

October 2024

Platform Power-Up Project reply to Welsh Government response on consultation: “do disabled children and young people have equal access to education and childcare?”

The Power Up Project is pleased to see the Welsh Government noting the importance of improving support for disabled children and young people in education and childcare. The fact the Government has accepted most of the Children, Young People and Education committee’s recommendations, is a sign that this issue has been taken seriously.

However, we would like to see the Welsh Government reconsider some of their choices so that every opportunity is maximised to meet disabled young peoples’ needs.

In advance of the Welsh Government’s response, young people engaging with the Power Up project identified four key recommendations as essential to delivering change. These were:

- Recommendation 11: practical guidance for schools
- Recommendation 19: mandatory staff training module
- Recommendation 24: no wrong door approach to services
- Recommendation 29: better local authority pathways

We are pleased to see that the Welsh Government has accepted **Recommendation 11**. We are glad to see that the Welsh Government understands the importance of making education more inclusive and are committed to doing this through guidance for schools.

Young people have told us about how they ‘missed out’ on parts of the education experience due to their individual needs not being met and felt that this could have been prevented by schools consulting ‘the people around them’ and charities to support them.

Therefore, it is promising to hear that the Welsh Government is going to develop this guidance from advice of those with lived experience and organisations. We would hope to see a clear timeline set out for this, to ensure there is time for this to be developed co-productively, allowing time for thorough consultation, before the next Senedd. Otherwise, an opportunity to make a real difference will be lost.

We were disappointed to see that the Welsh Government has rejected **Recommendation 19**: the creation of a mandatory training module for school staff.

Whilst we recognise that voluntary engagement in training is important and we believe is best practice, a lack of disability awareness is still a significant issue in schools that we feel requires a strategic focus, and clear national action to make a big change.

Young people have frequently mentioned to us about how some of the people supporting them in schools have been ‘misinformed’ and ‘uneducated’ on disabilities and neurodivergence.

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We understand that compulsory training is not always effective, but we ask that the Welsh Government explore the idea that teachers wanting to register in Wales demonstrate at least a basic level of disability awareness. We would encourage the adoption of an approach similar to Ask and Act training, after the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act, at minimum.

Without young people feeling confident in the ability of schools to understand the challenges facing them with their disabilities or neurodivergence, it will not be possible to create accessible, supportive and equitable environments that work for all young people.

We also welcome the Welsh Government's desire to streamline services to offer a better no wrong door approach, which was **Recommendation 24**.

Young people have said that it can be very 'intimidating' and 'overwhelming' to seek support 'by yourself'. So, we applaud the Welsh Government's commitment to transforming all schools in Wales towards a Community Focused schools approach, where accessing appropriate help will be easier due to services working together and sharing information. At Platform, we believe being part of and connected to communities is hugely important and so we are pleased to see the Welsh Government support this view.

In relation to **Recommendation 29**, for local authorities to develop clear and widely available support pathways, the Welsh Government has accepted it in principle.

We are pleased the Welsh Government has recognised the significance of having pathways with clear and well-informed advice and information. Young people have consistently talked to us about the importance of making information accessible both on and offline.

But we are disappointed that the Welsh Government has not committed to developing guidance with high expectations for local authorities and we hope that with time, the Welsh Government will provide both support and appropriate challenge, for local authorities to champion disabled children and young people's rights.

Conclusion

In summary, we acknowledge and applaud the Welsh Government's efforts to champion disabled children and young people's rights.

However, it is vital that we take every action to improve the education system for disabled children and young people. The world is only as kind and compassionate as the way we treat the 'seldom heard' individuals in our society. In the words of one of our young people, "when society works together, the world will become a better place."

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