

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 Estyn | Evidence from Estyn

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.**

Estyn welcomes the inquiry into Children and Young People on the Margins, it recognises this as an area of significant challenge in schools, PRUs, local authorities and regions across Wales.

Estyn works closely with local authorities through key officers, such as our Local Authority Link Inspectors (LALI). As part of this role, LALIs across all local authorities have recently undertaken a review of the support for vulnerable pupils. As part of these reviews, we found that nearly all authorities have established robust processes in identifying children missing education. Many local authorities work closely with Children and Adult Services, through a range of useful systems, to monitor children missing education. Local authorities work hard to engage with parents or carers of children who are no longer attending any educational provision to try and support and re-engage them. Where children move out of area or cannot be engaged, appropriate referrals are made by education to social services. The proposed requirement for local authorities to establish a database of children missing education and the requirement for local health boards to share information annually

about children resident in the area will help strengthen the arrangements. A national database may help to further strengthen work to identify and support children missing education who move between local authority areas.

Where local authorities have a higher number of care experienced children, and higher levels of poverty, officers in education report that the rates of children missing education are often higher. This problem has been exacerbated by the numbers of children who are refugees and asylum seekers, and in particular those who are unaccompanied. One example of this is from Newport local authority. Education leaders in Newport, in partnership with social services, have identified this as a growing area of need regarding children missing education. They have jointly developed a response through the implementation of a new project designed to provide accommodation for children who are unaccompanied refugees. The accommodation is to be in an area where there are surplus school places, to ensure that these children can access education locally to where they live. Previously, many of these children would have been missing education.

Views on children and young people who are victims of criminal exploitation.

Estyn is aware of the issues regarding young people who are victims of criminal exploitation. This is a particular concern for schools in areas of significant deprivation. In addition, it is also a significant concern in pupil referral units (PRUs), where many of the children and young people accessing this provision will have been previously excluded from education, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation. Other at risk groups include care experienced children, children experiencing trauma in the home and children who are unaccompanied refugees.

Schools generally know their pupils and their circumstances well. Since the pandemic, many have established registers of vulnerable pupils. Local authorities and regions will be aware of child exploitation through local and regional safeguarding boards. Local authorities will often have systems and processes to identify and support these children and young people.

Through the Welsh Government policy of Virtual Schools, there are many beneficial examples across Wales of local authorities encouraging young care experienced children and young people back into education and away from harm. In addition, where Education Welfare Services, Youth Services and Youth Justice Services are well developed, and work closely with colleagues in education, there are examples of successful practice in working with children and young people who are missing education and at risk of exploitation. Where this is successful, these services in local authorities have common approaches to prevention and early intervention.

They provide timely support and have clear exit strategies. Further, information sharing and data collection processes are shared through common systems. However, there is significant variation in the provision of these services across Wales, in ensuring that children are not missing education.

The Joint Inspections of Child Protection Arrangements which we carried out jointly with Care Inspectorate Wales, Healthcare Inspectorate Wales and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services were a helpful vehicle to shine a spotlight on the multi-agency work being done to identify and support children and young people on the margins. Unfortunately, there is no current plan to continue these inspections due to the current financial challenges across public services in Wales.

Views on other groups of children on the margins.

In addition to the groups identified in this inquiry, it is Estyn's view that it may be useful to also consider children and young people who are:

- Struggling with their emotional well-being and mental health
- Drug and alcohol dependent
- Disabled or have complex additional learning needs
- On part-time timetables and pastoral support plans (PSPs)
- Young carers

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.**
 - **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?**
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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.
