



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care Plan in Wales (Detailed version)



Contents

A message from the Ministers	3	Accessible, inclusive, high quality play, learning and care experiences in Welsh, English or bilingually	22
What is Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care?	5	Supporting their journey now and in the future	26
The best start in life	6	What we have done and what we are planning to do	28
Our vision for Wales	8	What are we expecting from those working in Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care?	35
Building on the care provided by parents and carers	11	Future considerations	36
The right to grow, learn and play in a happy, healthy, safe and inclusive environment	14	How will we monitor progress?	37
Supported by a valued, thriving and diverse childcare, playwork and education workforce	19	Glossary	38



A message from the Ministers

All babies and young children should have opportunities and experiences for enjoyment, fun, creativity and to socialise.

The early years of a child's life is a time of rapid cognitive, linguistic, social, emotional, and physical development.

It is a time when the foundations for lifelong learning and wellbeing are laid, and it is this time in a child's life where, our policies will have the most impact on their future.

We know from research that investing in Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care can have a positive impact on the physical and mental health and wellbeing of children. It can also potentially improve educational attainment and their longer-term contribution to society.

Since devolution, Wales has been committed to the early years, supporting children and their families by ensuring they have the best possible support and start in life. This has been reflected in our policies, legislation, and guidance. Wales was the first country in the UK to appoint a Children's Commissioner, enshrining the United Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in law, advocating the importance of play and developing a child-centred curriculum, supporting a child's holistic development.

In 2022, we published our [Children and Young People's Plan](#) and an update was published in 2024. This aims to support children and young people from all backgrounds to have the best start in life, including good early years services and support for parents/carers. In March 2023, we published [Our National Mission: high standards and aspirations for all](#) which sets out the overall vision for education in Wales. We recognise that high quality, accessible childcare can be transformational for children, brings opportunities for parents and is key to our efforts to tackle child poverty in Wales through our [Child Poverty Strategy](#). With the impact of the COVID pandemic still being felt across the country, compounded by the current cost of living crisis, we need now more than ever to continue to focus on Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care.



We want Wales to be a wonderful place for all babies, young children, their families and communities to thrive. 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. To achieve this, we need to build on the work we, along with our partners, are already doing. As set out by the First Minister, we believe that all children in Wales should have access to high quality provision in any education and childcare setting they attend. It should enrich their childhood and support them now and in the future.

Our priorities are to:

- provide opportunities for babies and young children to have fun and enjoyment
- enable babies and young children to learn, develop and engage in play
- respect the rights of babies and young children
- enable babies and young children to develop and nurture strong, mutual and happy relationships between adults and children
- make a real difference to current and future generations where everyone thrives and feels valued, regardless of background
- ensure we have a sustainable, thriving and diverse childcare, play and nursery education workforce
- help families to be able to work
- help the economy to grow by providing sustainable childcare.

The purpose of this Plan is to bring together in a clear way the work being taken forward by the Welsh Government and our partners in the childcare, playwork and nursery education sectors which comes under the umbrella of Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care.



Julie Morgan MS
Deputy Minister for Social Services



Jeremy Miles MS
Minister for Education and Welsh Language

What is Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care?



The best start in life



What does child development mean to me?

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.

We want every baby and child to have a wonderful childhood. We want them to thrive through enriched opportunities and experiences which will enhance their wellbeing, happiness and enable them to develop and learn. We want to support treating all children equitably, whatever their home life, first language, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation, gender and gender expression and whether they are disabled or non-disabled. Babies and young children live in the moment and should enjoy the many wonders and fun that brings. In doing so we are supporting them to build a more fulfilled future too.

At the heart of Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care, is the child and meeting their development needs.

Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care is not about creating a new type of early years setting. **It is about developing and delivering a consistent approach to nurturing, learning and development, through the provision of high quality play-based childcare and education opportunities, for all babies and young children aged 0-5 years old.**

It recognises childhood is precious, that babies and young children constantly play, learn and grow in different ways and to support that development they require care and nurturing.

Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care builds on and recognises the importance of working together with 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.



Our vision for Wales

We want Wales to be a wonderful place to grow up, live and work. Children have a fundamental legal right to grow up in a happy, healthy and safe environment. Children's rights are entitlements in Wales; they are not optional.

How we, as a society, provide for babies and young children can impact on their happiness, wellbeing and overall development.

Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care has a significant contribution to make in mitigating the impact of inequalities, whether it's racism, poverty, disabilities or other societal factors such as lack of opportunities all of which can have lasting effects on individuals' lives. We are committed to breaking down barriers to ensure babies and young children are supported to have fulfilling and happy childhoods.





We are committed to:

- focusing on child development, putting babies and young children at the heart of everything we do
- children's right to play
- the significant contribution play makes to supporting the development of healthy relationships, building resilience, enabling babies and young children to make connections, crucial for positive wellbeing, and supporting learning and development
- developing a valued, thriving, diverse and mutually respected childcare, playwork and nursery education workforce committed to high quality
- embedding equality and promoting non-discrimination, taking an inclusive approach into everything we do
- embedding anti-racism into everything we do, and ensuring all staff have a good understanding of different cultures, values, religions and beliefs, and the needs and barriers faced by different communities in and across Wales
- respecting that all those practitioners in education, childcare and playwork have equally important roles in supporting babies and young children's wellbeing and in helping to build the foundations for their future development
- encouraging opportunities for childcare and playwork settings and schools to work cohesively to develop a shared understanding of Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care
- early identification of Additional Learning Needs, facilitating early intervention, supporting timely, accessible provision of additional support, and contributing to a positive transition to education

- consistent high quality and seamless transitions between childcare and playwork settings, and schools
- encouraging partnership working, where practitioners can learn from each other and share knowledge and expertise.

We will continue our journey, to drive greater coherence across the Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care landscape in Wales. We are looking to enhance partnership, integration, coherence and consistency to our approach across all nursery education, childcare and playwork providers (including childminders, day nurseries, playgroups, Cylchoedd Meithrin, out-of-school childcare clubs), and schools (including special schools) for all children aged 0-5 years. We recognise that implementing our approach will take time, but change is essential if we really want all babies and young children in Wales to, thrive and have opportunities to have fun, play, learn and grow.



Building on the care provided by parents and carers



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.





Supporting families to ensure babies and young children have good experiences is important. We want to build on the care and nurturing babies and young children receive from their parents/carers. The ability to access high-quality education and childcare is central to our vision for supporting babies and young children in their early years. This includes provision being accessible, as well as being inclusive to support all children regardless of any additional learning needs or their backgrounds. Access to Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care is important as it can help babies and young children socialise with other children and adults, have fun, be creative and enjoy learning new things. It can also help to support early identification of need, early intervention and support positive transition and progression to education.

We know that having accessible childcare supports parents/carers to gain good, stable, employment which allows them to improve their family's circumstances and help to tackle poverty. Schools, childcare and playwork settings are a crucial part of our local economies. Through communication and engagement activities and working with our partners, we want to support families and communities to see the benefits in accessing quality care and education for them and their child.

Our Parenting. Give it time campaign supports parents/carers by focusing on positive parenting and early intervention support. A dedicated bilingual [website](#), along with advice and information guides, provide tips on common parenting concerns. The [Family Information Service](#) also provides information, advice and support to parents/carers. For families who may need some extra support, [Families First](#) programmes can offer early help with problems to help avoid them escalating.



Developing children's speech, language, communication and reading skills are particularly critical for our youngest children, where the building blocks for early language development begins with developing their attention, listening and understanding skills. ['Talk with Me'](#) is our commitment to supporting children's Speech, Language and Communication development. Promoting Speech, Language and Communication in the early years can reduce the impact of social disadvantage through life.

We want babies and young children to discover the benefits of bilingualism or multilingualism. Supporting babies and young children to access Welsh medium and/or bilingual childcare and nursery education provision is integral to helping increase the numbers moving into Welsh medium education. It can also offer support for the transmission of the Welsh language in the home. Further, our expansion of Flying Start childcare helps to support this. We want to ensure there is sufficient Welsh medium childcare, including after school and in the holidays, to enable families to access the provision they want. As part of the Childcare Sufficiency Assessments process, local authorities must consider the supply and demand for Welsh medium childcare and analyse and address any gaps in provision. Local authorities must ensure that these assessments are clearly linked to their local authority plans for growth and continuity in Welsh medium education as set out in their Welsh in Education Strategic Plans.

The assessments must also take account of the supply and demand of places for children who have special educational needs or require specialist care due to a disability and also look at the barriers experienced by their families when accessing childcare. In addition a statutory duty was placed on local authorities to assess and, as far as is reasonably practicable, secure sufficient opportunities for children to play in their areas. This has become known as the 'Play Sufficiency Duty'. The Statutory Guidance to Local Authorities, 'Wales – a Play Friendly Country' sets out the nine Matters local authorities need to take into account in assessing for and securing sufficient play opportunities. Under Matter B, Providing for Diverse needs, the local authority should aim to offer play opportunities that are inclusive and encourage all children to play and meet together if they wish to.



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



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.



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.

Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care supports our wider early years policies and ambitions in Wales. Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care is primarily concerned with promoting partnerships and join up between schools and settings as well as parents/carers, for the benefit of the child and their families.

Before families access Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care provision, they access health provision, which is usually their first contact with a range of providers and support programmes. Maternity provision offers families early information on public health issues including healthy living and early parenting. [Every Child Wales](#), the replacement for Bump, Baby and Beyond provides information for parents to support them from pregnancy through the first 1,000 days and early years of childhood to make the best decisions for their health and that of their child or children.

The [Healthy Child Wales Programme](#) sets out what planned contact children and their families can expect from their health boards, from maternity and health visiting services. All families are provided with support from both a named midwife and health visitor in their child's early years.





Building on the care and support babies and young children receive at home, childcare and playwork settings and schools also provide supportive environments and opportunities to play and develop a sense of cynefin without barriers. Cynefin¹ is 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.”** Cynefin is community, culture, heritage and identity. It is a holistic concept that encompasses the physical, social, cultural, spiritual and economic dimensions of a place.

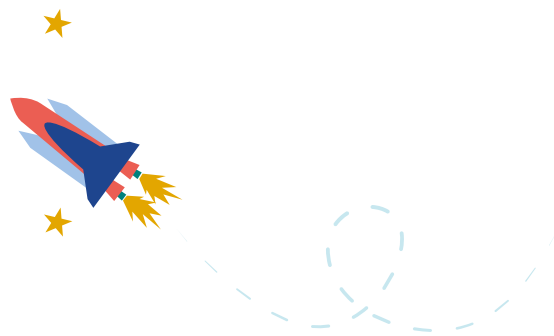
In our [Children and Young People’s Plan](#) we set out our aim for all children, “no matter what their backgrounds are, where they come from or where they live that they should have the best start in life and go on to lead the kind of lives they want to live”. Our [Planning Policy Wales](#) supports our aim to build communities that are thriving, empowered and connected. Local authorities in developing their Local Development Plans need to consider childcare, play opportunities and schools which will help to develop a thriving and sustainable economy. We are committed to investing in the learning environment of Community Focused Schools to facilitate the co-location of key services, which may include the provision of childcare and playwork and to secure stronger engagement with parents/carers outside traditional school hours.

We are committed to making sure that children and the adults who look after them know about children’s rights and how to access them. Our [Raising Awareness of Children’s Rights Plan](#) sets out how we will do this, including in early years.

1 Tyrie, J. Knight, C. Borrás, M (2021) Cardiff: Welsh Government, GSR report number 82/2021

Parents/carers and the home learning environment are fundamental in providing nurture and support to promoting babies and young children's development. Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care can build on the nurturing and learning parents/carers provide at home and/or help as a preventative measure for some Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). ACEs and other sources of childhood adversity represent a real risk to babies and young children having the best possible start in life. They, and the trauma associated with these experiences, can negatively impact a child's development. It is important that schools and settings, and those working within them, understand the association between childhood adversity and trauma, and developmental progress and outcomes. Public Health Wales have published a [state of the art publication](#) focusing on what we know about ACEs and the impact of ACEs on early child development.

Equally, it is important to remember, all children are individuals with different needs, some more complex than others. Developing supportive, trusting environments between parents and Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care provision, where early intervention can be promoted and encouraged will enhance the child's experience and improve longer term outcomes.



Friendships and social connections that children have with other children or a trusted adult are important ways of building resilience. Having a culturally diverse workforce helps to reflect and celebrate the different communities we have in Wales and can also help when children see the diversity of their own communities reflected in their settings and schools and enhance their sense of belonging. Social and emotional skills are another important source of resilience, which those who work in childcare and nursery education have a key role in developing.

Both the childcare and nursery education sectors have a role in preventative action through their relationship with parents, helping parents to understand and improve their knowledge of child development and parenting skills, help strengthen parent-child

relationships and signpost parents to other support services. In addition, where those working in the sectors identify concerns around a child's welfare, they will also have a safeguarding responsibility.

All settings and schools should support mental health and wellbeing of the children attending them and be an active part of the wider system of support for the child. We aim to support settings to work in a whole system way with other partners such as health, education, third sector and children's services through the NYTH/ NEST framework. Schools are supported in mental health and wellbeing for learners and teachers through the [framework on embedding a whole-school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing](#).



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



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.





To meet our Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care aspirations we need to ensure our workforce is supported to thrive.

The Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care workforce encompasses a range of staff including but not limited to: childcare practitioners and managers, childminders and their assistants, leaders and assistants of playgroups, playworkers, Flying Start practitioners, teaching assistants, teachers, Early Years Advisory Teachers, Foundation Learning leads, regional consortia and local authorities.

We will continue to support existing staff to remain in and develop their careers in these sectors. We are also committed to further developing a resilient, sustainable and diverse workforce, with a focus on growing the professions and making childcare, playwork and teaching professions of choice.

We want to ensure that the workforce is aware of the breadth of career opportunities spanning a wide range of areas. Over time we also want to work with the sectors to increase flexibility of staff to move between settings and schools, between childcare, education and playwork, and explore the recognition of transferable skills and qualifications.

We recognise that recruitment and retention are key issues for the childcare, education and playwork sectors and must be a focus of support to enable our Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care vision to be realised. We will continue to work with key partners to promote the sectors and the career opportunities. We will work to encourage a more diverse workforce to enable settings to mirror the diversity of the communities they serve.

We will support those working in the sectors to achieve the necessary qualifications and undertake training to ensure ongoing development of skills and knowledge. For example, in childcare and playwork, key support for childcare and playwork practitioners to access the training they need through the Training and Support Programme. This will enable practitioners to gain the qualifications and training they need as well as support opportunities for those already in the sector to upskill. Similarly, in education we will continue to ensure our Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programmes, preparing student teachers, are high quality and professionally appropriate, ensuring teachers are ready to teach the Curriculum for Wales and meet the standards for qualified teacher status. We will also continue to develop professional learning for all practitioners including teaching assistants. In addition, we are also working on childcare and education workforce training through our Neurodivergence Improvement Programme.

We also recognise the need for flexibility across the workforce. We are undertaking work to explore the potential to introduce flexibility in childcare qualification requirements, to support entry and progression in the childcare and playwork sector. This is in addition to the existing process for the assessment of international childcare qualifications to support entrance into the childcare workforce. This is key to developing a collective and diverse workforce.

We will work across government and with key external partners to ensure the workforce is equally valued and mutually respected across education, childcare and playwork.



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



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.



Childhood should be an exciting time for babies and young children. It can be a time for fun, exploration, discovery, and curiosity. By meeting the needs of babies and young children through high quality provision, we can support them in their everyday lives and their development.

We know that high quality provision is paramount. There is no internationally agreed concept of quality. In Wales, in Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care provision, certain elements have been identified as important to [quality provision](#). These centre on the core principles of foundation learning pedagogy.

Enabling Adults **who:**

- are warm, attentive and responsive to babies and young children
- are skilful, observant and interested in babies and young children and how they develop
- use knowledge and understanding of child development to support all babies and young children, and
- use knowledge and understanding of how babies and young children learn to plan experiences and environments.



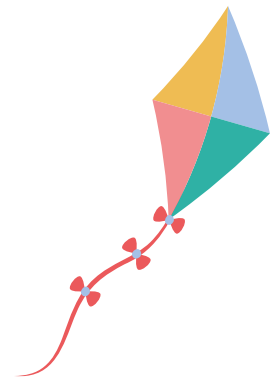


Effective Environments **which:**

- provide opportunities for all babies and young children to play, explore, and discover
- are inclusive to diverse cultures
- are inclusive to disabled children
- offer authentic indoor and outdoor experiences
- offer safe spaces to encounter appropriate risk and challenge, and
- create a sense of belonging, ownership and autonomy.

Engaging Experiences **which:**

- develop babies and young children's natural curiosity
- support early language development
- broaden and deepen babies and young children's understanding, and
- support creative thinking, problem solving and imagination.



These three elements build on the principles of [Flying Start](#) and [Curriculum for Wales](#), in particular [Enabling Learning](#) and a [Curriculum for Funded Non-Maintained Nursery Settings](#). These should be considered alongside the [National Minimum Standards for Regulated Childcare in Wales](#) and [Playwork Principles](#)². These policies focus on giving babies, children and young people the support they need to thrive.

Quality may look different in different settings or schools in practice. It is [high quality Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care](#) that is critical to make a difference and benefit a child's social, emotional, cognitive and physical development and wellbeing. Ultimately, the focus should always be on the child and their needs. We want all babies and young children to learn and develop: through play, exploration and curiosity. We want high quality provision to encourage participation, embracing inclusivity and diversity. Babies and young children should have the opportunity to explore and learn about other cultures and experiences.

We want to improve partnership working across education, childcare and playwork to build a cohesive Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care approach. Nursery education will continue to be available to all children from 3 years old. Foundation learning pedagogy and Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care, draw on our belief that learning and development are a continuum from birth enabling progress throughout a child's journey.

[Play](#) should be an important part of everyday life. Play is a fundamental right for all children. This is recognised and supported through quality education, care provision and out-of-school childcare. The pedagogy of playwork is also a well-established and effective way to support [children's learning and development](#). It is not only important to encourage play and exploration but enable activities to be child led. Play³ supports children to develop resilience, healthy relationships, friendships, and attachments with other children and adults. Playing helps with decision making, problem-solving skills and developing interests. Research also shows that play supports the development of thinking and self-awareness associated with long-term gains from Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care such as, critical thinking and communication skills.



2 For provision that offers Out of School Childcare, although elements of the ECPLC Quality Framework apply, the Playwork Principles are the professional and ethical framework to be followed.

3 The Ministerial Review of Play Report published in February 2023 recognised the importance of play for children's physical, mental, social and emotional health and wellbeing.

Supporting their journey now and in the future



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 feel supported in my journey both now and in the future.

Childhood is precious. 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 and/or school. Smaller, but still significant, are the transitions that take place within a setting and/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.



What we have done and what we are planning to do

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.

The next few pages set out what we have already done and what else we will be doing to the end of this Senedd term (May 2026).

Supporting the workforce

I need adults who are warm, attentive, and responsive to my needs, are skillful, observant, and interested in how I develop; use knowledge and understanding of child development to support me and help me to be creative, play, learn and grow. Building strong, mutual and happy relationships between adults and children is important for my wellbeing.

What we've done

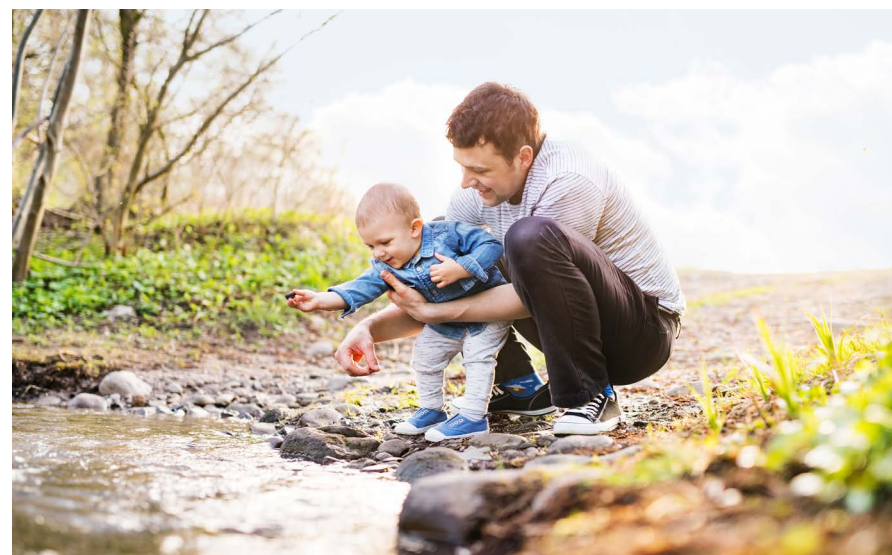
- Provided support and training to the childcare, playwork and education workforce.
- Published [an independent review of professional registration of the childcare and play workforce](#).
- Published an [Independent review of childminding](#).

- Developed professional learning and support for all teaching staff and embedded child development in Initial Teacher Education.
- Provided the [Schools Professional Learning Grant](#).
- Developed and published resources in pedagogical practice in [Foundation Learning](#).
- Published the [Anti-racist Wales Action Plan](#) and [DARPL](#) provide Childcare, Playwork and Early Year's professional learning resources and training.
- Aligned nursery education and childcare rates within the [Childcare Offer for Wales](#).
- Provided [Business Support to Childcare and Playwork Providers](#).
- Funded [Cwlwm](#) to support recruitment and retention.
- Supported Play Wales to publish a film promoting the importance of [play](#).
- Continued to review the professional learning and standardisation of job descriptions for Teaching Assistants.
- Provided funding to Children in Wales to deliver specific Children's Rights in Early Years workforce development sessions.

What we plan to do

- Promote the national Additional Learning Needs professional learning pathway.
- Continue to promote the [All-Wales Speech Language and Communication Training pathway tool](#).
- Support settings to implement the [Speech Language and Communication Guidance](#) to develop practitioner knowledge of Speech, Language and Communication development and skills to meet children's needs within the setting.
- Provide the training and support programme for childcare and playwork practitioners.
- Explore options for registration of the childcare and playwork workforce.
- Complete a workforce mapping and modelling project of the childcare and playwork workforce.
- 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.
- Support growing the Welsh medium workforce.
- Develop the Teaching Assistants work programme.
- Develop actions as a result of the recommendations of the [Ministerial Review of Play](#) and the [Childminder Review](#).
- Support the workforce's knowledge and understanding of babies and young children's mental health and wellbeing through the [NYTH/NEST framework](#).

- Promote training and wellbeing initiatives (through the [framework on embedding a whole-school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing](#)) 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.
- Raise awareness of the resources freely available on Hwb for all those who work in nursery education and childcare.
- Raise awareness of the resources on neurodivergence in early years freely available on Hwb and www.autismwales.org/en/education/i-work-in-an-early-years-setting/
- 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.
- Continue to fund the facilitation of Children in Wales to deliver specific Children's Rights in Early Years workforce development sessions.



Quality provision

I thrive having quality interactions with adults, other babies and young children by having authentic experiences and opportunities to play and learn.

What we've done

- Updated the [National Minimum Standards for Regulated Childcare](#).
- Published: [Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care resources](#) (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.
- Supported the development of Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) and Estyn [joint inspections](#).
- Funded [Cwlwm](#) and [Play Wales](#).
- Encouraged [bilingualism](#) and multilingualism.
- Developed our [Speech, Language and Communication campaign](#) and [support materials](#).
- Developed a [Curriculum for Wales](#).

- Published [curriculum](#) and [assessment arrangements for funded non-maintained nursery settings](#).
- Developed a trauma-informed [framework](#).
- Developed the [NYTH/NEST framework](#) to create a whole system approach to mental health and wellbeing.
- Published the [framework on embedding a whole-school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing](#).
- Developed a [suite of guidance for Community Focused Schools](#).
- Commissioned the development of the Children's Rights in Early Years Network (CREYN) and the Early Years Action Group (EYAG).

What we plan to do

- Ensure clarity and coherence of key Welsh Government strategies that impact babies and young children.
- Explore if legislative changes are required to remove any barriers to delivering our vision for Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care in Wales.
- Support all settings and schools to fully embed the foundation learning pedagogy.
- Ensure senior leaders have a sound understanding of the long-term benefits of foundation learning pedagogy.
- Support all practitioners to understand and apply the principles of progression.
- Review the National Minimum Standards to ensure they remain fit for purpose.

- Support childcare and playwork settings in meeting their requirements within the National Minimum Standards to deliver quality provision.
- Continue to provide funding to Cwlwm and Play Wales.
- Develop supplementary guidance for Community Focused Schools on the key aspect of Multi-agency engagement.
- Update guidance on the [Early Years Pupil Development Grant](#) to support schools and settings in tackling poverty.
- Develop, through '[Parents Connect Wales](#)', ways to engage and co-produce policy with parents.
- Integrate Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care into broader Welsh Government communication and campaigns aimed at children and parents/carers.



- Explore whether assessment arrangements for birth to 3-year-olds would be beneficial to develop.
- 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).
- Develop a shared understanding of key terminology and concepts such as child development across all settings and schools.
- 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.
- 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.
- Continue to encourage attachment-based interventions and training in schools and other settings to increase root cause understanding of emotional and wellbeing difficulties.
- 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.
- Continue to commission the Children's Rights in Early Years Network (CREYN) and the Early Years Action Group (EYAG.)
- 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.

Access

I like to explore and be creative, having the ability to play and be around other babies and young children provides me with opportunities for socialisation, growing self-determination and self-regulation and learning emotional intelligence.

What we've done

- Delivered our [Flying Start programme](#).
- Continued to provide part time nursery education to all 3-4 year olds.
- Continued to implement the [Childcare Offer](#) for those eligible, including the extension of the eligibility criteria to include some parents in education and training.
- Delivered the [Early Years Pupil Development Grant](#).
- Supported local authorities to provide Universal Primary Free School Meals.
- 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.

- Expanded Welsh medium through various initiatives including funding to Mudiad Meithrin and the Sefydlu a Symud (SaS) Programme to expand Welsh medium provision in the early years.
- Implemented the Additional Learning Needs Code and appointment of local authority Early Years Additional Learning Needs Leads Officers.
- Developed a three-year Neurodivergence Improvement programme.
- Developed and published a [Learning Disability Strategic Action Plan](#) and committed to undertake a review of the provision of children and young people's services, inclusion transitions.
- Funded the childcare and early years capital programme.
- Delivered the Early Years Integration Transformation programme.
- Invested in Community Focused Schools.
- 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.
- Published a Raising Awareness of Children's Rights Plan.
- 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.
- Continued to provide parenting support, through our [Parenting. Give it time campaign](#).
- Supported delivery of Family Information Services and Families First programmes.

- Developed/consulted on the Child Poverty Strategy to address the impact of poverty on children in Wales.
- [Published the Child Poverty Strategy](#).
- Developed a trauma-informed [framework](#).
- 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.

What we plan to do

- Continue to deliver Flying Start.
- 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.
- 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.
- Build on the learning from the Early Years Integration Transformation programme.
- Continue to provide part-time nursery education to all 3 and 4 year olds.
- Continue to deliver the Childcare Offer for Wales.
- 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.
- Continue to provide the [Early Years Pupil Development Grant](#).
- Continue to expand Welsh medium early years provision by continuing Mudiad Meithrin's Sefydлу 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.
- 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.
- Continue to fund Cwlwm to continue its work to support expansion of Welsh medium childcare and early years provision.
- Develop further supplementary guidance for Community Focused Schools.
- Continue to work with local authorities and wider partners to deliver the Universal Primary Free School Meals commitment.
- Support children and young people participation group to ensure the voice of children and parents is accounted for in relation to Additional Learning Needs.
- Continue to implement the Additional Learning Needs Code, supporting the Early Years additional learning needs lead officers in local authorities.



- Promote the Early Years Neurodivergence Programme – www.autismwales.org/en/education/i-work-in-an-early-years-setting/.
- Promote positive parenting practical information, advice and support for parents through the [Parenting. Give it time campaign](#).
- Undertake research to understand what drives a family's decision to choose either formal or informal nursery education and care provision.
- Continue to deliver the Playworks Holiday Project to support the all-important access to play opportunities with food/snacks for children.
- Promote the [Playful Childhoods Wales](#) campaign.
- Continue to [raise awareness](#) 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.
- Publish an update on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE's).
- Support parents to understand child development for 0-5 year olds.
- 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.
- Continue to promote and support early help programmes to families across Wales through local Family Information Services and Families First.



What are we expecting from those working in Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care?

We cannot achieve our vision alone. We need everyone working in the sectors to play a part and 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 celebrating 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, childcare and nursery education sectors
- support changing perspectives on childcare and the value of working in childcare, playwork and nursery education

- respond to children's developmental needs, prioritise early intervention, and surface children who may have additional learning needs
- support transition between early years settings and schools
- understand what it means to realise the rights of babies and young children in practice.



Future considerations

Implementing our Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care approach for Wales is a long-term ambition, which will go beyond this Senedd term. In continuing this journey future consideration could be given to:

- Continuing to focus on the importance of creating exciting opportunities and experiences for babies and young children to have fun, explore, discover and learn.
- Continuing to focus on the importance of quality of provision for a child's development, balanced with the need to support families. Recognising Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care as a preventative measure to enable children to have happy childhoods and to achieve their full potential as adults.
- Exploring how to make Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care more accessible to more families.
- Exploring further workforce development to develop greater capacity.
- Exploring ways which allow all suitable providers to deliver funded childcare and nursery education.
- Reviewing the web presence of services for families with a view to considering the development of a 'Families portal' to bring together existing webpages.
- Continuing to expand Welsh medium early years provision to achieve the target set in Cymraeg 2050 of 150 new provisions.



How will we monitor progress?

This plan is a living document. It will be flexible, adapting as our policies develop and reviewed regularly.

We will collect data and undertake research to monitor if programmes are being delivered effectively and are having a positive impact on people in Wales.

This Senedd term, we will monitor progress of the following activities:

Enabling Workforce

- Gather more evidence on practice to support additional learning needs in the early years through research into the Childcare Offer for Wales Additional Support Grant.
- Monitor take-up on the training programmes we support.
- Publish the outputs of our workforce mapping research project, providing evidence about the size and make-up of the childcare and playwork workforce.
- Continue to monitor changes in the structure of registered childcare and play provision and the childcare and playwork workforce through regular analysis of Care Inspectorate Wales data.
- Monitor changes in language of childcare provision through regular analysis of Care Inspectorate Wales data.

Delivery programmes to support quality and access of provision

- Inform the phased expansion of Flying Start through research and evaluation.
- Measure the impacts of Flying Start on families over the longer term.
- As set out in the [Curriculum for Wales Implementation Plan](#), we are undertaking a long-term programme of monitoring and evaluation around the curriculum which will consider to what extent the system is realising the reforms, shared aspirations and the ways of working; and how the reforms are affecting society, and contributing to the wellbeing of future generations.
- A four-year evaluation of the implementation of the additional learning needs system commenced in January 2023, in addition to a series of Estyn thematic reviews. Together they will provide key insights and evidence to monitor, identify and respond to emerging impacts of the new additional learning needs system.
- Gather evidence on the use of Childcare Sufficiency Assessments and how these are used to inform planning of childcare provision to meet demand.
- Improve our understanding of diverse experiences of early years provision by gathering data on the ethnic background of families, in line with the commitments in the Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan.
- Undertake research to support the delivery of the childcare actions in the Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan.
- Continue to monitor the take up of the Childcare Offer for Wales and undertake research with providers and parents to learn about the impacts of the offer.

Glossary

Term	Definition
Anti-racism	Actively identifying and eradicating the systems, structures and processes that produce radically differential outcomes for ethnic minority groups. It involves acknowledging that even when we do not regard ourselves as 'racist' we can, by doing nothing, be complicit in allowing racism to continue. In the workplace this can include challenging publicly or privately racist comments, ensuring Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic People are included as speakers, ensuring Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic organisations apply for grants. An anti-racist approach also puts emphasis on White people educating themselves about racism rather than expecting Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people to do this for them.
Care	The provision of what is necessary for the development, wellbeing and protection of a child.
Childcare	Care for the child by a carer other than a close family member for more than two hours a day for reward.
Children's rights	Children and young people aged 18 and under, have the right to be safe, to play, to have an education, to be healthy and be happy. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) sets out the rights of children.
Curriculum for Wales	A statutory curriculum framework for three to sixteen year olds in Wales setting out what is important in delivering a broad and balanced education in Wales.
Diversity	This refers to having a mix of people with different protected characteristics as set out in the Equality Act 2010. It can also include having a mix of people with different personal characteristics for example neurodiversity, socio-economic background and place of work.
Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care provision	This refers to the Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care provided by the childcare or play setting or nursery education provided in a school. This is provision for babies and young children aged 0-5 years old.
Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care (ECPLC) Quality Framework	The Quality Framework informs quality practice and describes the common principles that should guide all settings/schools and practitioners implementing ECPLC. It also includes the developmental pathways for 0-3 year olds and a reflective practice toolkit.

Term	Definition
Early years	Defined by Welsh Government as the period in a child's life from 0-7 years old.
Foundation Learning	Practice and pedagogy associated with nursery (3-4 year olds) and early education (3-7 year olds).
Funded non-maintained nursery settings	A childcare setting which is funded, by the local authority, to deliver nursery education to children aged between 3 and 4 years for part of the school day.
Maintained sector	Schools and nurseries maintained by the local authority.
Nursery education	Education provision for 3-4 year olds.
Pedagogy	The method or practice of teaching.
Parent	The term 'parent' has been used as a shorthand to include mothers, fathers, foster carers, adoptive parents, step-parents, 'kinship' parents and grandparents, guardians.
Partnership working	Working together, communicating openly, and planning collaboratively in ways that support a child's play, learning, care, and development, where contributions from all are as valued and as valuable as each other.
Play	Play is a behaviour, activity or process initiated, controlled and structured by children, as non-compulsory, driven by intrinsic motivation, not a means to an end and that has key characteristics of fun, uncertainty, challenge, flexibility and non-productivity.
Playwork	Way of working with children where the main focus is supporting children's play, rather than education or care (this is taken from the play quality framework).
Poverty	A long-term state of not having sufficient resources to afford food, reasonable living conditions or amenities or to participate in activities (such as access to attractive neighbourhoods and open spaces) that are taken for granted by others in society.
Practitioners	This generic term refers to the adults that work with children across the early years and can include childcare workers, teachers and classroom assistants.

Term	Definition
Reduce inequalities	Close the gap in measurable, identified outcomes (levelling up not down).
School	A school or nursery school which delivers education.
Setting	<p>Childcare settings include day nurseries, registered childminders, pre-school playgroups, cylch meithrin, out of school childcare clubs. Formal education settings refer to schools providing Foundation Learning.</p> <p>(To note – childcare setting (registered) are any setting registered with Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) to provide childcare for children 0-12 years of age).</p>
Statutory school age	Statutory school age in Wales is 5 years old.
Transitions	<p>Transitions are a complex and holistic process. They can include big life changes such as a start at a new setting, move, death or parental relationship breakdown. They can include day to day changes including moving from one setting or family member to another. Transitions can further be broken down to include smaller changes within a singular setting- moving between rooms or from one activity to the next.</p> <p>Within the context of ECPLC and for the purposes of the Plan transitions refer to the process of a child transitioning between home- childcare, childcare- school, childcare setting- childcare setting, school-home.</p>
United Convention of the Rights of Child (UNCRC)	<p>The UNCRC or United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is a legal agreement that sets out the rights of every child aged 0-18 years. All children have rights, no matter the colour of their skin, gender, religious beliefs, sexuality, ability, language they speak or anything else. All children have rights no matter what.</p> <p>The UNCRC sets out how governments should work together to make sure children know that they have rights, and how to claim them. This means working together to give children the basic things they needs to grow, be safe, be healthy, be heard and to reach their full potential.</p>

