

Briefing Paper 7

Education

National Assembly Elections 2007

"You're stressed, you kick off, you're kicked out of school. You get no education so you can't get a decent job and you're stuck in poverty."

Listen Up: Children and young people talk about poverty
Save the Children



Education

Article 29 of the UN Convention emphasizes – the purpose of education is to fully develop children to equip them to take responsibility for their own lives.

Education is key to delivering the Welsh Assembly Government's seven core aims for children and young people. It has a significant impact on children's self-esteem, well being and emotional development, as well as their attainment and employment prospects.

What has been achieved since 2003?

Education has been one of the areas where there have been clear differences from the policy direction in England. Instead of re-organising structures, the Welsh Assembly Government has concentrated on improving the quality of what happens within the school.

Key measures: Flying Start for two year olds in the poorest areas; a new curriculum at the foundation stage: learning pathways for 14-19 year olds; a Network of Healthy schools; Education maintenance allowances; free school breakfasts and help with uniforms; some pump-priming money for community-focussed schools; initiatives to improve transition to secondary school; and most recently, "RAISE", which will fund some initiatives to improve attainment. The Assembly Government has also made it mandatory for schools to develop school councils.

The publication of the Children's Commissioner for Wales' Clywch Inquiry in June 2004 highlighted some real concerns about the way in which pupils were being safeguarded in an educational setting and the Welsh Assembly Government has acted positively on most of the recommendations. These include the development of a school counselling strategy for Wales.

Guidance has also been issued on Inclusion and Pupil Support and Complaints Procedures in Schools and there will be consultation on Section 175 of the Education Act 2002, which relates to the duty on schools and LEA's to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people.

The development of Community Focussed Schools in Wales is welcomed. Schools need to be supported to develop partnerships with other agencies and with parents, to ensure that new initiatives meet the needs of the children and young people as well as the wider adult community.

What are our current concerns?

- Bullying continues to be one of the top three concerns for children and young people. The Welsh Assembly Government has set up an anti-bullying network and reviewed anti-bullying policies in schools. However, a key issue is how effectively anti-bullying policies are implemented. This includes bullying on the grounds of race, sexual orientation or disability. Children and young people are the best judges of how policies are implemented and they still have major concerns.
- Attainment in Wales rose steadily for some years but has now stalled and is still behind the levels of England. The number of young people leaving without five A-C grades at GCSE is very high and has a significant effect on

the ability of young people to work their way out of poverty. The gap between the worst performing and the best performing schools has not narrowed. In addition, the educational outcomes for children in the care of local authorities continue to be a major concern. The RAISE initiative is a step in the right direction. Disabled children often have lower attainment than they should. There is no statutory duty to give them a “flying start”.

- The emotional health and wellbeing of many children and young people in Wales is very poor, for a variety of reasons. This can show itself in difficult behaviour and disruption or in withdrawal or self harm. Schools are well placed to work preventively with children and young people, through developing their “emotional intelligence”, through teaching them social and problem-solving skills and, where there are concerns, through recognising the need for professional help from another agency.
- Contrary to popular opinion, most children and young people do not know their rights under the UN Convention. Schools are well placed to educate children about their rights and to give them information about where to go if they have concerns.

Recommendations

We call on the Welsh Assembly Government to:

- Ensure that Inspections of schools include feedback from children and parents about the effectiveness of anti-bullying policies and measures.
- Ensure that schools share effective anti-bullying practice, as evidenced in Estyn’s recent report.
- Ensure that schools and LEA’s implement the points for action from the WAG/WLGA “Narrowing the gap” projects on attainment.
- Quality control work -based training for 14-19 year olds.
- Develop guidance for schools and care settings to promote parental involvement in children’s education, particularly disadvantaged parents.
- Provide more detailed monitoring of the attainment of looked after children.
- Provide incentives for schools to work with looked after children and to hold on to them through difficult times.
- Use new powers under the Government of Wales Act to give disabled/learning disabled children a statutory right to child development services from birth (or from time of diagnosis).
- Ensure that teachers are trained to deliver, or to engage others to deliver: emotional literacy; problem solving; financial literacy; preparation for parenting; appropriate relationships, equality and diversity, and children’s rights,
- Ensure that school staff are trained to recognise problems, such as potential child abuse and mental health problems, and to refer on.
- Ensure that teachers are trained in children’s rights and that they make children aware of the UNCRC.
- Issue guidance to LEA’s on the education of Gypsy traveller children.
- Ensure that education and social work practitioners and carers are given training and guidance to enable them to support good educational outcomes for looked after children.
- Introduce a requirement that a key professional or carer attends parents’ evenings and other school events for every looked after child. The decision about who attends should take in to account the views and wishes of the looked after child.

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