

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb hwn i'r [Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg](#) ar gyfer yr ymchwiliad: [A oes gan blant a phobl ifanc anabl fynediad cyfartal at addysg a gofal plant?](#)

This response was submitted to the [Children, Young People and Education Committee](#) for the inquiry: [Do disabled children and young people have equal access to education and childcare?](#)

AEC 47

Ymateb gan: RNIB Cymru

Response from: RNIB Cymru

RNIB Cymru response to the Senedd Children, Young People & Education Committee's consultation, 'Do disabled children and young people have equal access to education and childcare?'

Background

RNIB Cymru provides tailored information, support and guidance to children and young people in Wales who have a vision impairment, as well as their families. Our aim is to ensure society is inclusive of people with sight loss and that the children and young people we support can reach their full potential, enjoying the same rights and responsibilities as their sighted peers.

Vision impairment is a high need, low incidence disability and the support needed will differ greatly between individuals. For many children and young people in Wales who have a vision impairment, navigating the complexities of education is hugely burdensome. Mainstream teachers and other professionals involved in education are likely to have little or no experience of supporting children and young people in Wales who have a vision impairment. This leads to inequity of access, experience and outcomes within education settings.

As a result of this, RNIB Cymru is calling the Welsh Government to embed the Curriculum Framework for Children and Young People with Vision Impairment (CFVI) into Additional Learning Needs policy. Use of the CFVI can improve understanding within education settings to ensure that there is fair and equitable access to education, as well as the right

support to maximise independence and prepare children and young people in Wales who have a vision impairment for adulthood.

The CFVI offers a UK wide framework for specialist and non-specialist practitioners, children and young people in Wales who have a vision impairment and their families and carers to unlock and navigate necessary support and education. The CFVI helps by addressing the many issues experienced by children and young people with vision impairment, including:

- The attainment gap between children and young people with vision impairment and the general population
- Poor employment outcomes, including high vulnerability of becoming long term NEET (not in education, employment or training)
- Poor social inclusion, mental health and wellbeing
- Inconsistent provision of specialist support
- Lack of joined up working between specialist and non-specialist professionals.
- The framework has been developed in consultation with professionals, children and young people, parents and carers.

Are disabled and neurodivergent children and young people able to access everything their school or childcare offers?

In order to access everything the school and curriculum has to offer, children and young people with a vision impairment often need specialist support e.g. accessible technology and training on how to use it, mobility and independence skills training to move around the school and classroom safely. The professionals who support the classroom teacher and school staff and the child or young person with a vision impairment are Qualified Teachers of children and young people with a vision impairment (QTVIs). QTVIs are employed by the Local Authority. Habilitation Specialists also play a critical role, supporting the child to develop skills and move around safely.

Children and young people with vision impairment are not being given access to the specialist support they need to participate and thrive in education settings. Research consistently highlights the importance of specialist support to ensure that children and young people with vision

impairment have the best opportunity to progress academically and to continue to live as independently as possible. However, without access to the specialist support they need, we know many children and young people are being let down and left behind.

The RNIB Cymru Freedom of Information (FOI) 2023 report highlights variation in practice and widespread geographical inequalities.

Across local authorities in Wales there is a variation in service structures, practices and budgets.

- The ratio of QTVIs to children and young on active caseload varies from 1:13 to 1:85; with high caseloads, the specialists needed to teach and support the development of specialist skills are under significant pressure in terms of time and resource.
- The percentage of children and young people on local authority (LA) VI service active caseloads accessing, or on a waiting list to access, habilitation support varies from below 9% to 48%, with the time from referral to an initial visit ranging from 1 week to approximately 12 months.

This patchwork of inconsistent support has the potential to leave some children and young people without the support they need to access education.

What impact do these issues have on disabled and neurodivergent children and young people's mental health and wellbeing and how well they do at school or nursery?

Vision impairment is a low incidence disability in children and young people with a high need for specialist support (as detailed above) for them to fully participate in education. RNIB's 2023 Freedom of Information Report on Vision Impairment education indicates an active service caseload of 1,663 children and young people with vision impairment in Wales.

Because vision impairment is a low incidence disability, the pupil's needs may not be well understood within the school. Without adequate resourcing for specialist professionals from the Local Authority, children and young people with a vision impairment can be left behind. Whilst there is evidence demonstrating how specialist education can improve outcomes for children and young people with vision impairment, there is

also consistent evidence highlighting what can go wrong when denied access to the support they need.

- Attainment gap - There is a consistent and significant attainment gap between children and young people with vision impairment and their peers without additional learning needs. At Key Stage 4, GCSE results show a gap of greater than 26% for pupils achieving Level 2 (equivalent to 5 A* to C) including English/Welsh and maths, a difference which needs to be addressed.
- Vulnerability to becoming long term NEET (Not in Education, Employment & Training) - Statistics from the Welsh government show that children and young people aged 16-18 with a disability in Wales are over twice as likely to be not in employment, education or training (NEET) than their non-disabled peers. This rises to over four times as likely for those aged 19-24. Several factors can risk a child or young person with vision impairment becoming NEET such as attaining lower levels of qualification, not being able to access education, limited opportunities for work experience and a lack of tailored careers guidance.
- Limited independence - In some areas of Wales, a high proportion of children and young people with vision impairment are unable to access habilitation support to enable them to develop the orientation, mobility and independent living skills that they need for both education and in young adulthood. The impact on social inclusion can be significant. For example, young adults with VI often do not apply for jobs in unfamiliar locations because they lack the confidence to travel independently.
- Wellbeing gap - children and young people with vision impairment report lower wellbeing and poorer mental health than their fully sighted peers. At age 17 CYP with VI were five times more likely to 'feel depressed all or most of the time'. There are added pressures on children and young people with vision impairment, with them having to deal with inaccessible systems, needing to repeatedly advocate for necessary adjustments and feeling socially excluded.

What are the barriers for schools and childcare providers in providing inclusive and accessible education?

The main barriers to schools and childcare providers in providing support to children and young people with vision impairments and their families are:

- Lack of knowledge or understanding: As vision impairment is a low incidence disability it often means there may only be one child with a vision impairment in the setting. If the school or nursery is unsure about how to access support, it can be very challenging for them to meet the child's needs.
- The patchwork of access to specialist support as highlighted in RNIB's 2023 Freedom of Information report is also an issue. Schools and nurseries need to know they can access support and training in a timely manner to support the child.

Do disabled and neurodivergent children and young people and their families feel they get the same choices as other children, young people and their families?

Feedback received by RNIB Cymru from children and young people with vision impairment and their families indicates that this can vary depending on the school or nursery and how much access they have to the specialist support available.

It is hoped that the new Additional Learning Needs Act and Code will open the door for more active engagement with families by schools to address any issues at the earliest possible stage.

Children and young people with vision impairments often tell us that they don't have access to the same opportunities as their sighted peers. This includes access to extracurricular activities and barriers to the transport to get to and from the activity. They also mention the assumptions made about what they can and cannot do e.g. lack of access to PE and sport. This can impact young people when they move beyond school as detailed above.

Is there good provision for different types of disability?

As stated, because vision impairment is a low incidence disability, its impact on children and young people can often be misunderstood. The patchwork of provision of specialist services to support children and young people with vision impairment make it difficult for awareness raising about this particular disability.

Conclusion

Children and young people with vision impairment should have equitable access to opportunities in life, however, all the evidence tells us that their education is currently failing to deliver this. The CFVI provides an opportunity to implement a consistent approach to the provision of specialist support throughout education. Formal adoption of the CFVI will enable the framework to have the greatest impact, allowing the potential of children and young people with vision impairment to be fully realised.

References

Curriculum Framework for Children and Young People with a Vision Impairment

[Curriculum Framework for Children and Young People with Vision Impairment | RNIB | RNIB](#)

Unlocking Education for All, Curriculum Framework for Children and Young People with a Vision Impairment in Wales, 2023

[Unlocking education for all – Curriculum Framework for Children and Young People with Vision Impairment in Wales \(rnib.org.uk\)](#)

RNIB Freedom of Information Report, Wales, 2023

[Freedom of Information Reports | RNIB](#)

About RNIB Cymru

RNIB Cymru is the largest sight loss charity in Wales, providing support and services to blind and partially sighted people, their families, friends, and carers. We aim to improve lives and empower people to adapt to sight loss and keep their independence. We work in partnership with public, private and third sector bodies across Wales to deliver projects, training, services and give information, advice, and guidance.

We challenge inequalities by campaigning for social change and improvements to services. We believe that timely treatment should be available to all to prevent avoidable sight loss, and that the right support is there for people when prevention isn't possible. We raise awareness of issues facing blind and partially sighted people on a daily basis. Whether you have full, some, little or no sight, everybody should be able to lead independent and inclusive lives, without facing inequity and discrimination.