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Exploring parents' and carers' expectations of schools and home roles in child development and behaviour

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Exploring parents' and carers' expectations of schools and home roles in child development and behaviour

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Glossary

ALN

Additional learning needs

ASD

Autism spectrum disorder

CAMHS

Child and adolescent mental health services

CfW

Curriculum for Wales

EOTAS

Education otherwise than at school

GP

General practitioner

LA

Local authority

LGBTQI

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex

Maintained schools

Schools wholly or substantially financially maintained by a local authority

OECD

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

PRU

Pupil referral unit, a type of education provision maintained by a local authority for learners who cannot attend mainstream school because of exclusion, health needs, or other circumstances

SEND

Special educational needs and disabilities

SLC

Speech, language and communication

1. Introduction and background

1.1 Background to this research

In light of the Curriculum for Wales (CfW) and accompanying reforms to the education system in Wales, there is growing Welsh Government literature that provides context for understanding how parents and carers can engage with schools and how schools foster collaboration between school and home/family. For example, when developing their CfW vision, schools are expected to maintain 'ongoing conversation' across the whole school and beyond by also engaging parents and carers and the wider community (Welsh Government, 2022). Parents and carers are also seen as 'partners in learning', and schools are encouraged to involve parents, carers, and the local community in curriculum design (Welsh Government, 2022). The Welsh Government Framework on embedding a whole-school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing is another example, as it emphasises schools' proactive engagement with parents and carers, including inviting them to contribute to activities to ensure wellbeing initiatives are inclusive and collaboratively developed (Welsh Government, 2026a). Other Welsh Government education initiatives, such as Community Focused Schools and the Poverty Proofing scheme, also recognise the importance of schools fostering closer relationships with parents and carers and involving them in children's education.

More recently, the Programme for Government 2026-2030 (Welsh Government, 2026) sets out the Welsh Government's aim to support teachers with a 'multi-agency holistic approach' to behaviour and wellbeing, and to share data and best practice locally and nationally. This is because it is recognised that continued school absence rates, as well as behavioural and mental health challenges, have meant teachers are spending more time managing classroom environments and less time delivering learning. The Programme for Government sets out that this approach will be carried out by coordinating a framework that brings together schools, health and social care, and youth services to address behaviour, attendance and wellbeing, as well as educational inequality. In addition, the Welsh Government is committed to improving professional learning, incident reporting, and information sharing between schools, and will test implementation through its Community Focused Schools Plus pilots.

Beyond the immediate school remit, the Welsh Government provides support to parents and carers via the Flying Start programme in the early years sector, where 12.5 hours of Flying Start childcare is gradually being made available to all 2-year-olds across Wales, starting with the most disadvantaged areas first. More broadly, the Welsh Government's Parenting. Give it time. initiative provides free practical tips and expert advice for parenting challenges. Furthermore, Families First is a Welsh Government programme designed to help parents, carers and families to receive the support they need through accessible services. Through its multi-agency approach, Families First brings professionals together as part of the Team Around the Family

initiative to help ensure families receive the support they need without having to navigate multiple systems and entry points.

While there are many policy levers encouraging parent and carer engagement and involvement in schooling in Wales, the current evidence base suggests that parents' and carers' expectations of schools' roles are not necessarily consistent across different parent and carer groups. Therefore, further exploring parents' and carers' expectations in Wales is key, as different expectations between parents and carers, schools and wider services can create misunderstandings, increase pressures on schools and affect parent and carer confidence.

Parents' and carers' expectations about the home-school boundary may vary depending on the context in Wales. For example, areas requiring specialist expertise, such as identifying speech, language, and communication (SLC) needs, place increased demands on schools in Wales, as parents and carers are less likely to be able to identify SLC needs than SLC professionals (Tiesteel et al., 2025). Many parents and carers see schools and early education as essential for children's social and behavioural development (Hughes and Jones, 2021). Indeed, a review of practices used in maintained schools and pupil referral units to prevent exclusions in Wales found that while parent and carer engagement was important in identifying underlying issues affecting a child's challenging behaviour, parents and carers also identified that they would like advice in developing their parenting skills and to understand how to help support their child's needs (Wilson et al., 2023). Furthermore, an evaluation of the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) system in Wales indicates that parents' and carers' experiences of engagement vary across schools (Thomas et al., 2025). In this evaluation, the parents and carers survey highlighted mixed experiences with differences in clarity, communication, and involvement in ALN processes. Recently, research on the Welsh Government Families First programme found that schools play a growing role in identifying children in need, especially post-COVID-19 (Davies and Campbell, 2025). Referrals to Family First were reported to be often linked to failing school attendance, school behaviour issues, and emerging ALN needs.

However, other areas, such as relationship and sexuality education, are often traditionally viewed as the family's remit (Thomas et al., 2023). A qualitative study of beliefs, behaviours, and barriers affecting parent and carer decisions regarding childcare and early education in Wales found that some families prefer early education and socialisation to occur within the family and thus to remain within the remit of the home (Hughes and Jones, 2021). In some minority ethnic communities, parents and carers wished to maintain cultural norms privately and manage social expectations before exposing their children to the school setting.

To further understand parents' and carers' expectations of schools in the context of child development, a consideration of the wider support system is important. Many

responsibilities that parents/carers attribute to schools overlap with or may sit more appropriately within health, early-years, and community-based services.

In terms of the early years, research in Wales suggests that health visitors offer guidance on developmental issues, such as toileting or the identification of health or hearing needs, and act as advocates (KilBride et al., 2018; Pope et al., 2013). Likewise, services, including speech, language, and hearing support, contribute by identifying delays and providing interventions that shape communication, behaviour, and school readiness.

For parents and carers of school-age learners, research in Wales indicates that parents and carers seek support from a range of avenues, such as family, professionals, including schools, GPs and health visitors, and local authority services, to name only a few (Welsh Government, 2013). For many parents and carers, the school setting may be woven into a tapestry of support pathways.

Beyond Wales, there is a body of literature from comparable education systems on how such systems define the boundaries of school responsibilities. For example, the Department for Education (DfE) in England, in its February 2026 White Paper on every child achieving and thriving, details a commitment to developing minimum expectations for schools regarding parent and carer engagement (DfE, 2026). One recurring theme in other countries such as Finland, New Zealand, the UK and European systems is that teachers' roles extend beyond classroom instruction to include welfare-related and community-oriented activities (Education Support, 2023; Eklund et al., 2020; McKelvie Sebileau et al., 2025).

1.2 Research aims and objectives

This research sought to explore 2 main points. Firstly, it explored the roles and responsibilities that parents and carers believe schools should fulfil, and those they consider are best fulfilled by themselves as parents/carers or other services. Secondly, it explored how policy and practice can assist parents and carers in building confidence and capability to promote children's development and in seeking support from organisations best placed to help them.

The research comprised a Rapid Evidence Synthesis (RES) and open forum discussions with parents and carers. The RES gathered and synthesised UK and international evidence on how parents and carers understand and allocate responsibilities for development, behaviour, attendance and wellbeing across schools and themselves as parents/carers, and on models of shared responsibility with wider services (e.g., health visitors, early years, multidisciplinary teams).

The open forum discussions were intended to gather primary evidence from parents and carers of primary and secondary school-age children in Wales. Although the research design originally anticipated a larger number of participants, recruitment challenges resulted in 5 parents and carers participating in the discussions. Due to

the limited data collected, only a summary of the open forum discussions is provided in this report.

1.3 Report structure

The structure of the report includes the following chapters:

- Chapter 2 describes the methodological approaches used, comprising the RES and open forum discussions with parents and carers
- Chapter 3 synthesises key insights acquired through the RES, with findings categorised according to the RES research questions.
- Chapter 4 provides a brief summary of the open forum discussions
- Chapter 5 concludes by drawing together key reflections and providing actionable points for future consideration

2. Methodology

This section sets out the methodological approach for this research. A mixed-methods approach was employed, including a RES from March to May 2026 and 2 open forum discussions with parents and carers of school-age children in Wales in June 2026.

2.1 Rapid Evidence Synthesis (RES)

A RES is a commonly used research methodology that allows researchers to prioritise and review studies from a large body of sources from across the academic and grey literature, using a transparent, well-defined, and replicable approach.

This section comprises the RES process, including (i) key research questions, (ii) the search strategy for literature, and (iii) the inclusion/exclusion criteria that have been used to decide if the retrieved studies are relevant to the research questions of this evidence review. A RES protocol was developed at the start of this research, outlining the key objectives of the evidence review, the search strategy, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and quality assessment criteria for the identified literature. The complete RES protocol can be found in Annex A of this report.

2.1.1 RES process

The RES protocol was designed to identify and assess relevant, high-quality evidence to address a series of research questions, as follows:

1. How do parents/carers define their own responsibilities in relation to their children's early development (e.g., toileting, SLC, social and emotional competencies), behaviour and attendance?

2. What responsibilities do parents/carers believe schools should hold in these areas, and where do they see the boundary of responsibilities between school and home?

3. How do parent and carer expectations and understandings of responsibility vary by context, including school phase, language medium, special schools, PRUs/EOTAS, and geographical area (including urban/rural) and across different ethnic and religious groups?

4. How do parents/carers understand, access and experience support from non-school services (e.g. health, early-years, family support and community services) in relation to their children's development, behaviour and wellbeing, and how do these experiences shape expectations of what schools should provide?

5. What can be learned from other UK nations and other comparable countries about how responsibilities for early development, behaviour and wellbeing are

divided between schools, families and non-school services, and how these arrangements shape parent and carer expectations of schools?

6. What are the implications for cross-government policy, including how education, health, family support and community services can be better aligned to reflect how parents and carers currently seek and use support, reduce unnecessary burdens on schools, and strengthen effective collaboration between families, schools and wider services?

The protocol first established the RES inclusion criteria, specifying the countries within scope, the language of the literature, the thematic areas of focus, and the publication date of research. It then detailed the search strategy, outlining the search terms, databases to be consulted, and procedures for record-keeping. Third, it set out the relevance and quality assessment criteria used to evaluate the strength of the evidence.

Searches using Boolean operators were conducted across databases and online libraries, including ERIC, JSTOR, SAGE, SSRN, and Taylor & Francis. Recognising that there was also relevant grey literature, the protocol incorporated a targeted search of studies produced by UK and international organisations, with a specific focus on the Welsh Government, the Department for Education, and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

Prior to starting this research, the Welsh Government had also carried out its in-house searches on the societal impact on teachers' time (e.g. running food banks, offering laundry services, arranging for dentists/opticians), including UK and international searches. Due to the similar nature of this research topic to that of the Welsh Government's in-house searches, these searches were also added to the longlist described below.

The implementation of the search strategy yielded an initial longlist of 331 documents, after duplicate publications were removed. Then, to narrow this longlist, the research team applied the following exclusion criteria: (i) publication date before 2023, (ii) non-English and Welsh language literature, and (iii) non-comparable countries to the UK, alongside additional screening of titles, keywords, and abstracts to assess (i) relevance to RES research questions and (ii) types of publications. This effectively resulted in 24 publications as a shortlist. To narrow this shortlist of 24 publications to a final list of 16 publications, the research team completed a Research Extraction Sheet. Apart from the studies' title, authors, publication date, type, and source, the Research Extraction Sheet was filled with information on the country/region of focus, abstract/executive summary, methodological approach, parent and carer and learner group type, RES research question(s) addressed, and a summary of findings. Finally, a quality scoring system was applied, assessing each study in terms of credibility, methodological approach, and relevance to the project's

objectives. Completing the Research Extraction Sheet allowed us to confirm the final 16 relevant publications for this research.

The final stage of the RES involved synthesising key findings extracted from the literature review. Chapter 3 of this report summarises the most useful insights for each of the RES' Research Questions.

2.1.2 Challenges and limitations

While the publications included in the RES provide an insight into parent and carer expectations, this should be caveated by the fact that this RES was designed to include only a small number of publications. The RES was able to identify evidence relating to most of the research questions. However, the evidence base was uneven across topics, contexts and parent and carer groups. While there was relatively strong evidence on parents' and carers' expectations of education, learning and child development, less evidence was available in areas such as behaviour. More broadly, it is also important to note that there is relatively limited literature examining parents' and carers' perceptions of schools in general, as well as of child development. On the contrary, there is more literature around the home-school relationships and partnership. Similarly, although the review identified evidence from a range of educational settings and parent and carer circumstances, not all of the contexts specified in the research questions, such as different school types, geographical areas, language mediums, and ethnic or religious groups, were comprehensively captured. The evidence was also stronger for some parent and carer groups than others, with a greater volume of literature relating to migrant families, parents of children with ALN, mothers, and families from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. By contrast, relatively little evidence was identified in relation to fathers, foster carers, adoptive parents, Special Guardianship Order carers and Kinship carers. As a result, the RES is able to provide greater insight into some areas of the research questions than others, and findings should be interpreted with recognition of the evidence gaps that remain across certain topics, contexts and parent and carer groups.

2.2 Open forum discussions with parents and carers

Insights from the RES were complemented with open forum discussions with parents and carers of school-age children in mainstream schools (primary and secondary sectors) in Wales.

2.2.1 The open forum discussions

The research originally intended to engage a larger number of participants through a series of discussion sessions; however, recruitment challenges resulted in 5 parents and carers ultimately taking part. The research team conducted 2 open forum discussions in an online interview and focus group format on Microsoft Teams. The interview session lasted one hour due to only 1 participant attending, while the focus

group session lasted 1.5 hours due to 4 participants attending. The sessions were semi-structured in nature. The discussion explored parents' and carers' views on their own and schools' responsibilities for children's development, behaviour and attendance. It also explored their experiences of working with schools and other support services, and their expectations around communication, boundaries and collaboration to meet their child's needs.

The research team recruited for these sessions via various methods, including sharing recruitment communications with national parent and carer organisations, 77 Welsh Government Community Focused Schools local authority (LA) leads, Community Focused Schools managers, Family Engagement Officers across all 22 LAs in Wales, and LA governor support officers. All parties contacted were asked to circulate recruitment communications via their parent and carer networks. Recruitment communications were also added on Hwb and the Dysg communication channels.

Linked to recruitment communications was an Expression of Interest (EOI) Form for parents and carers to indicate their interest in attending an open forum discussion. Twenty participants completed the EOI. The final 5 participants were then selected based on their ability to confirm that they had school-age children in Wales, and on their response to the research team's follow-up focus group invitation correspondence.

2.2.2 Challenges and limitations

Recruiting parents and carers to take part in this research was challenging. The research team had originally planned to host 3 90-minute online sessions – 2 in English and 1 in Welsh – with 8 participants in each session (total of up to 24 participants). However, sufficient interest was not obtained to host 3 sessions.

While the research team shared recruitment communications with a wide range of organisations and individuals to be circulated to their parent and carer networks in Wales, only a small number of parents and carers (n=20) expressed interest in joining an open forum discussion, and a smaller number attended the actual sessions (n=5).

Due to the short-term nature of this project, the participation selection and approach did not allow full demographic representation of parents and carers in Wales. Participation was self-selecting, relying on organisations and individuals having shared the recruitment communications with parents and carers, and parents and carers having expressed an interest in joining an open forum discussion and having the time to do so, whether that be during lunchtime or in the evening. This inevitably shaped the composition of the parents and carers engaged, who in their majority were people already actively engaged with their child's school and/or the school community. Given the small number of a particular parent and carer group who engaged, their views should not be read as representing the views of the wider parent and carer population in Wales. Therefore, only a brief summary of their views is provided in Chapter 4.

3. Rapid Evidence Synthesis (RES)

This chapter presents the key insights from the RES and thematically organises the findings to align with the RES's research questions.

3.1 The nature and quality of the evidence base

Much of the evidence is drawn from UK- and Republic of Ireland-based research, including broad analyses and more context-specific studies from England, Northern Ireland, Republic of Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, complemented by international perspectives, particularly from the OECD literature.

The RES was able to source evidence on how parents and carers perceive responsibilities for children's development, behaviour, attendance and wellbeing across the home, school and wider support services (RES research questions 1, 2, 4). While the RES identified these themes, there was more literature surrounding parents' and carers' expectations of general education and development than there was on areas such as behaviour. In addition, it examined studies including parents and carers of children in both primary and secondary education, alongside a smaller number of papers addressing the legislative and policy context shaping home-school relationships. It also identified lessons learnt from how responsibilities are allocated in other UK nations and comparable countries (RES research question 5), and the implications for cross-government policy for better aligning education, health, family support and community services to strengthen collaboration and reduce pressures on schools (RES research question 6).

One of the RES research questions (no. 3) was designed to explore variation in parent and carer expectations across a range of contexts, including school phase, language medium, special schools, PRUs/EOTAS, geographical areas, and different ethnic and religious groups. However, the available literature did not provide comprehensive evidence across all of these contexts. Rather, it found literature in relation to parent and carer expectations shifting due to the needs of their children, as well as the socioeconomic, linguistic and cultural contexts of parents and carers, in addition to variations in the post-COVID-19 context. In addition to capturing the general views of the parent and carer group as a whole, parent and carer profiles explored in the RES are mostly those of migrant families, parents and carers of children with ALN, mothers, and families from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. In the RES, less was found on fathers, foster carers, adoptive parents, Special Guardianship Order carers and Kinship carers. It is important to note that such groups' expectations of schools may be very different. The available literature was thus stronger for some parent and carer groups and circumstances than others, and did not provide comprehensive coverage across all of the contexts included within this research question.

3.2 Parents' and carers' perceptions of their own responsibilities

The literature highlights several ways parents and carers understand their responsibilities for their children's development. The main themes include parents and carers seeing themselves as partners in learning, despite some challenges, variation in perceived responsibilities across different parent and carer groups, and views on parents' and carers' roles in attendance and behaviour.

3.2.1 Partners in learning despite challenges

The research suggests that parents and carers see themselves as active supporters, advocates, and decision-makers regarding their children's development. For example, in a study with staff and parents and carers from 7 primary schools in England, Levy (2024) highlights how, following the COVID-19 pandemic, parents and carers increasingly saw themselves as partners in learning. Increased home-school communication meant that parents and carers were more engaged with their children's lessons and supported daily learning, strengthening their understanding of teaching and reinforcing their sense of responsibility for their children's development and engagement.

Building on this strengthened sense of partnership, parents and carers also describe their responsibilities as extending into both formal and informal learning at home. Many parents and carers perceive that they play a key role in supporting their children's learning through structured activities such as homework and reading, as well as through everyday experiences. Bond, Moore, and Hawkins (2025) show in their study of schools in socioeconomically deprived areas of Wales that families support learning not only through formal tasks, such as homework or reading, but also through informal activities such as cooking, crafts, games, and sports, which they view as valuable for developing life skills.

This perception of responsibility is reflected in wider patterns of parent and carer engagement. According to Verian (2026), findings from the Parents, Pupils and Learners in England panel indicate that parent and carer involvement in school-related activities remains generally high, particularly at the primary school level. Findings suggest that most parents and carers attend parents' evenings and school events, and many primary parents and carers self-report being consistently available to help with homework. Parents and carers also commonly support learning at home by reading with their children, discussing schoolwork, and providing learning resources, with both parents and carers and children self-reporting high confidence in the support available at home. However, this support often decreases as children grow older, especially in secondary school, where parent and carer attendance at school events, for example, becomes less frequent.

Despite parents' and carers' willingness to support learning, several barriers can limit their engagement with their child's learning. Difficulties such as limited time, household distractions, challenging socioeconomic circumstances, health issues and language barriers can reduce parents' and carers' ability to engage. As highlighted by Bond, Moore, and Hawkins (2025), some parents and carers may place greater emphasis on practical or informal learning experiences at home because they perceive them as equally valuable, or also because some may feel less confident supporting academic subjects such as maths or English.

3.2.2 Perceptions vary according to different parent and carer profiles

The literature also suggests that parents' and carers' views of their roles are shaped by their relationships with schools and broader circumstances. For example, a study examining home-school partnerships with migrant parents and carers in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland by Skinner et al. (2025) found that many parents and carers perceive it as their responsibility to understand the school system, including the curriculum, classroom routines, school rules, and calendar. However, language barriers and a lack of confidence can restrict parents' and carers' ability to navigate the education system effectively and fully support their children's learning. Similarly, Corrado (2025) notes, in their study about African parents' and carers' involvement with the UK education system, that parents and carers often face additional cultural expectations and economic pressures that can limit their level of engagement with schools, even when they remain strongly committed to supporting their children's development and education.

Despite these challenges, many parents and carers remain determined to support their children's education. Migrant parents and carers, for example, maintain a strong sense of responsibility toward their children's education and actively seek ways to collaborate with schools. In such cases, some parents and carers collaborate with schools as interpreters for other families or learn specific tasks their children require support with at home (Skinner et al., 2025). With guidance from school staff, parents and carers can build their confidence and skills, demonstrating that supportive school-parent/carer partnerships can help overcome barriers and strengthen parent and carer involvement (Skinner et al., 2025).

Similarly, a study of mothers in England from low-income families highlighted that mothers remain committed to attending school events whenever possible, using their involvement to strengthen relationships with their children (Nurse, 2025). This engagement with their children's schools gave some of the mothers who had left school at 16 and 17 a chance to reconnect with education themselves, highlighting how parent and carer involvement can support both children's learning and parents' and carers' personal development (Nurse, 2025).

Research suggests that parents and carers of children with ALN perceive themselves as responsible for advocating for the appropriate provision of services

and education for their children. For example, as Cummins and Hayton (2024) describe in their study with parents and carers of children and young people with vision impairment in the UK, parents and carers often advocate for specialist educational and mental health support, especially where support staff lack specialist knowledge, which can reduce parent and carer confidence in school-based support. Similarly, as Bridgeman (2025) shows in their study with parents and carers of children with ALN in Wales, parents and carers report the importance of understanding their children's rights and participating in educational decisions, particularly where behavioural challenges or exclusions occur.

3.2.3 Parents' and carers' role in school attendance and behaviour

The literature suggests that attendance is often understood as important but negotiated within family circumstances, and as something parents and carers decide. For example, in a study of parents and carers in England, Burtonshaw and Dorrell (2023) report that parents and carers value high attendance, but some justify absences due to the growing acceptance of term-time holidays, reflecting parents' and carers' belief in their autonomy to make decisions. Such parents and carers view this as acceptable in the post-COVID-19 era but noted how they felt this would not have been acceptable prior to this. Also, Thomas (2025) shows that from the perspective of parents and carers in Wales with children with ALN, there were school shortcomings in promoting attendance, given that most parents and carers were unaware of their children's attendance percentage and the long-term consequences of absences. Parents and carers may also see behaviour management as a shared responsibility with schools, especially when school practices are perceived as insufficient to support children's needs (Zeedyk et al., 2024).

3.3 Parents' and carers' perceptions of the responsibilities of schools

The research indicates that parents and carers view schools as responsible for far more than academic instruction, making it unclear at times where they see the boundary of responsibility between school and home. This relates to classroom management, emotional wellbeing, children with ALN, neurodiverse children, equality, diversity, and inclusion, home-school partnerships, consulting parents and carers, and school attendance. These responsibilities reflect a broader understanding of schools as central partners in supporting children's learning, wellbeing, and long-term development.

3.3.1 Classroom management and behaviour

Research by Levy (2024) highlights that parents and carers in England view schools as responsible not only for teaching academic content but also for managing classrooms effectively and maintaining positive behaviour. During the COVID-19 pandemic, parents and carers increased their appreciation for teachers' work,

dedication and professionalism. However, this also reinforced expectations that schools should provide structured lessons, accessible learning resources, and have transparent and responsible communication with parents and carers, shifting from one-way communication to more collaborative two-way exchanges that support children's learning and wellbeing.

3.3.2 Emotional wellbeing

Beyond academic support, parents and carers emphasise schools' responsibility to promote children's emotional wellbeing and to create caring, supportive environments. Research conducted by Evans et al. (2025), in two schools in communities with relatively high levels of socioeconomic deprivation in Wales, highlights that parents and carers value schools that adopt an ethic of care, where staff build trusting relationships with families and provide tailored social, emotional, and behavioural support. Additionally, as Levy (2024) underlines, parents and carers believe schools should be sensitive to family circumstances, such as socioeconomic circumstances and provide tailored support. Similarly, Nurse (2025) notes that mothers' perceptions of school spaces are strongly influenced by how safe, welcoming, and inclusive those environments feel.

3.3.3 Children with ALN

Parents and carers of children with ALN often place particular emphasis on schools' responsibility to provide specialist knowledge, appropriate adjustments, and inclusive learning environments. Cummins and Hayton (2024), in the context of children with vision impairment in the UK, report that many parents and carers lack confidence in teaching staff, as they do not believe teaching staff are trained sufficiently to educate children with ALN, highlighting the expectation of parents and carers that schools employ knowledgeable staff who can meet children's specific needs. Similarly, research suggests, in the context of Wales, that parents and carers may expect schools to implement individual support plans effectively, provide timely identification of needs and support referrals of children with ALN, and involve parents and carers more in educational decisions rather than simply informing them of outcomes (Bridgeman 2025; Thomas 2025). For instance, enhancing communication channels between schools and parents and carers so they are more informed of their children's development.

3.3.4 Neurodiverse children

The literature indicates that parents and carers of neurodiverse children express the need for schools to provide more neurodiversity-informed support and suggest that improving school support could reduce the burden on mental health services (Ashworth et al., 2025). For example, mothers of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) expect schools and teachers to create safe, structured, and sensory-aware classroom environments that support their children's learning and wellbeing (Zeedyk et al., 2024). Parents and carers also expect teachers to demonstrate

appropriate training and understanding of their children's individual needs (Ashworth et al., 2025; Zeedyk et al., 2024).

3.3.5 Equality, diversity and inclusion

Parents and carers additionally expect schools to create inclusive and respectful learning environments that address diversity and social development. Keating and Baker (2024), in Ireland, found strong parent and carer support for schools to deliver structured, age-appropriate education on gender equality and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI) inclusion. Parents and carers viewed schools as responsible for challenging stereotypes, fostering respectful relationships, and creating safe spaces where children can explore these topics openly. This responsibility extends to enabling parents and carers to support learning at home through guidance and shared resources.

3.3.6 Home-school partnerships

Another key responsibility identified by parents and carers is the development of strong home-school partnerships that are inclusive of diverse backgrounds. Skinner et al. (2025) highlight that parents and carers, particularly those from migrant backgrounds, expect schools to be proactive in welcoming families, valuing different languages and cultures, and providing opportunities to participate in school life. Similarly, Bond, Moore, and Hawkins (2025) note that parents and carers expect schools to move beyond passive engagement opportunities and to create meaningful ways for families to contribute to school activities.

3.3.7 Consulting parents and carers on decisions

Parents and carers also emphasise the importance of being consulted in decisions affecting their children, as exclusion from decision-making can undermine trust and create feelings of marginalisation. For example, a study exploring barriers to involvement experienced by African parents and carers within the UK education system found that some participants perceived that a lack of communication and inclusion in activities contributes to misunderstandings about African families and limits access to important school information, such as changes in grading systems or academic pathways that children might be selecting (Corrado,2025). Relatedly, Evans et al. (2025), in the context of the education system in Wales, demonstrate that parents and carers value having opportunities to share their views and feel listened to by school staff, as this helps to build trust and strengthen collaboration between families and schools, ultimately making it easier to support children's learning and wellbeing.

3.3.8 School attendance

Finally, parents and carers believe schools hold responsibility for supporting attendance and recognising the wider circumstances affecting families. Burtonshaw and Dorrell's (2023) research in England suggests that parents and

carers expect schools to demonstrate flexibility and understanding regarding issues such as illness, poverty, and transport difficulties. Parents and carers also highlight the need for accurate communication about attendance and the continued use of technology to support children who cannot attend school in person. These expectations reinforce the belief that schools share responsibility not only for education but also for supporting children and families within their broader social contexts.

3.4 Perceptions of support from non-school services

Parents' and carers' experiences with non-school services are often characterised by both reliance and frustration. While parents and carers recognise the importance of professional health and wellbeing support, they note difficulties in accessing services, navigating referral pathways, and maintaining effective communication with these services. These experiences lead many parents and carers to expect schools to act as central coordinators of support, providing guidance, facilitating referrals, maintaining strong communication with external professionals, and developing inclusive environments that address children's needs before difficulties escalate.

3.4.1 Accessing non-school services

Many parents and carers access non-school services through health and wellbeing pathways, particularly when concerns arise about their children's emotional or behavioural development. International evidence highlights that schools frequently collaborate with professionals such as counsellors, psychologists, social workers and nurses to support children's mental health and wellbeing (OECD, 2025). These partnerships often involve preventative programmes for all learners, targeted interventions for children at risk, and specialist support for those already experiencing difficulties. Parents and carers generally recognise the value of these collaborations, as working with trained professionals can strengthen behavioural outcomes, improve emotional wellbeing, and reduce pressure on teachers. However, as the OECD (2025) highlights, the effectiveness of such partnerships often depends on how well schools, families, and external services communicate and coordinate their roles.

3.4.2 Challenges of accessing services and perceptions of the school's role

Despite the availability of external support systems, many parents and carers report significant challenges in accessing services, particularly mental health support. Ashworth et al. (2025) found that parents and carers of children with ASD in the UK frequently struggled to obtain referrals to child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS), often experiencing long waiting times, unclear referral pathways, and poor communication between schools, health professionals, and families. In many cases, parents and carers first sought help from general practitioners or schools, but this can be a slow process. These difficulties often meant that families felt they had to

reach a crisis point before receiving help. Such experiences shaped parents' and carers' expectations of schools, with many believing that improved staff training, flexible learning environments, and specialist support within schools could reduce reliance on external services and prevent mental health difficulties from escalating.

Parents' and carers' experiences of navigating wider systems can also be influenced by cultural, social, and informational barriers. Corrado (2025) highlights that some African parents and carers in the UK felt isolated when supporting children with ALN, partly due to limited awareness of available services and difficulties understanding how to access funding, counselling, or specialist support. Some participants in the study expressed a desire for more effective communication systems to support newly arrived immigrant parents and carers and their families in understanding and navigating the UK system, enabling greater involvement. For families new to an education system, navigating both school processes and external services may be particularly challenging, leading to increased reliance on schools as a primary source of guidance and support. These experiences reinforce the expectation that schools should play a proactive role in informing families about available services and supporting them through the referral process.

More broadly, parents and carers often experience frustration when external support systems are slow or difficult to access, particularly in relation to mental health and attendance. Burtonshaw and Dorrell (2023) found in their study in England that many families, especially those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, struggled to access appropriate support despite recognising that their children required help. The perceived crisis in mental health services, including slow diagnosis and limited provision, created ripple effects that affected school attendance and overall wellbeing. As Burtonshaw and Dorrell (2023) underline, schools are often the most accessible service available to families, and so parents and carers sometimes direct frustration towards them when external systems fail, increasing expectations that schools should take a more active role in supporting children's emotional needs.

Limited engagement with wider services can also affect parents' and carers' understanding of attendance and inclusion processes. Thomas (2025), in their study in Wales, found that many parents and carers felt LA support was insufficient, with a large proportion receiving little or no assistance to help their children attend school regularly. Parents and carers consistently identified clear communication between schools, families, and external professionals as essential for supporting children's development and engagement. When communication was unclear, or parents and carers felt unheard, they were more likely to disengage from support systems, further complicating efforts to address attendance and behavioural concerns.

3.5 Variation of parent and carer expectations and understandings by context

The RES sought to explore how parent and carer expectations and understandings of responsibility vary by context, including school phase, language medium, special schools, PRUs/EOTAS, and geographical area (including urban/rural), as well as across different ethnic and religious groups (Research Question 3). The literature synthesised did not necessarily explore such contexts due to limited evidence found on these contexts. However, the RES found that parent and carer expectations and understandings of responsibility may shift according to the needs of their children, as well as the socioeconomic, linguistic and cultural contexts of parents and carers, in addition to variations in the post-COVID-19 context.

3.5.1 Expectations of parents and carers with children with ALN

One key context influencing parent and carer expectations is the level of support provided within schools, particularly for children with ALN. Cummins and Hayton (2024) found that parents and carers of children and young people with vision impairment in the UK often perceived school staff as lacking sufficient training, awareness and time. This insufficiency reduced parents' and carers' confidence in the education system and increased their own responsibilities. When provision was inconsistent, parents and carers frequently created accessible learning materials themselves, effectively compensating for gaps in professional support. This suggests that parent and carer expectations may shift according to perceived competence and reliability of professionals.

Similar patterns are evident in research involving parents and carers of children with ASD, where expectations shift according to the quality of support available. Zeedyk et al. (2024) found that mothers adjusted their expectations depending on classroom environments. In supportive and inclusive settings, mothers expected teachers to be able to accommodate support for their children's development and safety, while mothers reinforced similar strategies at home. However, in chaotic or poorly organised classrooms, mothers felt compelled to assume greater responsibility themselves, often becoming advocates who monitored teacher practices and requested changes to ensure their child's needs were met.

This shifting responsibility between parents and carers and teachers is also reflected in how families interact with wider support systems beyond the classroom. Ashworth et al. (2025), in the UK context, found that parents and carers of children with ASD expected schools to provide inclusive environments that supported mental health and to work collaboratively with healthcare services to ensure timely diagnosis and appropriate interventions. However, when these systems failed to respond effectively, parents and carers reported that responsibility was frequently redistributed to them. As a result, many parents and carers took on the additional role of advocates, navigating complex support systems and coordinating services themselves.

Additionally, data from Verian (2026) indicates that awareness of Parent Carer Forums—local groups representing parents and carers of children with additional learning needs and disabilities (SEND)—varies across school types, with awareness highest among parents and carers with children in special schools (55%), compared with 31% of parents and carers with children in primary school and 37% of parents with children in secondary school, while many parents and carers overall remained unaware of these services.[1] This uneven awareness suggests that access to advocacy networks and reliable information plays an important role in shaping how parents and carers understand their responsibilities and their ability to engage confidently with schools.

Finally, communication and collaboration between schools and families are key factors reported as shaping how parents and carers of children with ALN understand their responsibilities regarding their children's education and development. Bridgeman (2025), in the context of Wales, found that parents and carers expected to be actively involved in decision-making processes, not merely informed of outcomes but consulted throughout. However, the study also showed that parents and carers with greater knowledge or advocacy skills were more likely to secure appropriate support, highlighting inequalities in families' capacity to access services.

Similarly, Thomas (2025) identified poor communication among schools, parents and carers, and LAs as a significant barrier to supporting attendance among children with ALN in Wales. When communication is limited or unclear, parents and carers may struggle to understand their roles and the available support, reinforcing the importance of transparent collaboration to enable parents and carers to participate confidently and effectively in their children's education.

3.5.2 Parent and carer expectations according to socio-economic contexts

Parent and carer expectations also vary according to socio-economic context. Research by Bond, Moore and Hawkins (2025) in socioeconomically deprived areas of Wales suggests that parents and carers are often willing to engage with their children's learning, but poverty and financial hardship limit their participation in school activities. For some families, attending school events required balancing costs, work absence and participation, leading to feelings of exclusion or stigma. Similarly, Nurse (2025) found, in the context of England, that mothers experiencing poverty, health challenges, or single parenthood often prioritised their children's well-being over academic engagement. In Wales, Evans et al. (2025) examined the relationships between school staff, parents and carers and learners in 2 Community Focused Schools, and found that these schools, in disadvantaged areas, often prioritised pastoral care and wellbeing due to the impact of poverty on learning.

[1] The acronym SEND is a term used in the education system in England, and should not be conflated with the acronym ALN in the education system in Wales.

In such environments, parent and carer expectations of schools and schools' own remit may extend beyond academic instruction to include emotional and social support also.

3.5.3 Parent and carer expectations according to linguistic and cultural contexts

Migration and language barriers create additional contexts that can shape parent and carer roles and expectations. Skinner et al. (2025) found that roles within migrant families may shift when children become translators for their parents and carers, with relevant examples derived from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. This reversal of traditional roles can create tension within families, but it also illustrates how responsibility may move between family members depending on linguistic ability. In these situations, parents and carers reported feeling more confident and empowered when schools recognised them as knowledgeable partners and 'co-educators' Skinner et al. (2025, p. 23) as such recognition strengthened their ability to support their children's learning.

However, these positive partnerships are not always achieved. Corrado (2025), in a study of African parents and carers in the UK, reports that some parents and carers found it challenging to understand the education system due to insufficient guidance and communication from schools. This lack of clarity left parents and carers feeling overwhelmed and unsure of how to support their children effectively, despite often holding strong educational aspirations. In such contexts, parents and carers increasingly expect schools to provide clearer communication, accessible information and structured support.

3.5.4 Post-pandemic contexts

Broader systemic factors, particularly those emerging after the COVID-19 pandemic, have also reshaped attendance practices and relationships between schools and families, influencing how parents and carers understand their responsibilities. Burtonshaw and Dorrell (2023) reported a shift in parent and carer attitudes toward school attendance following disruptions such as lockdowns and strikes. As a result of prolonged interruptions to schooling, some parents and carers began to view individual school days as less critical than before, suggesting a re-evaluation of their responsibility to ensure consistent attendance. Importantly, for the authors, this shift did not occur in isolation but was influenced by wider socio-economic pressures. The cost-of-living crisis, for example, created additional barriers for many families, with transport costs and daily expenses making regular attendance more difficult, particularly for low-income households.

3.6 Available learning from other UK nations and comparable countries on implications for cross-government policy

The RES also sought to explore what can be learned from other UK nations and comparable countries about how responsibilities are divided between schools, families and non-school services and how such arrangements shape parent and carer expectations (Research Question 5). It also aimed to explore what the implications are for cross-government policy, including how education, health, family support and community services can be better aligned to reflect how parents and carers currently seek and use support, reduce unnecessary burdens on schools, and strengthen effective collaboration between families, schools and wider services (Research Question 6). Given that all the RES literature focused on UK nations and comparable countries, their learnings concerning Research Question 5 are already interwoven throughout this whole chapter. The research team thus decided to merge Research Questions 5 and 6 to focus on what can be learned from other UK nations and comparable countries on the implications for cross-government policy.

Overall, lessons from elsewhere in the UK and comparable countries to Wales highlight that effective support for children's development, behaviour and wellbeing depends on coordinated, multi-agency partnerships in which responsibilities are shared but clearly understood. However, the success of this model depends on strong communication between stakeholders, recognition of parent and carer expertise, equitable access to support systems and coherent policy frameworks. Without these, responsibilities risk becoming fragmented or disproportionately placed.

Across systems, an emerging consensus highlights the importance of partnerships between schools, families and non-school services, although the balance of responsibility and the effectiveness of collaboration vary in practice. Comparative insights from international contexts reinforce the importance of system-wide partnerships. The OECD (2025) highlights that across many education systems, schools are increasingly expected to collaborate not only with families but also with community stakeholders and social services to address children's health, wellbeing and broader life challenges. These partnerships are particularly important for disadvantaged groups, where coordinated support can improve outcomes in behaviour, attendance and wellbeing. As the OECD (2025) underlines, effective systems distribute responsibility across a wider ecosystem, with schools acting as coordinators rather than sole providers of support. It also stresses the need for sustained investment in staff across education, health and social care, ensuring that teams remain stable over time and can build the relationships necessary for long-term collaborative working.

In the UK, research points to a model in which responsibilities are interconnected yet differentiated among actors, taking into account the UK's different education systems. However, the way these responsibilities are enacted may depend heavily

on the quality of relationships and communication among stakeholders. Drawing on lessons from the pandemic, Levy (2024) highlights that effective home-school communication is central to developing a shared understanding of roles among English parents and carers and schools. Two-way communication, culturally responsive engagement and multi-agency collaboration, including health, social care and community organisations, were shown to strengthen shared responsibility for children's wellbeing. Levy (2024) underlines that even when responsibilities are shared in principle, structural barriers can limit families' ability to participate equally, for example, with increased use of digital communication, where certain families might have restricted access.

At the same time, evidence from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland highlights the importance of recognising families as active contributors rather than passive recipients within this shared model. Skinner et al. (2025) found that when schools position parents and carers, particularly those from migrant backgrounds, as collaborators, it strengthens relationships with schools and improves outcomes for children. Drawing on families' cultural knowledge and experiences not only enhances learning but also promotes inclusion and mutual respect. This approach challenges more traditional models in which responsibility is implicitly shifted onto schools, instead advocating for a more reciprocal and collaborative division of roles.

Despite this policy emphasis on partnership, evidence from England suggests that the implementation of shared responsibility remains uneven. Jones, Banerjee and Jackson (2025), in their study about parent and carer engagement within England's current educational policy landscape, argue that parent and carer engagement policies often lack clarity and coherence, frequently focusing on communication rather than meaningful collaboration in children's learning and development. While parent and carer engagement is recognised across multiple policy areas, such as education or health, the lack of a clear, shared vision between schools and non-school services limits its effectiveness and places responsibility on schools to interpret and implement guidance. Policies thus tend to influence parents and carers indirectly through schools and often adopt a one-size-fits-all approach, overlooking differences in family circumstances. Additionally, limited training for teachers in working with parents and carers further constrains effective collaboration, meaning that responsibility may be nominally shared but not fully supported in practice.

A contrasting example, Jones, Banerjee and Jackson (2025) underline, is Scotland, where there is a more coherent model involving a national strategy that positions parent and carer engagement as a key driver of improvement and offers evidence-based guidance to practitioners and sectors. This comparison suggests that parent and carer engagement policy could benefit from a clearer, more unified framework that aligns expectations across education, family support and related services, while also strengthening collaboration between families, schools and non-school services.

4. Open forum discussions with parents and carers

This chapter sets out a summary of the main themes from the open forum discussions held with 5 parents and carers of primary and secondary school-age children in Wales. These parents and carers were highly engaged in their children's learning and therefore represent an already-engaged parent and carer profile. Their views should not be read as representing the views of the wider parent and carer population in Wales. Consequently, Chapter 4 provides only a brief summary of their views.

4.1 Areas of shared responsibility

Overall, the 5 parents and carers' beliefs suggest that they viewed responsibility for school attendance, behaviour, child development and wellbeing as shared between parents and carers and schools. Their views suggest that they saw themselves as taking the lead in the early years and primary context, with the school assuming a greater role as the children grow older and enter secondary school.

4.2 Additional areas as the school's responsibility

Four of the 5 parents and carers believed that learners' physical and emotional safety while at school was a core responsibility of schools. With regard to physical safety, 3 parents and carers expected schools to respond effectively to bullying, classroom behaviour management and meet learners' needs (e.g. managing allergies). Three parents and carers also viewed the promotion of children's emotional safety and wellbeing during the school day as a key school responsibility. However, the parents and carers shared concerns about the extent to which schools were meeting these responsibilities within the remit of physical and emotional safety.

4.3 Key factors impacting parents' and carers' responsibilities

In discussing their roles and responsibilities, all 5 parents and carers discussed a range of factors that shaped how they approached and managed these responsibilities. These included family financial circumstances. In particular, parents and carers who were employed described difficulties with not always being able to participate in school events. Furthermore, parents and carers of children with ALN shared their experiences of needing to become advocates for their children's needs within the school setting, as they perceived gaps in communication or support from the school in terms of ALN provision.

4.4 Home-school communication

Four of the 5 parents' and carers' challenges related to the quality and consistency of home-school communication. These instances included perceived gaps in communication between schools and parents and carers, inconsistencies in communication between school staff, and concerns regarding the timing and

appropriateness of certain contexts within which school communication was shared with parents and carers. However, 4 of the 5 parents and carers also shared positive examples of collaborative approaches that support home-school communication.

4.5 Support from non-school services

Three parents and carers discussed accessing or being in the process of accessing non-school services, including CAMHS, Mind, GPs, and wider health services. These 3 parents' and carers' experiences varied considerably, including views that non-school services provided secondary support to that of the school, uncertainty about referral pathways and access routes to non-school services, as well as uncertainty regarding how responsibilities were shared between schools and non-school services. However, positive experiences of support from non-school services were also shared specifically by one parent who commented on the excellent mental health support their child had received.

4.6 Ways forward for home-school roles and responsibilities

All 5 parents' and carers' beliefs highlighted the importance of greater clarity regarding the respective roles and responsibilities of parents and carers and schools, shared accountability, improved home-school communication, and greater flexibility in how parents and carers can engage with school activities and events.

5. Conclusion

This chapter sets out a summary of the main findings of the RES. It then sets out future points to consider.

5.1 Summary of RES main findings

5.1.1 The nature and quality of the evidence base

Of the 16 publications read, much of the evidence is drawn from UK- and Republic of Ireland-based research, including broad analyses and more context-specific studies, complemented by international perspectives, particularly from the OECD literature. The evidence also reflects a range of parent and carer experiences, including those of migrant families, parents and carers of children with ALN, and families from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. In addition, it includes studies focused on parents and carers of children in both primary and secondary education, alongside a smaller number of papers addressing the legislative and policy context shaping home-school relationships.

While these publications provide insight into parent and carer expectations, this should be caveated by the fact that this RES includes only a small number of publications. Furthermore, the available evidence did not provide comprehensive coverage of all contexts included in the research questions. In particular, there was limited evidence relating to some parent and carer groups and educational contexts. The findings should therefore be interpreted as indicative insights rather than a complete picture of parent and carer expectations.

5.1.2 Parents' and carers' perceptions of their own responsibilities

The evidence review identified more literature on parents' and carers' perceptions of their own responsibilities in terms of children's general education and development than on early development, with some literature on behaviour and attendance. The evidence base suggests that parents and carers see themselves as active supporters, advocates, and decision-makers regarding their children's development and education, with their responsibilities extending into both formal and informal learning at home. Despite this, the literature identifies challenges to parent and carer engagement with their children's education, namely a lack of time, household distractions, challenging socioeconomic circumstances, health issues and language barriers. The literature also illustrates that the way parents and carers see their roles is shaped by their relationships with schools and their broader social circumstances and profiles, as well as their child's needs. Additionally, the evidence suggests that attendance is often understood as important but negotiated within family circumstances, and as something parents and carers decide. Parents and carers may also see behaviour management as a shared responsibility with schools.

5.1.3 Parents' and carers' perceptions of the responsibilities of schools

The research indicates that parents and carers view schools as responsible for far more than academic instruction, making it unclear at times where they see the boundary of responsibility between the school and home. There is evidence to suggest that parents and carers may view schools as responsible for managing classrooms effectively, maintaining positive behaviour and attendance, and supporting children's emotional wellbeing, as well as for creating caring, supportive environments. There is evidence to also suggest that parents and carers expect schools to create inclusive and respectful learning environments that address diversity and social development, as well as develop strong home-school partnerships that are inclusive of diverse backgrounds. The RES highlights that parents and carers of children with ALN often place particular emphasis on schools' responsibility to provide specialist knowledge, appropriate adjustments, and inclusive learning environments. The literature also indicates that parents and carers of neurodiverse children express the need for schools to provide more neurodiversity-informed support. Parents and carers also emphasise the importance of being consulted in decisions affecting their children, as exclusion from decision-making can undermine trust and create feelings of marginalisation.

5.1.4 Perceptions of support from non-school services

Parents' and carers' experiences with non-school services are often characterised by both reliance and frustration. While parents and carers recognise the importance of professional health and wellbeing support, they note difficulties in accessing services, navigating referral pathways, and maintaining effective communication with these services. These experiences lead some parents and carers to expect schools to act as central coordinators of support, providing guidance, facilitating referrals, maintaining strong communication with external professionals, and developing inclusive environments that address children's needs before difficulties escalate.

5.1.5 Variation of parent and carer expectations and understandings by context

The evidence indicates that parents' and carers' expectations and understandings of responsibility shift according to the needs of the child and parents' and carers' socioeconomic, cultural and linguistic profiles, as well as in the post-COVID-19 period. For example, parents and carers experiencing challenging socioeconomic contexts may value education but face barriers to school involvement due to financial challenges. In such circumstances of socioeconomic deprivation, schools may be expected to prioritise pastoral support. Similarly, migrant parents and carers may encounter language and system-related challenges, which can increase their need for schools to provide clear communication, guidance and collaboration. The research also suggests that parents and carers adjust what they expect of themselves, schools and other professionals depending on the perceived

competence and reliability of professionals to meet their child's needs, especially children with ALN. Additionally, broader systemic factors, particularly those emerging after the COVID-19 pandemic, have reshaped attendance practices, with research suggesting that some parents and carers may have re-evaluated their responsibility to ensure consistent attendance.

5.1.6 Available learning from other UK nations and comparable countries on implications for cross-government policy

Across education systems, an emerging consensus highlights the importance of partnerships between schools, families and non-school services, although the balance of responsibility and the effectiveness of collaboration vary in practice. Research points to a multi-agency model in which responsibilities are interconnected yet differentiated among actors and clearly understood. Evidence also points towards the importance of recognising parents and carers as active contributors rather than passive recipients within this shared model. However, research suggests that the way these responsibilities are enacted depends heavily on the quality of relationships and communication among stakeholders. Therefore, the success of such a collaborative model may depend on strong communication between stakeholders, recognition of parent and carer expertise, equitable access to support systems and coherent policy frameworks. Parent and carer engagement policies could thus benefit from a unified framework that aligns expectations across education, family support and related services.

5.2 Future points to consider

The following future points to consider are mainly based on the RES findings. They are also based in part on the learnings gathered from the challenges of recruiting parents and carers for this research as part of the fieldwork. Due to the small-scale nature of this research, these points should be read as possible areas for consideration.

5.2.1 Future point to consider 1: Schools in Wales could review and, where needed, revise their approaches to parent and carer involvement.

The RES literature highlighted the importance of partnerships between schools, families and non-school services. For a shared model to work, recognising parents and carers as active contributors rather than passive recipients is key, as is recognising parent and carer expertise, providing equitable support systems and maintaining transparent communication.

Overall, schools in Wales could consider reviewing their approaches and strategies to parent and carer involvement to assess whether their practices enable diverse and equitable participation (e.g., virtual events) and clear, consistent communication.

5.2.2 Future point to consider 2: Either nationally or locally, expectations for home-school responsibilities should be made transparent and understandable to parents and carers, learners, schools and non-school services.

The RES highlighted that, across education systems, an emerging consensus emphasises the importance of partnerships among schools, families, and non-school services, and points to a multi-agency model in which responsibilities are interconnected yet differentiated among actors and clearly understood. The success of such a collaborative model may depend on multiple elements, including a coherent policy framework. The research therefore highlights the importance of a multi-agency approach and clear roles and responsibilities. In light of these findings, one option for further consideration could be whether a unified framework would help align expectations across education, family support and related services.

Therefore, the Welsh Government, in discussions with schools and relevant stakeholders, could consider establishing a school framework that sets out transparent expectations for the roles and responsibilities of parents and carers, schools, and non-school services across areas such as child development, attendance, behaviour, and wellbeing, recognising the interrelated nature of these factors. This would be similar to work already carried out by the Scottish Government, as highlighted in the RES (Jones, Banerjee and Jackson, 2025). This should be done in a way that is easy for parents and carers to understand and practical to apply on a day-to-day basis, for example, by mapping key responsibilities across the home and school, as suggested in the open forum discussions. Further research, aligning with Points 3 and 4 below, may support such work.

This approach could support wider Welsh Government ambitions. The Programme for Government 2026-2030 (Welsh Government, 2026) sets out the Welsh Government's aim to support teachers with a 'multi-agency holistic approach' to behaviour and wellbeing, and to share data and best practice locally and nationally. The Programme for Government sets out that this will be done by coordinating a framework that brings together schools, health and social care, and youth services to address behaviour, attendance, wellbeing, as well as educational inequality. In addition to this, the Welsh Government is committed to improving professional learning, incident reporting and sharing of information between schools, and will test implementation through its Community Focused Schools Plus pilots.

5.2.3 Future point to consider 3: Exploring best practice regarding conducting research with parents and carers in Wales

The literature reviewed in the RES captured the views of the parent and carer group as a whole and also homed in on parent and carer profiles including migrant families, parents and carers of children with ALN, mothers, and families from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. However, not all parent and carer profiles were captured in

the RES literature. Indeed, less information was found on fathers, foster carers, adoptive parents, Special Guardianship Order carers and Kinship carers.

Furthermore, recruiting parents and carers to join open forum discussion sessions was challenging. While 20 parents and carers expressed interest in joining open forum session discussions, ultimately, only 5 parents and carers attended the sessions. While their views provided key insights, they were a cohort of parents and carers who were actively engaged in discussions around their children's schooling. As such, their views should not be read as representing the views of the wider parent and carer population in Wales. The research team did, however, recruit for these open forum sessions via diverse methods, including sharing recruitment communications with national parent and carer organisations, 77 Welsh Government Community Focused Schools LA leads, Community Focused Schools managers, Family Engagement Officers across all 22 LAs in Wales, and LA governor support officers. All parties contacted were asked to circulate recruitment communications via their parent and carer networks. Recruitment communications were also shared on Hwb and Dysg communication channels.

Therefore, the Welsh Government could consider reviewing and strengthening its approach to capturing the views and experiences of parents and carers within its research activities. This could include undertaking a dedicated scoping project to explore evidence from Wales and internationally on effective approaches for recruiting and engaging a diverse range of parents and carers in research. Such work could examine a variety of engagement models, including both in-house and externally commissioned approaches, to identify methods that best support inclusive participation. Strengthening these approaches would help improve the representation of diverse parent and carer perspectives in Welsh Government research, ensuring that their experiences and insights are meaningfully reflected in future policy development and decision-making.

5.2.4 Future point to consider 4: Further research and/or consultation should be carried out about home-school roles and responsibilities.

The literature sourced for the RES mainly centred around UK-based literature, including some publications focusing on the school system in Wales. While the publications that focused on Wales shared key insights around certain groups of parent and carer expectations, they did not all directly explore perceptions of home-school roles and responsibilities.

The open forum discussion with the 5 parents and carers who took part has provided limited exploratory insights into their perspectives of home-school roles and responsibilities. However, these parents and carers make up only a small sample of a parent and carer profile that is already engaged in their child's schooling, so their views should not be taken as a definitive indication of wider views.

Therefore, the Welsh Government could consider commissioning further research to explore home-school roles and responsibilities. This should not only include the views of a diverse cohort of parents and carers in Wales, but also explore the expectations and perceptions of learners, school staff, and non-school services. This would enable a comprehensive picture to be drawn of current perceptions of home-school roles and responsibilities within the education system in Wales.

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7. Annex A: RES protocol

This section sets out the research questions, search strategy, and inclusion criteria used to decide whether the retrieved studies fit the RES.

7.1 Research questions

Based on the tight timescale of this project, and to ensure that available resources were used efficiently, targeted research questions were set out and used to guide both the search and the review of the literature. The RES sought to provide evidence on the following areas:

1. How do parents/carers define their own responsibilities in relation to their children's early development (e.g., toileting, SLC, social and emotional competencies), behaviour and attendance?
2. What responsibilities do parents/carers believe schools should hold in these areas, and where do they see the boundary of responsibilities between school and home?
3. How do parent and carer expectations and understandings of responsibility vary by context, including school phase, language medium, special schools, PRUs/EOTAS, and geographical area (including urban/rural) and across different ethnic and religious groups?
4. How do parents/carers understand, access and experience support from non-school services (e.g. health, early-years, family support and community services) in relation to their children's development, behaviour and wellbeing, and how do these experiences shape expectations of what schools should provide?
5. What can be learned from other UK nations and other comparable countries about how responsibilities for early development, behaviour and wellbeing are divided between schools, families and non-school services, and how these arrangements shape parent and carer expectations of schools?
6. What are the implications for cross-government policy, including how education, health, family support and community services can be better aligned to reflect how parents currently seek and use support, reduce unnecessary burdens on schools, and strengthen effective collaboration between families, schools and wider services?

7.2 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

The research team used inclusion and exclusion criteria to decide if the materials identified from the search were suitable for answering the core research questions of this project. The criteria that were used to move from a longlist of materials towards a short reading list of studies included in the Research Extraction Sheet are listed in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Inclusion and exclusion criteria for the Research Extraction Sheet

Theme	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Country of study	Wales and other UK nations. Also, international evidence was selected from jurisdictions considered comparable to Wales, e.g. Ireland. The criteria for determining comparability were developed iteratively during the review.	Non-UK countries that are not considered comparable to Wales were excluded. Jurisdictions were assessed for comparability based on criteria developed during the review process.
Methods	All methods, including qualitative studies, descriptive and observational studies, quantitative analysis and evaluation, and evidence reviews and meta-analyses.	
Areas of focus	Studies that investigate questions relevant to the research questions.	Studies not focusing on the research questions presented were considered out of scope. Studies not focusing on school-age learners in primary and secondary education (other education sectors such as early years, further education, or higher education) were not included.
Date of research	The body of literature for these topics is growing, so the research team mostly focused on the post-COVID-19 period from 2023 to present to ensure that they captured current parent and carer expectations.	Texts published prior to 2023.
Language	English and Welsh	Any other language
Type of studies	Academic literature: Peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters. Grey literature: government-commissioned research, publications by research organisations, government publications.	Newspaper articles and editorials/opinion pieces, magazine articles, theses and dissertations, and books or other works of equivalent length.

7.3 Information sources

The research team retrieved evidence from both the academic and grey literature. Searches, using Boolean operators, were conducted across databases and online libraries, including ERIC, JSTOR, SAGE, SSRN, and Taylor & Francis. Recognising that there was also relevant grey literature, the protocol incorporated a targeted search of studies produced in the UK and internationally, with a specific focus on the Welsh Government, the Department for Education, and the OECD.

Prior to starting this research, the Welsh Government had also carried out its in-house searches on the societal impact on teachers' time (UK and international searches). Due to the similar nature of this research topic to that of the Welsh Government's in-house searches, such searches were added to the longlist.

7.4 Search strategy

The research team designed the search strategy to ensure it is targeted at thoroughly answering the key research questions. Table 2 illustrates the keywords used to identify relevant sources of evidence.

This protocol was set to obtain the most relevant pieces of literature to address the primary research questions. Based on the time schedule and the scope of the review, the search strategy was built by targeting keywords present in the title (main field) and the abstract (chapter and research question level).

During the scoping review, different combinations of words were tested to arrive at the set of keywords presented in Table 2. Search terms were combined into search strings using Boolean operators (AND/OR/NOT) and other database-specific search operators.

Table 2: Keywords for search strategy

List of keywords for the search strategy	
Group	parent*, parental, carer*, famil*
Expectations and engagement	Involvement, engagement*, perception*, perspective, attitude*, expectation*
School relationship	school*, children's education, teaching, home-school relationship, home-school partnership*, home-school boundar*, parent-school relationship, teacher role, school staff
Location	Austria, England, Europe, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, New Zealand, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Spain, Wales, UK

Different combinations of search terms and keyword fields were selected to identify relevant evidence. Those used were the ones that returned a substantial, but manageable, number of relevant results.

7.5 Study records

7.5.1 Data management

To ensure the search process is comprehensive and transparent, a Research Activity Sheet was used to record all search terms, accessed sources, the date of the search and the number of search results. The research team recorded and maintained a list of the retrieved references in a specialist software package called Zotero. Zotero is a free, open-source reference management tool that stores citation information (e.g., author, title and publication fields) and has the ability to organise, tag and perform advanced searches.

7.5.2 Selection process and data collection

The research team began the process by screening the initial search results to remove any duplicate studies to compile a longlist of publications. The research team screened the titles, abstracts and keywords of the longlisted publications to decide which studies to include in the shortlist. The screening process to select shortlisted papers was carried out according to the inclusion and exclusion criteria listed in Table 1. An independent researcher checked a random sample of decisions to verify agreement with the screening process. In the minor instances where initial agreement was not reached, the research team came together to discuss their views and come to an agreement. The screening process resulted in a shortlist of 24 publications.

7.6 Data extraction

To capture the key findings of each study included in the shortlist and narrow the shortlist of 24 publications to a final list of 16 publications, the research team used a Research Extraction Sheet that included the following details for each study:

- Title
- Author(s)
- Type of publication
- Publication date
- Source
- Country/Region of focus
- Abstract/Executive summary

- Methodology (e.g., focus groups, interviews, survey)
- Parent and carer group type
- Learner group type
- Relevant research question(s) addressed
- Summary of findings
- Quality score

The information was recorded in MS Excel.

7.6.1 Assessing the quality and relevance of studies

Finally, the research team assessed the quality of the research. The research team recognised that the assessment framework needed to be flexible to accommodate a varied evidence base. They, therefore, developed a bespoke quality assessment framework that was fit-for-purpose and tailored to the specific characteristics of the literature. Quality was thus assessed on (i) credibility, (ii) methodology of the study and (iii) relevance. For each category, the research team assigned a score of 1-3 (where 1 was the lowest score and 3 was the highest). Table 3 provides details on how these three categories were defined and the scoring guidance, which was provided to researchers in advance.

Table 3: Quality assessment

Element	Description	Score
Credibility	Is the study coherent? Can findings be trusted? Does the author consider study limitations or alternative interpretations of the analysis? Has the study been peer-reviewed? 1 = The study has not been peer-reviewed, with conclusions drawn from limited data or theoretical discussion. Lack of transparency around data and no discussion of data quality. 2 = Study is informally published as a working paper/research report by a reliable source. Limited discussion around sources, information and data quality, or alternative interpretations of research findings. 3= Study is published in a peer-reviewed academic journal or published as grey literature and rigorously documents information quality, sampling decisions and other aspects of the methodology.	1-3

Methodology	How robust is the evidence to contribute to our review? 1 = Methodology is weak and relies on uninformed opinions or unreliable data. Significant concerns about the validity of quantitative findings and/or trustworthiness of qualitative findings. 2 = Some limitations in terms of methodology and the validity of quantitative findings and/or trustworthiness of qualitative findings but deemed acceptable. 3 = Methodology is strong, and research materials are clearly related to research questions and aren't leading or biased. Few concerns about the validity of the quantitative findings and/or trustworthiness of qualitative findings.	1-3
Relevance	Does the study help to answer the research question? 1 = The research question or hypothesis is not directly related to the proposed research questions. 2 = The research question or hypothesis is only somewhat related to the proposed research questions. 3 = The research question or hypothesis is directly related to the proposed research questions.	1-3
Overall judgment	Considering the above categories, what is the overall judgment?	3-9

The researchers checked a random sample of each other's assessment scoring. In the minor instances where initial agreement was not reached, the research team came together to discuss their views and come to an agreement. This quality score aimed at ensuring a comprehensive understanding of best practice, approaches and discussion on the topics, maximising the relevance of the publications included in the review. Only publications with a total score of 9 or 8 were included in the RES, with those that scored a mark of 8 only missing a mark due to relevance. This resulted in a total of 16 publications, which were reviewed equally in the synthesis, as all had different levels of relevance for different RES research questions. Those with a score of 7 or less were omitted from the final list of publications to decrease the number of studies to the agreed number of up to 16 publications.

8. Annex B: Open forum discussion guide

Warm-up / icebreaker

1. Please tell us your first name, only if you want to, and at which stage of education is/are your child(ren) at.

Remember you can share as much or as little as you'd like.

Or if you prefer, you can write in the chat.

Parents'/carers' roles and responsibilities

2. What do you think is the role of parents/carers in supporting their children, especially when it comes to their development, behaviour, and attending school?

Prompts: For example…

Daily routines (homework, nutrition, extracurricular activities)

Social skills and speech, language and communication

Attendance at school

Independence (e.g. toileting)

Emotional competencies

3. What helps parents/carers to carry out this role, and what can sometimes make it more difficult?

Prompts: For example…

Time or work commitments

Financial situation

Access to support

Child learning or health needs

Family circumstances (e.g. number of children)

Confidence or knowledge of how to support your children

4. Have the expectations of your role as parents/carers in supporting your children changed due to particular circumstances or your children's needs, and if so, can you tell us a bit more about that?

Prompts: For example…

Child's age and needs

Number of children

School medium

Financial situation

Access to support

Confidence or knowledge of how to support your children

Schools' roles and responsibilities

5. What do you think schools should be responsible for when it comes to children's development, behaviour, and school attendance?

Prompts: For example…

Daily routines (homework, nutrition, extracurricular activities)

Social skills and speech, language and communication

Attendance at school

Independence (e.g. toileting)

Emotional competencies

6. Do you think what parents/carers expect from schools changes depending on their circumstances or their children's needs? Have your expectations changed due to different circumstances?

Follow-up/alternative wording if needed: Have your expectations of what schools should offer changed at all over the years, and if so, can you tell us a bit more about it?

Prompts:

Do expectations change depending on children's age?

What about when children have specific needs?

Do work or family situations affect what parents/carers expect from schools?

Do some parents/carers rely more on schools than others?

Shared responsibilities, communication and boundaries between parents/carers and schools

7. Have you worked together with your children's school to support your children's development, behaviour or school attendance, and if so, how would you describe that experience?

Follow-up: Can you share an example of when working with your children's school went well? What helped make it work well?

Follow-up: Can you think of a time when working with a school around your children's needs felt difficult or challenging?

8. How would you describe your experiences of communication between you and your children's school?

Prompts:

How easy or difficult is it to get information?

How often do you hear from school?

Are communications clear and help you solve concerns, questions or worries about your children?

What are the mechanisms to communicate with the school (messages, meetings, calls)?

9. As a parent, are there times when it feels unclear who should be responsible for your children's development, behaviour, school attendance, and well-being (parents/carers, schools, or other services)?

Prompts: For example…

Emotional support

Language development

Social skills

Mental health

School attendance

10. Are there any areas where you feel something should mainly be the responsibility of parents/carers, mainly the responsibility of schools, or something that should be shared between both?

Prompts: For example…

Emotional support

Language development

Social skills

Mental health

School attendance

Support from non-school services

11. Have you ever had support from services outside school, such as health, early-years, family support, or community services for your children? If so, what was that experience like?

Prompt: What other people or services have you accessed that support you with your children's development, behaviour, or wellbeing?

12. Are there areas where you feel, as parents/carers, you need more support than you currently receive in terms of your children's development, behaviour and wellbeing, and who should be responsible for this support?

Prompt: school roles, non-school services roles

Improving collaboration

13. What would help you as parents/carers to further work with schools and other non-school services to support your children?

Follow-up: If you could give one piece of advice to schools or non-school services about collaborating with parents/carers, what would it be?

Wrap-up

14. Is there anything that we haven't asked about today, and that you would like to share at this point?