



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

# Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care Plan in Wales (High Level Plan)



# What is Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care?

It is the wonderful world of childhood, from wellbeing and happiness to development and learning. We all want every baby and young child to thrive through enriched opportunities and experiences. Babies and young children live in the moment and should enjoy the many wonders and fun that brings. And in doing so we are supporting them to build a more fulfilled future too.

This plan sets out how childcare, playwork and nursery education settings prior to statutory school age (0-5 year olds) can support the development of babies and young children's social, emotional, cognitive and physical needs. In addition, to supporting babies and young children's wellbeing and their ability to thrive.



# The best start in life

Children have the right to grow up in a happy, healthy and safe environment. Children's rights in Wales are entitlements; they are not optional. They are set out in law. We know that adults who better understand children's rights, can make sure children's

experiences are better too. Focusing on child development is key to enabling children to have the best start in life. We want to make Wales a wonderful place to grow up, live and work now and in the future.

I am unique! I will progress and develop at my own pace through the quality of experiences and relationships I have.

To be happy I need support from those around me: I am developing a sense of belonging. I need safety and stability from the adults in my life and my surroundings. When I am loved and cared for, I develop positive attachments and relationships which helps me feel safe and secure. This helps me learn and manage my feelings and how to respond to new situations.

I learn how to connect with and care for myself and others by what happens around me. When I have new experiences, opportunities to play and make friends I develop new ways of communicating, thinking, and solving problems. I am curious and experience joy in talking, playing, singing, stories and exploring my world. I want to feel free, have fun and do more of what makes me happy!

I am growing quickly. To be healthy I need opportunities to be active and play, I need a healthy diet and to be looked after when I am unwell.

All this helps me learn to move my body, be happy and confident'.

I am developing my independence. My experiences and the way I am cared for now are shaping the adult I become.



# Building on the care provided by parents and carers

We want to support families so that babies and young children have good experiences in their homes.

Access to childcare and playwork provision and schools builds on the care and nurturing at home and helps to provide supportive environments and opportunities to play and develop a sense of cynefin, the Welsh term which means “the place where

we feel we belong, where the people and landscape around us are familiar, and the sights and sounds are reassuringly recognisable.”

It is important that we work alongside parents and other care givers to support every baby and young child to have the best start in life and to feel empowered, cared for and nurtured.

My needs are important. I need to feel safe and secure with the adults around me. My world is slowly expanding to become a little more each day. I learn that new people, new things and new ways of playing can be fun. With your help, I am learning to explore the world around me. I am becoming more confident with you by my side. I rely on you to nurture me and as I grow and develop, I do not always need you to be right by my side. I have learnt to trust that you will be there when I need you to comfort me or share in my delight. By knowing me well, you have learned to respond to what I show you I need.



Talk with me

Family Information Service

Parenting. Give it time

Flying Start Programme

Neurodivergence Improvement programme

Children and Young Peoples Plan

Every Child Wales

# The right to grow, learn and play in a happy, healthy, safe and inclusive environment

Childhood can be an exciting time for babies and young children. It can be a time for fun, exploration, discovery and curiosity. Every baby and young child is unique, and their needs will be impacted the most by their parents/carers and the adults around them, their environment and the experiences they have. Babies and young children will discover, play, have fun in their own natural way and in their own time.

Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care plays a vital role during this period of rapid growth and brain development. Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care can nurture positive relationships supporting children's wellbeing and can mitigate adversity.

I have additional rights to adults, because I need extra protection and I'm highly dependent on the adults around me. I'm finding out about my rights through how others treat and care for me. Everything is new for me and I need opportunities to try new things as I explore, play and make simple choices. Play is my world and I'm watching and learning from all that is around me. I want to be happy, healthy and safe.



**Raising Awareness of Children's Rights Plan**

**Home Learning Environment**

**Adverse Childhood Experiences**

**Family and Parenting Support**

**NYTH/NEST framework**

**Healthy Child Wales Programme**

**Planning Policy Wales**

**Framework on embedding a whole-school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing**



# Supported by a valued, thriving and diverse childcare, playwork and education workforce

All those working with babies and young children in Wales have such an important role to play in supporting them to be themselves, play, learn and grow. We want our workforce to thrive, be equally valued and mutually respected across education, childcare and playwork. We want to attract the right people into the childcare, playwork and education sectors with the skills and behaviours to provide high quality play, learning and care opportunities for babies and young children.

We need to ensure training and qualifications are accessible for our workforce and are based on effective practice and standards. We need training which supports the workforce to fully understand how babies and young children learn and develop, and we want to support the existing workforce to gain the skills they need to progress in their careers and access more employment opportunities.

'I need to feel secure within my relationship with adults around me. I look to those trusted adults to help me grow and develop, they will enrich my day and provide me with opportunities to play and have fun. I want to be able to recognise my culture and diversity in the people who look after me. I rely on them to nurture me and help me grow my independence. I experience and build positive relationships when I am loved, nurtured and valued by, my family and other familiar adults. Developing a sense of belonging is central to shaping who I am and who I can become.'



**Career  
Progression &  
Development**

**Recruitment &  
Retention**

**Suitable  
Qualifications**

**Partnership  
approaches**

**Career of choice**

# Accessible, inclusive, high quality play, learning and care experiences in Welsh, English or bilingually

All babies and young children need engaging experiences that reflect their interests and ignite their curiosity. We want babies to thrive and by meeting their individual needs and by working in partnership with others we can nurture, inspire, and challenge all children, supporting them to develop socially, emotionally, physically and cognitively. We should embrace the Welsh language, the culture of Wales and the heritage of Wales, alongside celebrating the cultures of others. We want all children to develop a sense of cynefin in a Wales where everyone thrives and feels valued. High quality play, learning and care supports this.

We will retain and strengthen what we know works well and explore how we build on these strengths – focusing on the enabling adults, effective environments and engaging experiences. There should be a continuum of care and learning provision, with Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care dovetailing into Curriculum for Wales.

I am curious and like to explore the world around me. I like to discover new things and be creative. Going to a childcare, play setting and/or school that's Welsh, English or bilingual and playing with other babies and young children enables me to learn how to discover new things, communicate, socialise and interact with others with confidence and be creative and imaginative.



Quality Framework

Developmental Pathways

Reflective Practice Toolkit

Enabling Learning

Curriculum for Funded Non-Maintained Settings

Playwork Principles

# Supporting their journey now and in the future

Childhood is precious. It is a time that should be cherished. Babies and young children should be allowed to flourish at their own pace through play and engaging experiences. To support babies and young children, Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care along with other early years services such as access to health and social care provision will protect and support their journey to be happy and healthy.

Throughout their childhood, babies and children will go through various transitions that require them to adapt to a new set of circumstances. These may include major changes such as bereavement, divorce, moving home or the transition from home to a setting/school.

Smaller, but still significant, are the transitions that take place within a setting/school, such as moving from room to room or activity to activity. Transition is not a one-off event; a successful transition is one that has been carefully planned over time to gently nurture babies and young children's needs and wellbeing.

We need to work together to consider how collaboration and partnership working can support the planning for different transitions, particularly for the most vulnerable children. Partnerships between the various services and families are important for all babies and young children to receive consistent care, nurturing and learning opportunities.

I am only little, I need to feel secure as I grow. By supporting me to have fun, enjoying my play and working together with my parents/carers, I will be supported in my journey both now and in the future.





# Our priorities: What we've done, what we plan to do

We are not starting from a blank page. We already provide substantial play, care and learning opportunities for our babies and young children to enjoy their childhood, to explore and discover the world around them and to learn and develop skills now and for their future.

We have an opportunity to work with incredible practitioners, lead organisations and families to develop our Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care vision. The table below summarises what we have done and plan to do to May 2026.

Theme	What we've done	What we plan to do
<b>Workforce</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provided support and training to the childcare, playwork and education workforce</li> <li>• Published <a href="#">an independent review of professional registration of the childcare and play workforce</a></li> <li>• Published an <a href="#">Independent review of childminding</a></li> <li>• Developed professional learning and support for all teaching staff and embedded child development in Initial Teacher Education</li> <li>• Provided the <a href="#">Schools Professional Learning Grant</a></li> <li>• Developed and published resources in pedagogical practice in <a href="#">Foundation Learning</a></li> <li>• Published the <a href="#">Anti-racist Wales Action Plan</a> and <a href="#">DARPL</a> provides Childcare, Playwork and Early Years professional learning resources and training</li> <li>• Aligned nursery education and childcare rates within the <a href="#">Childcare Offer for Wales</a></li> <li>• Provided <a href="#">Business Support to Childcare and Playwork Providers</a></li> <li>• Funded <a href="#">Cwlwm</a> to support recruitment and retention</li> <li>• Supported Play Wales to publish a <a href="#">film promoting the importance of play</a></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote the national Additional Learning Needs professional learning pathway</li> <li>• Continue to promote the All-Wales Speech Language and Communication Training <a href="#">pathway tool</a></li> <li>• Support settings to implement the <a href="#">Speech Language and Communication Guidance</a> to develop practitioner knowledge of Speech, Language and Communication development and skills to meet children's needs within the setting</li> <li>• Provide the Training and Support programme for childcare and playwork practitioners</li> <li>• Explore options for registration of the childcare and playwork workforce</li> <li>• Complete a workforce mapping and modelling project of the childcare and playwork workforce</li> <li>• Develop pathways to employment or volunteering opportunities in childcare, playwork or nursery education, growing a more culturally and ethnically diverse workforce which is representative of our communities in Wales</li> <li>• Support growing the Welsh medium workforce</li> <li>• Develop the Teaching Assistants work programme</li> <li>• Develop actions as a result of the recommendations of the <a href="#">Ministerial Review of Play</a> and the <a href="#">Childminder Review</a></li> <li>• Support the workforce's knowledge and understanding of babies and young children's mental health and wellbeing through the <a href="#">NYTH/NEST framework</a></li> <li>• Promote training and wellbeing initiatives (through the <a href="#">framework on embedding a whole-school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing</a>) for staff and those working with children to enable a stronger, more resilient workforce, who feel equipped to support children's mental health and wellbeing</li> </ul>

Theme	What we've done	What we plan to do
<b>Workforce (Continued)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continued to review the professional learning and standardisation of job descriptions for Teaching Assistants</li> <li>Provided funding to Children in Wales to deliver specific Children's Rights in Early Years workforce development sessions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Raise awareness of the resources freely available on Hwb for all those who work in nursery education and childcare</li> <li>Raise awareness of the resources on neurodivergence in early years freely available on Hwb and <a href="http://www.autismwales.org/en/education/i-work-in-an-early-years-setting/">www.autismwales.org/en/education/i-work-in-an-early-years-setting/</a></li> <li>Work with external partners to raise awareness of the childcare, playwork and education sectors as a place to work and have a long-term career</li> <li>Continue to fund the facilitation of Children in Wales to deliver specific Children's Rights in Early Years workforce development sessions</li> </ul>
<b>Quality</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Updated the <a href="#">National Minimum Standards for Regulated Childcare</a></li> <li>Published: <a href="#">Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care resources</a> (A Quality Framework for Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care in Wales; Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care: Reflective Practice Toolkit; and Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care: Development pathways for 0-3) for practitioners on quality provision</li> <li>Supported the development of Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) and Estyn <a href="#">joint inspections</a></li> <li>Funded <a href="#">Cwlwm</a> and <a href="#">Play Wales</a></li> <li>Encouraged <a href="#">bilingualism</a> and multilingualism</li> <li>Developed our <a href="#">Speech, Language and Communication campaign</a> and support <a href="#">materials</a></li> <li>Developed a <a href="#">Curriculum for Wales</a></li> <li>Published <a href="#">curriculum</a> and <a href="#">assessment arrangements for funded non-maintained nursery settings</a></li> <li>Developed a <a href="#">trauma-informed framework</a></li> <li>Developed the <a href="#">NYTH/NEST framework</a> to create a whole system approach to mental health and wellbeing</li> <li>Published the <a href="#">framework on embedding a whole-school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing</a></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure clarity and coherence of key Welsh Government strategies that impact babies and young children</li> <li>Explore if legislative changes are required to remove any barriers to delivering our vision for Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care in Wales</li> <li>Support all settings and schools to fully embed the foundation learning pedagogy</li> <li>Ensure senior leaders have a sound understanding of the long-term benefits of foundation learning pedagogy</li> <li>Support all practitioners to understand and apply the principles of progression</li> <li>Review the National Minimum Standards to ensure they remain fit for purpose</li> <li>Support childcare settings and playwork settings in meeting their requirements within the National Minimum Standards to deliver quality provision</li> <li>Continue to provide funding to Cwlwm and Play Wales</li> <li>Develop supplementary guidance for Community Focused Schools on the key aspects of Multi-agency engagement</li> <li>Update guidance on the <a href="#">Early Years Pupil Development Grant</a> to support schools and settings in tackling poverty</li> <li>Develop, through '<a href="#">Parents Connect Wales</a>', ways to engage and co-produce policy with parents</li> <li>Integrate Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care into broader Welsh Government communication and campaigns aimed at children and parents/carers</li> <li>Explore whether assessment arrangements for birth to 3-year-olds would be beneficial to develop</li> </ul>

Theme	What we've done	What we plan to do
<b>Quality (Continued)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Developed a suite of guidance for <a href="#">Community Focused Schools</a></li> <li>Commissioned the development of the Children's Rights in Early Years Network (CREYN) and the Early Years Action Group (EYAG)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a greater knowledge of the child's journey from birth and the different transitions experienced (including the sharing of information between settings, schools and parents/carers to help develop and build a picture of each child to help them thrive, wherever they attend to facilitate successful transitions for all)</li> <li>Develop a shared understanding of key terminology and concepts such as child development across all settings and schools</li> <li>Support settings and schools to adopt trauma-informed practices which could benefit their interactions with parents/carers, with children and with each other. Working in this way should also benefit and support those working within settings and schools</li> <li>Support settings and schools to embrace diversity and acknowledge in an authentic and purposeful way key festivals celebrated by different cultural and religious groups across the globe</li> <li>Continue to encourage attachment based interventions and training in schools and other settings to increase root cause understanding of emotional and wellbeing difficulties</li> <li>Consider how to effectively share learning across the nursery education and childcare sectors and improve integrating with other key services such as health and social care</li> <li>Continue to commission the Children's Rights in Early Years Network (CREYN) and the Early Years Action Group (EYAG)</li> <li>Develop and implement a new national operating model for School Nursing Services in Wales, continuing Healthy Child Wales for rest of the compulsory school aged population</li> </ul>
<b>Access</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Delivered our <a href="#">Flying Start programme</a></li> <li>Continued to provide part time nursery education to all 3 and 4 year olds</li> <li>Continued to implement the <a href="#">Childcare Offer</a> for those eligible, including the extension of the eligibility criteria to include some parents in education and training</li> <li>Delivered the <a href="#">Early Years Pupil Development Grant</a></li> <li>Supported local authorities to provide Universal Primary Free School Meals</li> <li>Provided funding to local authorities via the All Wales Play Opportunities Grant for the continuation of the Playworks Holiday Project to support the all-important access to play opportunities with food/snacks for children</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to deliver Flying Start</li> <li>Expand our early years provision via Flying Start. Phase 2 will focus on delivering the childcare element of Flying Start to more 2 year olds</li> <li>Co-produce a bespoke bilingual speech, language and communication surveillance and intervention package for Wales (Prosiect Pengwin) to identify children who may have speech, language and communication needs and signpost them to the appropriate support</li> <li>Build on the learning from the Early Years Integration Transformation programme</li> <li>Continue to provide part-time nursery education to all 3 and 4 year olds</li> <li>Continue to deliver our Childcare Offer for Wales</li> <li>Ensure that local authorities are supported to fulfil their statutory responsibilities to support pre-school children with additional learning needs, including physical and sensory disabilities, by tackling the barriers to accessing childcare</li> </ul>



Theme	What we've done	What we plan to do
<b>Access (Continued)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expanded Welsh medium through various initiatives including funding to Mudiad Meithrin and the Sefydli a Symud (SaS) Programme to expand Welsh medium provision in the early years</li> <li>Implemented the Additional Learning Needs Code and appointment of local authority Early Years Additional Learning Needs Leads Officers</li> <li>Developed a three-year Neurodivergence Improvement programme</li> <li>Developed and published a <a href="#">Learning Disability Strategic Action Plan</a> and committed to undertake a review of the provision of children and young people's services, inclusion transitions</li> <li>Funded the Childcare and Early Years Capital Programme</li> <li>Delivered the Early Years Integration Transformation Programme</li> <li>Invested in Community Focused Schools</li> <li>Continued to listen to young children in a meaningful way, enabling more children to be better involved in shaping services and opportunities, for example through the development of the Play Sufficiency template, playful workshops, focus groups and neighbourhood walkabouts</li> <li>Published a Raising Awareness of Children's Rights Plan</li> <li>Worked with key partners including UNICEF, the Children's Commissioner for Wales and Children in Wales to develop resources in rights and participation, e.g. Rights of Babies, Infant and Toddler resources</li> <li>Continued to provide parenting support, through our <a href="#">Parenting. Give it time</a> campaign</li> <li>Supported delivery of Family Information Services and Families First programmes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to provide the <a href="#">Early Years Pupil Development Grant</a></li> <li>Continue to expand Welsh medium early years provision by continuing Mudiad Meithrin's Sefydli a Symud programme as well as promoting the benefits of Welsh medium early years provision to ethnic minority communities in line with the Anti-racist Wales Action Plan</li> <li>Continue to support families to introduce and use Welsh at home, pass on the Welsh language to their children, and support children's linguistic, social and educational development through the free sessions offered by the Cymraeg i Blant/Cymraeg for Kids programme</li> <li>Continue to fund Cwlwm to continue its work to support expansion of Welsh medium childcare and early years provision</li> <li>Develop further supplementary guidance for Community Focused Schools</li> <li>Continue to work with local authorities and wider partners to deliver the Universal Primary Free School Meals commitment</li> <li>Support children and young people participation groups to ensure the voice of children and parents is accounted for in relation to Additional Learning Needs</li> <li>Continue to implement the Additional Learning Needs Code, supporting the Early Years additional learning needs lead officers in local authorities</li> <li>Promote the Early Years Neurodivergence Programme – <a href="http://www.autismwales.org/en/education/i-work-in-an-early-years-setting/">www.autismwales.org/en/education/i-work-in-an-early-years-setting/</a></li> <li>Promote positive parenting practical information, advice and support for parents through the <a href="#">Parenting. Give it time</a> campaign</li> <li>Undertake research to understand what drives a family's decision to choose either formal or informal nursery education and care provision</li> <li>Continue to deliver the Playworks Holiday Project to support the all-important access to play opportunities with food/snacks for children</li> <li>Promote the <a href="#">Playful Childhoods</a> Wales campaign</li> <li>Continue to <a href="#">raise awareness</a> of the change in law under the Children (Abolition of Defence of Reasonable Punishment) (Wales) Act 2020. We have commissioned Children in Wales to develop bespoke resources to raise awareness of the Act targeted at all age groups including early years</li> </ul>

Theme	What we've done	What we plan to do
<b>Access (Continued)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developed/consulted on the Child Poverty Strategy to address the impact of poverty on children in Wales</li> <li>• Published the <a href="#">Child Poverty Strategy</a></li> <li>• Developed a <a href="#">trauma-informed framework</a></li> <li>• Through the framework on embedding a whole-school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing, school staff can access the National CAMHS In-reach service which provides advice, guidance and liaison from mental health professionals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Publish an update on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE's)</li> <li>• Support parents to understand child development for 0-5 year olds</li> <li>• Support the use of Welsh language in the home for all Welsh and non-Welsh speaking families. Building on our existing work to support Welsh language transmission and use in families, using the latest techniques to change behaviours</li> <li>• Continue to promote and support early help programmes to families across Wales through local Family Information Services and Families First</li> </ul>

## How will you know that we're making progress?

- Children's rights are respected, protected and fulfilled
- Children will have access to high quality, play, learning and care opportunities and experiences
- Parents will have access to all the relevant information to be able to help children learn, play and grow
- Parents will have access to high quality childcare, play and nursery education provision in Welsh, English or bilingually
- The workforce will work together to support children to have fun in the moment and to develop
- The workforce will be supported to understand and support the mental health and wellbeing needs of babies and young children
- The workforce will be supported in their career and personal development
- Everyone will embrace diversity and cultural differences
- Everyone will focus on the child and child development, central to our ECPLC approach for Wales

# How can you help?

We need to work together if we are to support babies and young children to thrive. The babies and young children of Wales deserve to have a childhood filled with wonder, excitement, engaging experiences and supportive adults – together we can achieve this. We **all** need to:

- develop a deeper understanding of child development and the importance of play
- gather views through our consultations and research proposals
- undertake training opportunities provided to upskill, develop new skills and refresher courses
- actively promote the Welsh language
- actively develop and grow a diverse and inclusive workforce
- work together to deliver the Anti-racist Wales Action Plan, embracing diversity and different cultures
- work together on policies, guidance and supporting materials
- work with the National Academy for Educational Leadership to support and provide information to senior leaders about the importance of early years
- support the promotion of Out of School Childcare with parents and the wider community
- support babies and young children by sharing information to support smooth transitions and increase partnership working across the play, learning and care sectors
- support changing perspectives on childcare and the value of working in childcare
- respond to children's developmental needs, prioritise early intervention, and surface children who may have additional learning needs (ALN)
- support transition between early years settings and schools
- understand what it means to realise the rights of babies and young children in practice



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