's Commissioner for Wales

Keith Towler

William Powell AM c/o Abigail Phillips
Clerk
Petitions Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff CF99 1NA

21.12.2011

Dear William

I write to you in relation to two petitions that have been received by your committee regarding which you have requested a response from me as the Children's Commissioner for Wales.

P04-346 Free Childcare for 3-4 year olds

My Investigations and Advice officers have taken calls relating to associated issues, which tend to reflect the confusion among members of the public. Early years services is a complex area of service provision which differs from area to area and has a variety of structures, such as flying start, foundation phase and early education funding.

I think it would be useful to clarify the wording of the petition. When the petitioners refer to free childcare for 3-4 year olds, are they referring to free education places? My understanding is that though the setting could be in nursery schools, nursery classes in primary schools or reception classes in primary schools, playgroups, private day nurseries, independent schools, or with child minders who belong to an approved network, they can all be referred to as providers of free education places. It is clear that the local discretion afforded to local authorities leads to various models of discharging their obligations to free education places.

I would refer you to Newport Council's family service to ascertain that the information attached in your correspondence is an accurate description of the situation in Newport. Its website states:

'Some Private Day Nurseries are also recognised as providers of education. Children who are resident in Newport and who attend one of the Private Day Nurseries or Playgroups who are Registered Education Providers, may be entitled to funding to cover a half-time early years education place (term time only) instead of a Council Nursery place. Please note that the funding will be paid directly to the setting. If your child does attend one of these settings, they must attend a minimum of 3 sessions on separate days to be eligible for the funding. Please be aware that this funding may not cover the usual charge of the setting, therefore you may still incur a charge. Please speak to individual settings to discuss this in more detail.'

This will, of course, benefit some families. However the Council may not be able to offer

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the flexibility to facilitate the needs of all families. It is almost inevitable that some parents will benefit more than others, based on their particular circumstances.

P-04-337 Free Sunscreen for all School Children under the age of 11

Whilst acknowledging this as an issue which is relevant to children's right to be healthy, I don't feel as if my Office can add value to the deliberations relating to this particular petition. I do note with interest the response from the Minister for Health and Social Services and will monitor other contributions published by the Committee.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Keith". The signature is written in a cursive style and is followed by a long horizontal line that extends to the right.

Keith Towler
Children's Commissioner for Wales
