

Happy, healthy  
and safe:  
A manifesto for  
Wales' Children  
and Young  
People 2021



Comisiynydd  
Plant Cymru  
Children's  
Commissioner  
for Wales

## The election

In May 2021 there will be a Senedd election.

This is when people who live in Wales will vote for who they want to run the country for the next five years.

Groups of politicians, called parties, will try to persuade people why they are the best people to vote for.

The party who gets most of its politicians elected to the Senedd will be able to form a Government and run the country.

Over the coming months parties will try to convince all of us who live in Wales to vote for them.

One of the ways parties do this is by publishing something called a manifesto.

A manifesto explains to people what a party would do if they got enough votes to run the country.

Manifestos for the Senedd elections can only include things that the Welsh Government has the power to change.

This includes health care, education and transport.

Some things, like immigration and refugees, crime and policing, Universal Credit and rules about TV, radio and social media, are decided by the UK Government in Westminster, London.

Manifestos are usually published at the start of the year, before the election in May.

## What we want to see in manifestos

It's our job to make sure that the Government always thinks about children's rights when they make decisions that affect children.

And we want all political parties who are hoping to win the election next year to think about children's rights when they write their manifestos.

On this page, we've written our ideas.

They are the things we want political parties to put in their manifestos, so we can be sure that the next Government will do what's best for children and young people.

These ideas have come from all of our work over the last five years and reflect what children and young people have told us is important to them.



## Clear information

We want all political parties to make their manifestos easy for everyone to understand, including children and young people, much like this page.



It's very important that parties give clear information about what they will do for the next election because it's the first time 16 and 17-year-olds in Wales get to vote.

This page has the things we're asking parties to put in their manifestos to make a positive difference to young people's lives.

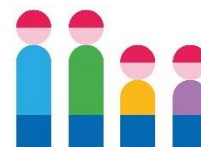
## The top things we want Welsh Government to do for children and young people

Action to reduce child poverty and support those living in poverty	Listen and act on children and young people's ideas on tackling climate change	Free bus and train travel for under 18s
More youth and play services that anyone can use, for free	Make it much easier for children to get help and support for their mental health through a 'no wrong door' approach	Make sure all children have the electronic devices they need to learn at home, and access to the internet
Make sure every child in Wales has their rights respected in school	Review the testing and exams system in Welsh schools from ages 7-18	Make new laws to protect the rights of children who are home educated
Give all young children the chance to go to a nursery for free, to help them learn and develop	Stop private companies making a profit in children's homes and foster care	Bring the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child fully into Welsh law

## Services and Support

### Free buses and trains

All children under the age of 18 should be able to use the bus and the train in Wales for free



### Tackling climate change

The Welsh Government has said there is a 'climate emergency' in Wales. The next Welsh Government should act on young people's ideas to help fight climate change as this is a really important issue for Welsh children and young people.

### Playgrounds and youth clubs

- There should be more places in Wales for children to play safely and for free. We'd like to see free adventure playgrounds all over the country.
- All young people should be able to easily spend time at a youth club and speak to a youth worker.

### Devices and broadband

- Not all children have a computer or digital device. This has been a big worry for lots of families, especially when schools were closed. As schools open again, children still need to be able to use a computer or tablet at home, and to have a broadband connection. They need this for research and school work, and in case their school has to close again in the future as part of a local 'lockdown.'
- We want the next Government to make sure that all pupils of secondary school age have their own device to make sure they can keep learning at home. Some families will also need extra help to get an internet connection.

## Money and extra help

We're worried that lots of children's families can't afford all the things they need. The new Government needs to say how they will make these issues better.

### Free school dinners

- Children are going hungry because they can't have a free school dinner - there is a limit on who gets a free dinner based on how much money their parents earn. We think the limit should be higher so more children can have free dinners.
- Families who apply for other financial help like Universal Credit should be asked at the same time if they want to get free school meals; this is called 'auto enrolment'. This should mean that a family only has to fill out one application to get all the support and help they need.
- Families should get money or food for free school meals during the holidays too, not just when they are in schools. Some children go hungry during the holidays because their families can't afford to feed them when they're not getting free school meals.

### Tampons and sanitary products

Some young people can't afford the sanitary products (tampons and sanitary towels) that they need when they have their periods. The next Welsh Government needs to make sure that they can keep getting these for free and to make sure those who aren't in school get the help they need as well.

## Young Carers

Some children care for someone else in their family; they are often called Young Carers. Lots of young carers are really proud to help look after their family members but some find it very challenging too. The next Government needs to make sure that young carers get enough support themselves to look after their family and do well at school, and follow their own hobbies outside of school.

## Sexual Abuse

If a child or young person has been sexually assaulted or abused they need somewhere safe and welcoming to get medical help and to help them recover from what has happened to them. The next Government should give more money to these services so that they can be more like Iceland's 'Child House' model.

## Education and Childcare

### Free childcare

Going to a nursery or a childminder before starting full-time school can help children to learn and develop. At the moment children aged 3 and 4 can go for free if their parents work certain hours. But we think all children should be able to go for free; we don't think any child should miss out just because their parents aren't working a certain amount of hours.

### More money for schools

Wales will have a new curriculum soon, meaning what schools teach and the way they teach it will change. The way children with additional learning needs learn will change too. But at the moment many schools don't have enough money. We want the next Welsh Government to increase the money that schools have so that there are enough teachers and support teachers, with lots of opportunities for training.

### Help for children who might be excluded

Some children and young people get 'excluded' from school. This means children are told not to come to school, either for a few days or permanently. We're worried that more children in Wales are getting excluded because of their behaviour in school. We want schools to support children who may need extra help so they don't miss out on an education. We think schools can do this by taking a 'whole school approach' – where schools understand all children's health needs.

### Off-rolling

Sometimes schools ask families to stop bringing their child to school if they're worried about their attendance or grades, because they think it will make the school look bad. This is called 'off-rolling', and it can happen because schools are judged on things like pupils' attendance levels and GCSE results. We want the Government to change how they judge schools so that schools are valued for including all children and for making decisions that are best for each individual child.

### Exams

Our survey of 10,000 children in 2019 found that tests were the biggest worry for 7-18 year olds. In 2020 the huge difficulties with exam results after exams were cancelled raised big questions about how we recognise and support young people's hard work, skills and knowledge. We want the next Welsh

Government to change how we measure children's learning in a way that reduces stress and supports every child to progress, instead of leaving young people with low grades and low self-esteem.

### Learning at home

When parents choose to teach their child at home they should have to tell their local council, so that the council can see the child and to make sure they and their family have all the help they need with their learning and talk about any extra support they might need. All children have a right to a good education, whether they learn in school or at home. The next Government needs to make a new law to make sure this happens.

### Staying safe on school trips

When schools take children on trips, including trips to other countries, there's advice from the Government that they *should* follow to help keep children and young people safe. But we think the rules should be stronger and schools should *have* to follow the advice from the Government, to make sure all children in Wales are as safe as possible. They will need to make a new law to make this happen.

### Keeping children safe in private schools

Some children in Wales go to independent schools. Independent schools follow some different laws to most schools in Wales. Teachers at independent schools don't have to register with the Education Workforce Council – an organisation that checks teachers work with children safely. This means children in independent schools are not protected as much as children in other schools. The Government needs to change the law to make sure all children are protected.

## Health and Wellbeing: No Wrong Door

Services that help children and young people with their mental health need to have enough money and staff to help with emotional difficulties or behavioural problems too. They might not be classed as having a mental health condition, but they still need help and support to get better from any difficult things that have happened to them. And children should be able to get help wherever they ask for it. We call this 'a no wrong door approach', because whatever 'door' you knock for help, whether it's your GP, your school, a youth service or somewhere else you should get the help you need.



## Neurodiversity

Around 1 in 10 children have a condition that is neuro-diverse. This include things like autism, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), dyslexia, dyspraxia and speech and language needs.

- We want Welsh Government to change how these children get help so they aren't waiting for months for an appointment while things may be getting worse. This shouldn't depend on a doctor or other medical professional making a 'diagnosis' of them having a particular condition; they should get the help they need whatever the cause or reason.

This might mean that they need help from health services, their school, or a social worker, and all of these people should work together to give them the care they need.

# Children who can't live at home with their families

## More support from a Personal Advisor

The next Government need to make sure that children who've been in care have the support they need, from someone called a Personal Advisor, and from their local council. We think Wales needs a new law to make sure this always happens.

## Keeping children safe, wherever they live

We've heard about some children who've been asked to live in houses that haven't been inspected to make sure they're safe. These are called 'unregulated placements'. We want the Government to change the rules to stop this from happening, to keep children safe.

## No profit in children's care

There are some companies who earn money when they care for children, for instance in a children's home. For example, when a child is taken into care by the local council, the council often has to pay a private children's home to look after the child. We don't agree that companies should be able to make a profit from children's care. The Government should make sure that making a profit from care services becomes a thing of the past. This will take some time to make sure no child is left without a safe place to live, but they need to do something now to make this change over the coming years.

## Children who are in custody

A small number of children in Wales go into 'custody' every year (a type of prison for under 18s) because they've broken the law. About half of them have to go places in England because there isn't enough room in the centres we already have in Wales. We want the Government to create secure centres in Wales so young people can stay nearer their families and given the education and help they need to turn their lives around. Secure centres would also be less like prisons and more like children's homes with more rules. The Welsh Government has a document called the Youth Justice Blueprint for Wales which sets this out as their aim; we would like to see this happen and for progress to be made to give these children better support and reduce reoffending rates.

## Advocacy

The Children's Commissioner for Wales was a new job that was created 20 years ago after a report called 'the Waterhouse inquiry' showed that children in care weren't being listened to by the adults who were meant to be caring for them. And lots of them were being abused when they were in care. We've done lots of work since this to make sure every child in care has an 'advocate' - this is someone who supports a child to give their opinion and have their say when adults make decisions that affect them.

- We now want the next Welsh Government to make sure that young people who are getting any type of health care to be able to have an advocate if they want. And we want young people who want to challenge decisions made about their education to be able to use an advocate too. These will include young people with additional needs or young people who face being excluded.

## Protection of children's rights

- Wales has a law that means the Government has to think about how their decisions protect and promote children's rights, but other public services like health boards (the people who run hospitals, GP surgeries etc.) and local councils don't have to do this. We want the next Welsh



Government to change the law so that all public services will have to protect and promote children's rights in all of their work.

- The Children's Commissioner is given her job by the Welsh Government, and the Welsh Government gives her the money to run her office, which pays for all of her staff, her building, and the actual work that she and her team does. But it's also her job to tell the Government what they should do better, and sometimes to criticise them if they aren't considering children's rights when they make decisions. It would be better for the Commissioner to be given her job and the money to run her office by the Senedd. This is normally the case in other countries around the world, and it allows Commissioners to speak out freely and stand up for children's rights without worrying about their Government taking away their job or their money.