

P-06-1359 Offer Welsh working parents the same financial support for childcare as England, Correspondence – Petitioner to Committee, 26.09.23

Mrs Morgan's response has not adequately addressed any of the points I have raised. The Welsh Government response is deflecting by focusing on their current Flying start provisions, rather than explaining why they're unwilling to match Englands financial support for working parents despite being given the money to do so by the UK Government.

In her email she talks about budget constraints and balancing this including pay deals for teachers and NHS. This is deflecting from the fact the Welsh Government were specifically given a budget from the UK Government to spend on childcare to match Englands policy if they chose to do so, therefore we're not asking for teachers and NHS budget to be spent on childcare. The Welsh Government have made no announcement on how they intend on spending this money and yet they've been aware of it since March 2023. (Q1) What have they spent this money on? (Q2) And have England allocated the same amount of £ per child, as they've allocated for Wales in their consequential? If they have, then Wales should be able to afford the same childcare scheme as England, so why are they choosing not to?

In 2021 the Welsh Government lost 155 million and don't have the best track record for finances so someone needs to hold them to account and ask where this money is going.

I don't doubt Flying Start has been beneficial to high needs families but that's where the roll out should have ended. Most families are not high needs that require Flying Start provisions. Most families are suffering financially in a cost of living crisis and that's why the expansion of the childcare provision would have worked better, it would help financially. More parents could go out to work generating more income tax for Wales. The Welsh Government have produced no evidence that their Flying Start roll out has helped reduce the number of children in Wales facing poverty, as far as I'm aware Wales still have a high number of children living in poverty.

Reasons Flying Start are not helping the majority of Welsh families -

1. To use the Flying Start hours you need to have a Flying Start registered provider. A lot of providers, particularly child minders, don't intend on registering with flying start. In my village not a single child minder intends on registering with FS because of the additional paperwork and training when they're already registered with the CSSIW. This means if your child already has a childcare provider they are attached to and thriving with, but they're not FS registered, you have to take them out of that setting should you want to use the hours. (Q3) How is this helping children thrive? The thinking behind this is FS is high quality childcare but it's up to parents to decide the right setting for their child, not the Welsh Government. Parents can read the CSSIW reports and decide on the quality of a setting themselves. In comparison English parents get 15 hours (later increased to 30) to spend wherever they like.
1. The 12.5 Flying Start hours are spread over 5 days so a child gets 2.5 hours a day. This means working parents would have to collect their child and drop them to another provider or pay an additional fee for a "wraparound" service. As a result many parents who are eligible for the hours have had to decline using them due to the disruption caused for their child and their workplace, despite needing the financial aid. This is a further block for parents in the workplace, particularly mothers. In comparison English parents get 15 hours (later increased to 30) to spend however they like.

1. The postcode lottery roll out truly is a disgrace. I have spoken to hundreds of families, some of which are eligible for FS and have informed me they don't need the hours as they're financially stable. And then I've spoken to some families who are desperate, and yet they're not eligible. Mrs Morgan and Mr Drakeford [REDACTED] may be familiar with the [REDACTED] area; [REDACTED] a road with no affordable housing. Eligible for Flying Start. At the top of this is [REDACTED] estate. A new estate with a large proportion of affordable housing. Not eligible for Flying Start. (Q4) How is that helping children to thrive? In comparison English parents who work will all receive the 15 hours (later increased to 30) despite their postcode.

The parents of Wales have spoken, they've spoken to the media, they've sent the Welsh Government emails and they've signed the petition. It's very upsetting that despite this the Welsh Government are ignoring the needs of the many, and focusing on their own agenda meeting the needs of the few.

In preparation for a meeting with a minister I asked for stories from parents to share, I thought they would be worthwhile including here. It's worth noting that I had hundreds of responses and I didn't receive a single supportive response. Even those against the petition were not supportive of Flying Start -

[REDACTED] from Barry couldn't go back to work full time after having her daughter because her postcode wasn't eligible for flying start and after paying for childcare she would earn £4 a day.

[REDACTED] from Cardiff isn't living in a flying start postcode and has spent £28000 on childcare for her daughter in the last two years.

[REDACTED] from Cardiff is considering moving to a flying start area to qualify for free hours because paying her £1800 a month childcare bill for her two children is more than her £1300 monthly salary.

[REDACTED] from Caerphilly is living in a Flying Start area but was unable to use the 12.5 hours for her daughter because she was unable to pick her up due to work commitments, so she had to pay for private nursery anyway.

[REDACTED] from Newport lives in a flying start postcode but doesn't need the 12.5 hours as her family take care of her son. Her friends who live in the surrounding area desperately need the hours but aren't eligible.

[REDACTED] from Bridgend gave up work after her second child and now claims universal credit because it wasn't worth working after paying her childcare costs, she was not eligible for flying start.

[REDACTED] from Caernarfon and her husband both work but don't live in a flying start area. Childcare would cost them 1k + per month. They can't afford this without falling into debt so are not having children at the moment, despite wanting them."

(Q5) How is Flying Start helping these families in need?

My contact who runs a private nursery in North Wales has been working on this campaign with me. She gave me the following information from a childcare provider perspective -

"We feel we are currently been undermined and forgotten about as private day nurseries, in the governments plans for the expansion of the 2 year old funding. Flying start are accrediting and choosing their own settings over private day nurseries and we are being made to feel inadequate. I have yet to find online a flying start setting that has been awarded an excellent rating by CIW however my setting was awarded an overall excellent 2 weeks ago. My working parents are unable to use their funding as the hours are 9-11.30 in a designated flying start setting e.g a school as they are with me from 7.30-5.30pm as they are in work.

Working parents in Wales are at a loss compared to England, as from 2025 all children from the age of 9 months old of working parents will be eligible for 30 hours of funded childcare if they work 16 hours or more and earn under £100,000 a year. We get this in Wales currently for our 3 year olds with the same criteria. Working parents in Wales will only get 12.5 hours by 2025 in an accredited flying start setting. Is being registered with CIW not up to flying starts standards, this should be questioned?

Working parents should have the same funding as England to help with the costs of childcare, some of my parents work for nothing after paying childcare but they need to keep their professional jobs.

I find it a personal attack on private day nurseries when the Welsh government says they are providing better quality childcare in their flying start settings. This should be a parents choice where they use their funding.

Flying start was set up for children in deprived areas mainly non-working parents and it has proven to be successful and rewarding for many children. Expanding this particular programme is not the way forward for the working parents in Wales as it doesn't give flexibility, affordability and causes displacement within childcare settings. Childminders have voiced their opinions that they will not be part of the programme as they feel they are already registered with CIW and meet the national minimum standards and this should be sufficient but it's not."

Many thanks
Jade [REDACTED]