

Impact Update: Spring '25



VOICE

Making sure children's voice and experiences are heard is a key part of my role as Children's Commissioner.

Last month, for the first time as part of a national report in Wales, I presented **children's accounts of housing and homelessness issues** to the Welsh Government and local authorities. The picture they painted was stark: unsafe living conditions; impacts on their health and wellbeing; and a lack of basic requirements that all children need to grow and flourish. You can read more about this report on [page 8](#).

We've also been hearing **young people's and parents' concerns about learner travel**, including mileage thresholds for free transport and the cost of getting the bus to school. It's something that I've continued to highlight in recent months, publishing [this position page](#) that was quoted extensively in a recent Senedd debate on this issue. And I'm really pleased that a video we made with a school in south Wales was shown in the Welsh Government's Learner Travel Summit. You can watch this and other experiences on [page 7](#).

We've been **taking what we've heard from children and young people to the heart of our democracy in Wales**; over the last three months I've taken part in the Senedd's Petitions Committee evidence session on mobile phones in schools and gave evidence to the Senedd's Health and Social Care Committee on childhood obesity. We've also made sure the views of children and young people have featured as part of our responses to some key Welsh Government consultations including the Tobacco and Vapes Bill and Youth Work in Wales.

And finally, I was proud of the young people at St Christopher's school in Wrexham, who spoke fantastically at our event in St Asaph in February to a room full of professionals. The topic was **engaging effectively and meaningfully with children with additional needs, and disabled children**, an inspiring event that you can read more about on [page 3](#).

Looking ahead, we'll continue to put children's stories at the centre of our work. With a year to go until the Senedd elections, we'll soon be publishing **our manifesto calls to all political parties**, taking some of the eye-opening stories we hear far too often from children and their families and challenging parties to address the issues they contain.



Here for all children



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Over the past three months we've engaged with over 850 children and young people, worked with adults who support children, and listened to nearly 4,000 of children's views through our Monthly Matters surveys.

In the last three months we've heard children's views on:

- **Misinformation:** we asked children and young people how they spot fake information online. How easy it is to find fake information online? And would they report it or not?
- **School toilets:** 21 years ago, we wrote a report on children's views on school toilets, called 'Lifting the Lid'. We revisited those questions with children this year to see how much had changed.
- **Oral health:** for World Health Day, we asked children about their oral health. What did they know about keeping their teeth clean and how often do they see a dentist?



MISINFORMATION

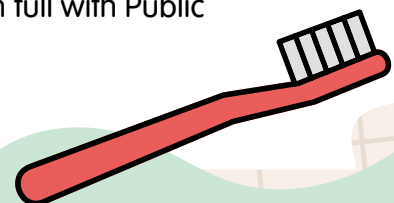
- Only 13% said they'd report something online that seemed fake
- 74% said it's easy to believe something fake online
- 72% said you are more likely to believe things that come from well-trusted sources
- 61% of you said social media companies or websites could add warnings or fact-checking labels to posts to help stop the spread of fake information

We'll be sharing the responses with Ofcom to inform their work on protecting young people online.

ORAL HEALTH

- 66% had been to the dentist since the start of the school year
- 83% brush their teeth at least twice a day
- 49% rinse after brushing

We were pleased to work with Public Health Wales on this survey, which as well as hearing about children's cleaning routines, gave children good advice on their oral health. You can watch [our video here](#). We'll be sharing the results in full with Public Health Wales.



SCHOOL TOILETS

- 56% were not happy with the school toilets
- 62% can go to the toilet in lesson time
- When it comes to toilet paper, 21% said toilet paper was either not available or hardly ever available
- 57% thought the toilets were clean, or not too bad



Early analysis of our survey suggests that not much has changed in children's opinions of their school toilets since our report 21 years ago. We'll be further analysing the responses and presenting them in a short report. We've also reached out to schools for further conversations on this issue and how we can help make a difference.



Our Policy and Participation Advisor, Chloe Gallagher, reflects on our recent event and its impact on young people

Listening to Children and Young People with Disabilities and Additional Learning Needs: A Rights-Based Approach to Participation

Children and young people have the right to be heard, and their voices are essential in shaping the world around them. However, for children with disabilities and additional learning needs, the challenge lies not just in being heard but in being listened to in a way that is meaningful and resonates with them.

A rights-based approach, grounded in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), ensures that children's rights are respected, protected, and fulfilled. Yet, despite increasing awareness of the challenges faced by children with disabilities in Wales, their voices are still often overlooked.

The question of how we can ensure children with disabilities and Additional Learning Needs are genuinely listened to was the focus of our recent event in St Asaph, Denbighshire. The event brought together professionals to explore effective practices for participation and to highlight the importance of listening to children with disabilities and Additional Learning Needs in ways that matter to them.

Valuing Diverse Forms of Communication



A children's rights approach is not just about gathering views but about creating an environment where every child feels respected and empowered to share their thoughts. For children with disabilities and Additional Learning Needs, this means listening in ways that meet their individual needs, whether through verbal communication, art, or other creative methods.

Ahead of the event, we worked with a group of young people from St Christopher's School in Wrexham. The group consisted of eight young people aged 13-18, each with a disability or additional learning need, and their individual needs were carefully considered throughout the delivery of the project. Together, we explored why "voice" matters to them, with support from Wrexham University's Civic Mission team to deliver Public Narrative training, which focuses on how to tell personal stories that inspire action and connect to larger social issues. Over a period of 6 weeks, participation workers supported the group to prepare a presentation for the event using the "heart, head, and hands" framework:



- **Heart:** Why does this issue matter? The group reflected on their personal experiences
- **Head:** What are the facts? The group created a survey to gauge their peers' views.
- **Hands:** What action do they want to see? The group discussed what changes they hoped their presentation would inspire

This approach allowed the young people to engage with the topic on a deeper, more personal level.



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One of the most striking outcomes of this project was the variety of ways the young people chose to express themselves. While some spoke directly, others used different forms of expression: one young person presented their thoughts through a fantasy fiction story, while others used visual art to share their ideas. These diverse methods of communication highlight the different ways children process and express their thoughts. It reinforced the point that the method of communication is just as important as the message itself.

During the event, practitioners acknowledged the value of offering a variety of communication options. Feedback included comments like, "Inclusivity and having different ways for children to share their views is essential," and "simple changes can make a massive difference in participation."



IMPACT ON THE YOUNG PEOPLE



The project had a significant impact on the young people involved. It provided them with the freedom to express themselves in ways that suited them, boosting their confidence and giving them a sense of ownership over the process. One young person reflected, "It was fun and challenging. I did enjoy it, even though I was worried at first. It helped me build my confidence."

Another said, "They took their time to listen to what we said." The group felt that their message was important: "A lot of people say children need to be listened to more, but they don't talk about how. I think our message helps with this."

One particularly memorable moment was when a young person, who usually preferred writing, chose to speak during the event. Creating an environment where they felt comfortable and supported allowed them to step out of their comfort zone, demonstrating the power of providing a safe space for self-expression. This moment reinforced the importance of fostering an atmosphere where young people feel both supported and confident enough to express themselves in their own way.

This project has reinforced this approach to engagement, and I'm committed to continuing to offer creative methods for young people to share their voices. By adopting a rights-based approach, we can ensure that all children, regardless of ability or need, have the opportunity to shape the world around them.



Rights realiser



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Our Advice team helps children and young people in Wales to access their human rights. Our team has handled over 300 cases over the past three months.

[Go to our advice webpage for more information about this service.](#)

Most common issues

Education-related issues represented 41% % of all cases. This included:

- Complaints about school provision, bullying, placement issues, and exclusions
- Cases related to Additional Learning Needs (ALN/SEN), especially highlighting challenges with Individual Development Plans, placement disputes, and statutory delays under the reformed ALN system.

Social Services-related issues made up 27% of issues, including:

- a lack of post-18 support, placement stability, access to entitlements, and delayed or unclear planning.

Other themes from cases included:

- Some complex ALN cases highlighted situations where a lack of tailored support or flexible responses from schools appeared to increase children's distress or anxiety, particularly where behavioural needs were misunderstood or unmet.
- Mental health and neurodivergence intersecting with inflexible school policies on issues like school uniform and reductions or removal of previously agreed support
- Post-18 care leavers experiencing difficulties accessing financial support or housing entitlements.
- Children not being meaningfully involved in decisions that affect them





Challenger



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"I feel like as young people we are being let down. We have a right to free education but we're seeing because of this barrier of a bus fare that we're not getting that access".

This is a quote from a young person speaking to us in March 2025, regarding the difficulties young people are facing in getting to school each day to access their education.

Learner travel, including mileage thresholds for free school transport, is an issue we've consistently raised, including through formal recommendations within our Annual Reports.

In March, the issue was debated in the Senedd, with our calls extensively quoted by members. This month, the Welsh Government held its Learner Travel Summit, which brought key stakeholders together, including the Commissioner, to discuss the problems facing young people and their families across Wales.

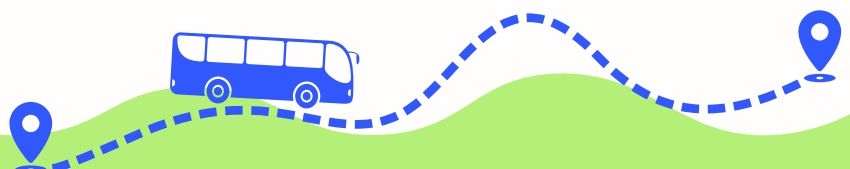


We've delivered on our commitment to put children's experiences at the heart of discussions by producing a range of videos showcasing some of the difficulties people are having with the current system.

This video from a school in south Wales was played at the event, presenting young people's thoughts on the cost of currently getting to school and the impact it's having on families.

Another video we've made walks a child's journey to school during winter – a journey that made our staff feel uncomfortable and unsafe.

And two mothers tell us about their concerns – one whose child was given a walking route by her local council through a field of wild horses, and another who worries about her child walking long distances alone.





Truth teller



- Describing their privately rented home, one young person said, ***"my house has dodgy wiring, and I can't plug anything in without being scared I'd get injured."***
- A young person living in social housing told us that their ***"current home is damp. It feels as if the mould and damp is making me unwell"*** and the ***"walls are wet to touch."***

"there is a broken roof in mum's bedroom. We had to put a bucket under it so my sister didn't get soaking in the night. There's mould on every window. It's too expensive. We can't afford the food and the house."

A ten-year-old girl living with her Mother and younger sister

As part of our research into children's experiences of housing issues and homelessness, my team held face-to-face structured conversations with young people from across Wales.

Our report, the first of its kind in Wales, presented recommendations to the Welsh Government and local authorities on prioritising children's rights in housing policy.

Housing is an essential determinant of children's rights and well-being. Adequate housing isn't just a matter of providing shelter—it's integral to a child's physical and emotional development, health, access to education, and future opportunities.

But despite the right all children have to a good standard of living under article 27 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), this research has laid bare children's and young people's experiences of feeling unsafe in their housing, of living in cramped living conditions which impair their ability to thrive and learn, and the negative impact on their physical and mental health of living with mould and damp. We've heard clearly the weight all of this can place on young shoulders; a weight no child should have to bear. This is the first time that these experiences have been heard nationally from under 16's, but it must not be the last.

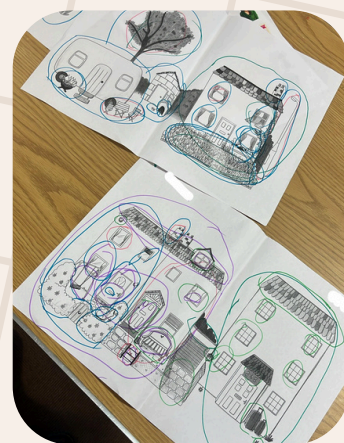


Welsh Government must review all of its housing and homelessness guidance to ensure there are specific requirements relating to children's rights under the UNCRC, and putting children's views and experiences at the heart of developments is a key requirement going forward.

You can read [the full report](#) on our website.

Including children's views in our work - Jordan Doherty and Sophie Williams, participation leads for our Housing and Homelessness research

"I thought this was going to be proper intense, but it was actually alright."



As a participation officer there's no greater compliment you can receive than this, especially when talking about a sensitive topic. This is what one young boy said to us after taking part in our Housing and Homelessness project.

We have spent 3 months talking to children and young people aged 7 to 18 from across Wales about their experiences of housing and homelessness in Wales. It's been a real privilege to listen to these children and young people share their story and support them to think about what they would like to see change in Wales.

We spent a lot of time as a team thinking about the types of materials we could produce to support children and young people to take part in this project, and we knew that it could potentially be traumatic for them to share the most personal details of their lives.

We decided to get some artwork commissioned to help start conversations and worked with the talented artist Sian Moore to create a street that reflected as many different types of homes as possible. This artwork played a key role in the conversations that took place, with children and young people recognising their own stories being reflected to them.



The children and young people who took part were keen to highlight the things that felt familiar to them and their family, and this enabled us to support them to create their own homes. Children and young people drew their homes and shared their stories in one-to-one sessions. We heard some upsetting stories about being homeless, what breakfast time can be like in a B&B and how difficult life can be when there aren't enough beds and bedrooms for everyone in your home. Children and young people were worried about the impact on their own health (from mould) and also the impact the stress had on their parents' mental health and well-being.

We are grateful to all young people who took part in the research and the adults who supported them to do so, and we'll do our best to make sure the experiences we heard lead to positive changes.

If you want to learn more about this work, get in touch with us by emailing post@childcomwales.org.uk

Diolch | Thanks for reading!

We'll publish our next quarterly impact paper in the summer.



01792 765600



post@childcomwales.org.uk



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