

CYPM12 Cymdeithas Arweinwyr Ysgolion a Cholegau Cymru

Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg | Children, Young People and Education Committee

Plant a phobl ifanc sydd ar yr ymylon | Children and Young People on the margins

Ymateb gan Cymdeithas Arweinwyr Ysgolion a Cholegau Cymru | Evidence from Association of School and College Leaders Cymru (ASCL)

Please set out any views on missing children below.

You may wish to consider:

- **Nature and scale of the issue and regional variations.**
 - **At risk groups: including the impact of care experience and out of area placements.**
 - **Practice: issues such as information sharing and data collection.**
 - **Policy: the effectiveness of devolved policy and practice responses, including Welsh Government oversight. Whether there is effective read across to relevant Welsh Government strategies.**
 - **Devolved and UK powers: how joined up is the interface between devolved and non-devolved policy such as criminal and youth justice.**
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ASCL members believe that there are many risk factors that contribute to young people going missing in Wales. This includes family breakdown, trauma, and involvement in criminal activities; these factors may not be mutually exclusive. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the parents of the children who go missing struggle to implement positive parenting strategies, which may have been absent for many years.

Whilst children looked after (CLA) and out of area placements are at most risk, there may be a layer of “hidden” children. This includes amongst those children and young people who go off roll to be home educated or move into a PRU but have a limited hours timetable.

There is a risk that home educated children drop off the radar. Some points that may be considered in relation to this are:

- All children should have a check in e.g. safeguarding. Someone should be in regular contact.
- Welfare checks on home educated students to ensure they are safe and to consider their provision.
- Exploring reasons why a child is being home educated / removed from mainstream education.
- Lack of resources at LA level to support and check the quality of home educated provision.
- Home educated may result in individuals moving between authorities making it more difficult to identify and monitor individuals.

Where children and young people are on a school's roll they endeavour to work in partnership with education welfare services to ensure they know where every child is so that they are not considered to be 'missing'.

In order to reduce risk of vulnerable learners becoming missing, schools should participate in Section 47 enquiries as part of normal practice. This would enable information regarding the young person to be shared which may provide valuable contextual details that may be of relevance to decisions regarding next steps. Currently this is not mandatory but regional variation exists whereby some authorities do include schools' perspective whilst others do not.

In summary, we advocate for a comprehensive approach to addressing missing children that prioritizes prevention, early intervention, and multi-agency collaboration to minimise the risks posed to vulnerable individuals of going missing.

Please set out any views on children and young people who are victims of criminal exploitation below.

You may wish to consider:

- **Nature and scale across Wales and regional variations (e.g. traditional, drug related, sexual, financial).**
 - **At risk groups: including care experience, children experiencing trauma in the home and children not enrolled in mainstream education.**
 - **Policy: The effectiveness of devolved policy including Welsh Government oversight. Whether there effective read across to relevant WG strategies such as Child Sexual Exploitation.**
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- **Practice: Approaches to prevention, community resilience, early intervention, support provided and exit strategies for victims. Practice issues such as information sharing and data collection.**
- **Devolved and UK powers: How joined up is the interface between devolved and non-devolved policy such as criminal and youth justice? Are there any points of tension between criminal law and safeguarding?**

Anecdotal evidence from members suggests that the nature and scale of criminal exploitation varies across Wales. In the case of schools serving low socio-economic catchment areas there is more prevalence of drug-related exploitation. For example, county lines and newer issues of using children to sell e-cigarettes.

It is not always children looked after or home educated who are at the highest risk. There are more incidences of children who have experienced trauma. For example, parents in prison and those who are involved in anti-social behaviour or frequenting areas of anti-social behaviour in the community.

In particular, for those children experiencing trauma it is felt that:

- There is a lack of resources in the system to support and intervene.
- Insufficient support is available for families.
- Children born into criminal families can be impossible to reach.
- Early intervention is virtually non-existent.

Significant factors also include the peer group that children are part of. Additionally, a lack of parenting or capacity of parents to parent appropriately contributes to the risk of children becoming involved in criminal behaviours.

Young people can become dragged into criminal activity before they receive any intervention or support. This may be because:

- There is a lack of capacity in social services for children needing support.
- If a family isn't engaged, the offer of support stops, rather than a different route or resources targeted in another way.
- Lack of targeted resources to crime prone areas. For example, in North Wales, towns on the train line or close to the A55.
- No long term follow-up for children who have been on the child protection register and then come off, but the family unit is still broken.
- Young people are given yellow cards by the Police, but there is no further consequence. They may, as a consequence, have little regard for the justice system as they accumulate numerous yellow cards.

- Yellow cards issued for some serious offences meaning that there is little deterrent to others who may follow and repeat such behaviours.

There is evidence of community partnership working in some authorities. For example, in Swansea the Early Help Hub and CMET groups. However, it is felt that the impact of such groups is somewhat limited. In addition, Youth Justice services have very little impact in changing entrenched behaviours and habits due to a lack of capacity.

Information sharing has improved, however, a significant number of issues are increasingly being put back to schools to deal with. For example, there is an over-reliance on Youth workers to address community issues.

Please set out any views on other groups of children on the margins.

You may wish to identify other groups of children “on the margins”. These would be groups of children in circumstances that require a specific response from children’s services or other statutory providers and for which there are concerns about the current policy or practice.

There is a perception that looked after children, especially children in their mid-teens are becoming increasingly vulnerable. This may be impacted by the rate of change of care workers and social workers working with vulnerable young people.

School has often become one of the main ‘care givers’ and when this relationship becomes more challenging or difficult due to extreme SEBD issues, wider police issues or change of placement, this places the vulnerable child at even more risk. The lack of a main or consistent care giver, places the child at extreme risk. If the school relationship can be maintained, in a school where pastoral care is extensive (going beyond its core function) this may bridge this gap, but can vary depending on available resources. This is becoming increasingly difficult due to insufficient funding.

Group homes and short-term care givers do not provide the same function as a longer-term foster care placement, key worker often change frequently as do social workers, this a significant issue for especially vulnerable teenagers, which places vulnerable children at risk.

There is some evidence that children who have experienced at least one ACE are more likely to be excluded from school and, as a consequence miss education or become criminally exploited.

Finally, there is an increasing risk of young people becoming exploited by far -right groups who encourage engagement in anti-social behaviours.