

Hub Childcare Provision for Children with a Statement of Special Educational Needs in Wales during COVID-19

Why we conducted the survey

Following Kirsty Williams’s response to our letter regarding education guidance for children with Additional Learning Needs and/or Disabilities (ALN/D) we conducted a survey of parents of statemented children in Wales.

Ms Williams advised that guidance published in April 2020 – Vulnerable Children and Young People: coronavirus – “set out expectations that local authorities undertake a risk assessment to determine the needs of all children and young people with a statement of SEN.” Ms Williams’s letter later states that “The purpose of undertaking assessments was to determine whether children and young people with a statement of SEN would be able to have their needs met at home with support provided remotely or whether they would need a childcare placement at a hub due to their vulnerability.” Ms Williams informed us that “assessments should include parents and carers.”

Unfortunately, many of our stakeholders have been reporting on social media and in meetings that they were unaware that a childcare provision in hubs was available to their statemented child(ren) or young people. Furthermore, many have had limited contact with their child(ren)’s school(s), and often no direct contact from their local authorities.

Who responded?

In order to identify the range of this issue, we conducted a Survey using Survey Monkey which was distributed across social media networks – namely Facebook and Twitter. We had a total of 189 respondents, covering most local authorities in Wales – unfortunately, we had zero responses from Merthyr Tydfil or Wrexham.

What we asked

We asked respondents to advise whether or not they had been contacted by their statemented child(ren)’s school and/or their local authority regarding whether or not a hub childcare placement was needed. We also asked what school setting their child typically attends, and whether or not they had a shielding family member in the household. The results can be split by yes/no responses, and by the child(ren)’s typical school placement.

Unfortunately, due to the nature of the survey, we did not include children who do not have a statement, nor did we include children who are Educated Other Than At School (EOTAS).

Summary

Yes			No		
Specialist School	Resource Base	Mainstream School	Specialist School	Resource Base	Mainstream School
19	10	15	32	31	82
Total Yes			Total No		
44			144		

From this table you can see that 76.2% of all respondents had no contact from their school or local authority to determine whether or not their statemented child(ren) would need a hub placement due to their vulnerability.

We understand that local authorities may have been in a position where they would have been unable to provide a childcare hub placement to any families who had a shielding member in the household. However, of the 189 respondents only 27 were in this category, 4 of whom were contacted regarding hub placements.

Furthermore, we thought that it was possible that local authorities were prioritising statemented children who attend specialist schools or resource bases, and our results seem to corroborate this. Children who typically attend either of these settings made up 49% of our responses, however they made up 66% of the ‘yes’ category. Whilst these children undoubtedly have complex needs, it is not reasonable for local authorities to assume that those who attend mainstream settings do not.

Local authority breakdown

We have provided a breakdown of results by local authority (excluding Merthyr Tydfil and Wrexham which yielded zero responses):

LA	Yes			No			Total	Shielding	
	Specialist School	Resource Base	Mainstream School	Specialist School	Resource Base	Mainstream School		Yes	No
Blaenau Gwent	0	0	1	0	1	1	3	0	0
Bridgend	0	0	0	0	1	2	3	0	0
Caerphilly	0	0	1	0	3	12	16	0	2
Cardiff	1	0	2	3	2	16	24	0	3
Carmarthenshire	0	1	0	3	2	0	6	1	2
Ceredigion	0	2	0	0	1	3	6	0	1
Conwy	3	0	1	3	1	6	14	0	2
Denbighshire	0	0	1	1	0	3	5	0	0
Flintshire	1	0	0	2	0	3	6	0	0
Gwynedd	0	1	0	1	0	1	3	0	0
Isle of Anglesey	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
Monmouthshire	0	0	1	0	0	3	4	0	3
Neath Port Talbot	3	1	1	7	3	3	18	0	2
Newport	1	1	0	1	7	7	17	1	2
Pembrokeshire	0	0	0	1	0	1	2	0	0
Powys	1	0	0	2	1	1	5	0	1
RCT	4	1	5	3	2	10	25	1	3
Swansea	5	3	1	4	6	9	28	1	2
Torfaen	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0
Vale of Glamorgan	0	0	0	1	0	1	2	0	0
Totals	19	10	15	32	31	82	189	4	23

This table demonstrates that there were several local authorities (Bridgend, Pembrokeshire, Torfaen, and the Vale of Glamorgan) who had zero contacted respondents, and only one local authority (Monmouthshire) whose

uncontacted figure matches the shielding figure, which could go some way into explaining why those families did not receive this information.

Summary

It is clear that despite Kirsty Williams's guidance advising that all children with statements should be assessed to establish whether or not their vulnerabilities meant that they should be offered a childcare position in a hub, the majority of respondents did not receive said assessment.

We accept that it is possible that some schools and/or local authorities conducted in-house reviews in order to identify the most vulnerable children, however this produces two issues:

- 1) The guidance states that assessments should include parent/carers. In-house assessments do not allow for this, and crucial information could be missed.
- 2) Lockdown and schooling at home are vastly different environments to typical schooling which have caused extraordinary stress and distress for many people across the UK. While it is possible that a child/family would not be as vulnerable in a typical situation, it is not reasonable to assume that would remain the case during lockdown. These families identified in-house as not vulnerable may have encountered bereavement, have a parent/carer who is unwell and/or disabled, be facing redundancy, or be unequipped to care for their statemented child(ren) without the respite school usually provides.

We said in our letter to Ms Williams (dated 16th June 2020) that our stakeholders felt that children with ALN/Ds were not being considered to the same extent as their peers. These figures do little to convince them otherwise.