

The National Assembly for Wales Petitions Committee

P-04-346: Petition on the provision of early years education

Comments by Mudiad Meithrin –

- We note that 15 hours a week of free-of-charge childcare is not available in Wales for 3 to 4 year olds. Families that live in Flying Start areas have the right to part-time childcare for 2 to 3 year olds, but that service is not available to children that live beyond the boundaries of the Flying Start areas, or to 3 to 4 year olds.
- The Welsh Government funds 10 hours a week of early years education for children between 3 and 4 years old. That early education is provided in nursery classes in schools, as well as in non-maintained sector settings – depending on the policy of each local authority. However, we note it is not the aim of this childcare to enable parents to work or attend training, rather to provide opportunities for young children to benefit from early years education.
- We agree, however, that it can be very difficult for working parents to collect their children from the 3 year old education provision at the end of the session, and to transport them to another place for wraparound care for the rest of the day. This is particularly true for parents whose children attend Welsh-medium education in south-east and north-east Wales – where the nearest Welsh-medium school may be some miles from the child's home and the parent's workplace.
- The accessibility of the early years education to the family home can be a substantial factor in parents' decisions about what provision to choose. Often, the travelling distance to the nearest Welsh-medium school means that parents who want their children to have Welsh-medium early years education are not given equal opportunity. In many counties, school transport is not funded for 3 year olds, and that has a negative impact on the options available to parents, particularly in the case of parents who suffer from deprivation. We urge the Government to ensure that the Welsh-medium early years educational provision is available locally to all families, and in a location that is as accessible as the English-medium provision. It is only through achieving this that we can ensure fairness and equal opportunity for every child and their family.
- We agree that the provision of wraparound care on site or near to the site where early years education is provided, whether in the maintained sector or the voluntary sector, is a means of facilitating the transferral of children from one type of provision to another, thereby saving working parents from having to collect their children at midday. As the petition notes, there are examples of this happening, but the opportunities for parents to take advantage of this type

of provision is not consistent across Wales. Local authorities' childcare sufficiency assessments should recognise and draw attention to any gaps in local provision. We suggest that examples of good practice in the context of wraparound care should be collected so that they can be fed back to Local Authorities and areas where the service is not available to parents.

- Some day nurseries have been registered with the Local Authority as education providers for 3 year olds. In these settings, 10 hours of nursery education can be funded for 3 year olds, and parents can pay for the additional hours when their children are present in the nurseries. This is a very convenient arrangement for working parents, and perhaps consideration should be given to ways of encouraging more nurseries to register as education providers for 3 year olds, and Estyn inspections could be undertaken to enable them to achieve this. However, it should be noted that there are few opportunities for parents to take advantage of day nurseries that operate through the medium of Welsh. As a result, more often than not, parents have to use the English-medium provision rather than their choice of Welsh-medium day care. Fiscal funds should be found that would enable sessional Welsh-medium childcare providers to expand their service to full day care.
- We would like to emphasise that the parents of children who have additional needs often face even more difficulties as they try to access education for 3 year olds or wraparound care/full day care for their children. There are many examples of a shortage of equal opportunities for children that need additional assistance to enable them to take advantage of early years provision. In day care settings, if the child needs a one-to-one assistant, parents may have to pay more for this, unless the local referral programme can contribute towards some of the cost. Situations such as these often mean that the parents of children with additional needs cannot undertake work or training in the same way as other parents. This creates a situation of injustice and disability discrimination.