

Research Briefing:

Petition number: P-05-735

Petition title: **Make Foundation Phase more Effective for our Children, Provide more Teachers and Abolish Year 2 SATs.**

Petition text:

I would like the Welsh Assembly to stop letting our children down in the Foundation Phase.

To follow the lead of the most successful education systems in Europe, such as Finland and throughout Scandinavia.

To provide schools with training and funding for appropriate child teacher ratios, to enable the effective delivery of the Foundation Phase pedagogy.

I call for the abolishment of Nationalised tests, SATS, in the Foundation Phase. They simply do not correspond with the Foundation Phase ethos.

We love the ethos of the Foundation Phase, the approach Welsh Assembly have taken is refreshing, and in line with the heaps of research that supports child-led play up to the age of seven. However, it is unfortunate, that the ethos of the Foundation Phase is lost in many schools across Wales. This is because of a lack of training in early years play provision; even if the teacher had the training, passion and knowledge to deliver the Foundation Phase pedagogy, the ratios of teachers to child makes it near impossible. How can any teacher follow a child's lead in play when there are up to 30 children in that class, with only one TA to support all of those children as they play, discover and learn?

We do not believe that nationalised tests, SATS, have any place in the Welsh foundation phase. The foundation phase is about supporting children in their Play: To develop gross motor skills through movement,

To develop finer motor skills needed for writing,

To take risks and learn responsibility,

To give them the time they need to develop solid building blocks for language and numeracy,

To have opportunities to revisit and learn as and when a child needs/chooses too,

To develop the skills to self access and discover,

To learn key social skills with their peers and adults.

This is a proven approach to fully prepare children ready for primary education at the age of seven. This is how Europe's most successful education systems do it, yet children of six and seven years old in year two are expected to sit and write in tests to compare our children to those in England. This forces teachers in the Foundation Phase to start drilling phonetics and numbers into our children when they start Reception and by Year-one to be expected to sit read and write, "readying" them for these tests which reflect on the on the school. Our children are being robbed of their childhoods, children who are starting school at just turned four years old in Wales, who are then forced into this system, six hours a day of classroom drilling. This is not the progressive foundation phase ethos that Welsh assembly put into play in 2006. I urge you all to consider the effectiveness of the foundation phase across Wales, with some more TAs and training we can become productive early years practitioners paving the way for all children in Wales to have positive, rewarding, Learning Journeys

At its meeting on 14 February 2017, the Committee considered this petition and asked for some information on the pupil to teacher ratios in Scandinavian countries.

The OECD publication, [*Education at a Glance 2016*](#), provides some data on early childhood education staff ratios. Early childhood education: Refers to programmes with an intentional education component aimed at developing cognitive, physical and socio-emotional skills for participation in school and society. They are grouped into two categories:

- ISCED (International Standard Classification of Education) 010, early childhood educational development – programmes designed for younger children (between the ages of 0 and 2);
- ISCED 020, pre-primary – programmes designed for children from the age of 3 to the start of primary education (ISCED level 1).

The data in Table 1 is extracted from Education at a Glance and shows data for ISCED levels 01 and 02 for pupil to contact staff (teachers and teachers’ aides) and pupil to teachers.

The figures should be interpreted with some caution because the indicator compares the teacher/student ratios in countries with ‘education-only’ and ‘integrated education and daycare’ programmes. In some countries, the staff requirements in these two types of provision are very different. A variety of job roles exist within the early childhood and education sector, and any classification of staff is problematical particularly when comparing across countries.

Table 1: Pupil to staff ratios in early years in selected countries, 2014

	<u>ISCED 01</u>		<u>ISCED 02</u>	
	Pupils to contact staff	Pupils to teaching staff	Pupils to contact staff	Pupils to teaching staff
Denmark	4	12	6	10
Finland	–	–	–	10
Sweden	5	5	6	6

Source: OECD, Education at a Glance 2016

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.