

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 53

Ymateb gan: Blymyddoedd Cynnar Cymru

Response from: Early Years Wales

Early Years Wales is a leading umbrella organisation for the early years childcare sector in Wales. Established originally as Wales PPA, the organisation has been providing supportive services to childcare providers and parent and toddler groups since the 1960's. We are a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee.

Our membership consists of day nurseries, playgroups, childminders and ASC as well as practitioners and professionals.

Over the course of the summer, Early Years Wales has reached out to its membership to gain their experience and feelings regarding ALN in Wales. We have done this via survey, forums and written statements as well as gathering case studies from across Wales. It is evident from the response that we have had that our sector is passionate about the quality of support that they can provide children with Additional Needs and the support they receive to do this work.

Early Years Wales has been involved with the reforms of the ALN act and code since the beginning and has always worked closely with Welsh Government to support the transition into the new regime, however, it is still clear that there is very little focus on the 0-3 age group and even less resources gone into this age group, unless Flying Start is available, and as this is not a universal service, there is already a lack of equity for children with additional needs across Wales.

We have looked at all the points with the consultation and have some comments and quotes from our members.

Language

We were concerned to see the use of language that is not in either the ALN Act or Code, particularly 'neurodivergence' and that we are not talking about ability, rather than disability.

Although neurodivergences is a familiar term for professionals, it is not a term that is generally used within the childcare sector as children in the 0-3 space usually have emerging diagnosis and wouldn't generally be categorised in this way. It is a term that many parents that we spoke to find difficult to understand and associate with. Practitioners also suggested that it is a term that would be more familiar with older children, particularly teens. One parent reported to us that she dislikes the term because it does not clearly say what difficulty her child has, which means that their needs are not so easily met. On the other hand, she says that her teenage son much prefers the term.

Throughout this consultation, you use the words 'neurodivergent' and 'disabled' which many felt did not cover the additional needs of children that they have in their care, so in terms of barriers you have put one up before the consultation has even been read.

It is important to understand that these comments are related in the majority to children aged 0-5 who are attending registered childcare. At this age, there is no statutory or universal offer to parents and access to services, such as Flying Start for example is dependent on postcode.

To what extent are children and learners currently able to access all parts of childcare and education provision, including the way in which the curriculum is taught and extra-curricular activities.

There is no universal provision for 0–5-year-olds, so services and support received at childcare settings will vary according to local authority and postcode, for example a child accessing a Flying Start provision will have access to enhanced health visiting services, parent support, additional support staff, easy access to SALT, Education Psychologists and a huge range of additional services although this does vary from county to county. Children accessing non-maintained funded settings have access to Early Years Advisory teachers, have access to additional support. As an example, a day nursery that does not offer Flying Start or funded foundation learning will not have any access to these enhanced services, although some counties do have good provision via referral and brokerage schemes.

CASE STUDY 1

Two children placed at a day nursery receiving additional adult support.

Child A was at nursery school and Child B arrived later in the morning after attending a swimming lesson. The referral scheme coordinator visited the setting for a review and the room leader had an opportunity to discuss her concerns as she has felt unsupported by any professionals working with the children.

All her knowledge in how to support the children had been picked up from conversations with the nursery school staff. She was disappointed that the physiotherapists and speech therapists go to the school to support the two children but haven't visited the nursery. She felt they had needed guidance with lifting the girls, to ensure staff were safe and needed to know how the two children should sit correctly.

The extent to which children and young people have been excluded from aspects of education or childcare due to their disability or neurodivergence.

Children placed in childcare usually have emerging needs which have not had any interventions or support. Quite often, these are children on waiting lists for referrals and their needs are not fully understood. IDP's are not usually in place at an age where children are attending childcare i.e. 0-3 no mandatory provision.

Our members said:

"Affordability of and availability of suitable additional staff is a barrier to some children being able to attend. In some instances, the layout of a setting or the physical fabric of a building may prohibit necessary adaptations being made."

"We try to include all children as much as we can. We are a very diverse nursery and try to include every child no matter what their difficulty is. The only barrier that is sometime presented is staffing due to us not having the means to provide one to one support for the child due to funding"

The extent to which families and children feel that they have been affected by direct, indirect or discrimination arising from disability.

Siblings are often impacted by discrimination by association and are often labelled with the same issues and not treated as individuals. This is particularly

noticeable with twins who are often treated as ‘cut and paste’ rather than having needs individually assessed.

Parents may have to attend two different sites for childcare/education with siblings unable to access the same provision at the same time particularly after school/holiday clubs, trying to juggle the needs of multiple children can be very stressful and a more flexible approach to start/finish times and transport could go some way to overcome this.

The impact of any lack of or limited access on a child or young person’s mental health and well-being and educational outcomes.

Although this is difficult to measure on very young children, the impact on a family’s well-being can be significant if their child does not get the support they need. Parents are left feeling isolated and not heard and it is difficult to know where to get help.

Children who do not have support at an early age can fall behind in their developmental and learning outcomes and lack of social interaction with their peers can have a negative impact later in life.

“Children who are not fully supported by an additional adult could lead to them feeling misunderstood and not heard. This then has a negative impact on their mental health and well being and how well they do at school. Some children require more support than others and I feel at the moment the children who need this especially in nursery settings are not getting it due to us having to count them in normal ratio”

The barriers for schools and childcare providers in offering accessible provision

There are many barriers that childcare providers face in offering suitable provision for example.

Childcare settings are often in old buildings with challenges such as small rooms and stairs, some settings are in pack away situations such as village halls and adaptations cannot always be accommodated.

Recruitment and retention has become an issue in Wales and it is difficult to recruit qualified and experienced staff especially considering the low wages.

Availability of extra support varies from county to county .

Transition from childcare into mainstream education can be difficult and information sharing is not always successful.

“Hiring suitable staff who have had the right training or qualifications. Childcare staff don’t feel valued and are leaving the industry as their pay is so low. We also struggle to recruit as there isn’t enough qualifications that we can accept to work in childcare then we have to count those staff members as unqualified which can affect our ratios. Education qualifications or Health and Social aren’t recognised in childcare settings.”

CASE STUDY 2

The child is currently attending XX nursery without support and then the mother takes him to a childminder on a Thursday afternoon just for respite for herself.

She has 4 children each with an additional need, but she feels her 4-year-old is the most challenging.

■ went to the setting to discuss his needs with the manager/owner, she expressed concerns about the child attending a childminder as she feels it isn’t the right environment for the boy as the rooms are small and the younger children and babies are getting hurt. He is unaware of the boundaries, has a constant need to climb and swings from the curtains, if he wants something he will walk across children and staff to get what he wants and has no regard for other people in his way. If the children are taken out into the community, he is a risk as he runs off, and won’t listen to instruction.

If the mother is successful in getting support for her child, she will return to work, therefore she would require a placement of five mornings in the setting and then transfer support for him to be taken to xx nursery in the afternoon.

How well disabled and neurodivergent children and their families are consulted or informed of the choices in education or childcare available to them.

Choices are limited in the childcare sector and it is usually up to the individual family to source suitable childcare unless they live in a 'flying start area and are eligible for that.

Parents have reported to us that they like the new approach from the Act and Code as it puts their child front and centre through All About Me and PCP's. They also feel that the school ALNCO's are better equipped to manage their child's progress through school and they are kept better informed.

Whether parents of disabled and neurodivergent children and the children themselves receive effective information and support from local authorities and schools

Parents find it difficult to get information on where to go and what services they can access. Local Authority websites can be difficult to navigate, and information is not always easily accessible. This is especially difficult for parents with very young children with emerging needs as they don't have a point of access as they would if their child is in school. Parents expectations can be difficult to manage if they don't have all the correct information.

"We have found it difficult talking to parents as our parents have demands which must be met or we are criticized over it. I think some have unrealistic hopes which we cannot meet. Our experience has not been a pleasant one"

Whether disabled and neurodivergent children and parents of disabled and neurodivergent children have the same level of choice as other children and parents and what issues affect choice or school or childcare.

Parents' choice within the childcare sector is often influenced by location and availability and the authority in which they live. Price, flexibility and suitable spaces for the times parents need if, for example, they are using childcare to go to work. If a child needs additional adult support or resources to attend childcare, this can often be limited, for example, if a local authority scheme only

offers 5 hours one to one support a week but the child needs to attend for 15 hours to enable the parent to work how is this shortfall managed.

School admissions process is generally universal, so parents are aware of the steps they need to take.

The extent to which there is adequate provision for children with different types of disabilities.

There has been an increase in waiting lists for children that require extra support within childcare settings because it is so difficult to recruit well qualified staff for limited hours and low pay.

It is almost impossible to predict demand for a particular disability, for example, hearing or visual impairment or Downs syndrome. A childcare setting might never have had a child with these needs and therefore planning and training for this type of scenario is difficult. In these situations, training needs to be reactive and prompt to ensure the right level and quality of support is available; but the question would then have to be asked as to who is responsible financially for this.

“integration needs to be handled carefully in all situations, not just school, and childcare. It is easy to say that we should have integration but this can sometimes come at a cost to other children and young people”

CASE STUDY 3

■ visited the setting in February to meet the play worker and to monitor the progress the child was making. Although the play worker has no formal qualifications, she has worked and supported the setting for many years, providing additional support in all areas, she is well known to the staff and children and knows the routine of the group.

The play worker had been supporting the child for three weeks by the time ■ visited, she expressed her concerns saying she was finding it increasingly difficult to build up a relationship with Child B. The child displays very challenging behaviour and the supervisor & play worker felt they needed the input of a professional to help them understand how to interact with her, to best support her needs in the setting.

