



**Comisiynydd  
Plant Cymru**

Children's  
Commissioner  
for Wales

## Our Manifesto for Children and Young People: The commitments we want political parties standing in the 2026 Senedd elections to make for children and young people



1

**Children's rights:**

- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) should be fully incorporated into Welsh law, with direct duties on public bodies to act compatibly with children's human rights.
- Amendments are needed to the Children's Commissioner for Wales' legislation to review the powers of the office and the bodies included within our remit. We should also be accountable to the Senedd and not to the Government.

PAGE 4

2

**Safeguarding:**

- The IICSA recommendation to establish a Child Protection Authority needs to be delivered.
- New legislation is needed to close safeguarding loopholes to enable independent oversight of religious organisations, and non-affiliated sports clubs.

PAGE 6

3

**Child poverty:**

- Introduce a Welsh Child Payment akin to that of Scotland – parties will need to find a way to achieve this, either through the existing devolution settlement or through legal changes that would allow this to happen.
- Extend universal free school meal provision to secondary school age children.
- Ensure that all those entitled to claim Welsh administered benefits can easily do so.
- Extend Summer holiday provision such as the Food & Fun (School Holiday Enrichment Programme) scheme to meet the needs of those in deep poverty.

PAGE 7

**Our Asks set out the changes children and young people in Wales need to grow up happy, healthy and safe. Ahead of the 2026 Senedd elections, we're calling on political parties to listen and commit to these priorities, showing children and young people truly matter in Wales' future.**

4

**Education:**

- Undertake a comprehensive review of how School Governing Bodies work, to consider how school governors are recruited, trained and supported, as well as exploring skills auditing and remuneration.
- Take all necessary steps to ensure the sufficiency and transparency of funding and resource for ALN provision across Wales and consider the findings of the Audit Wales review, as well as consider the ringfencing of budgets.
- Increase support for families to understand and navigate the ALN system.

PAGE 9

5

**Transport:**

- Expand upon the current £1 fares pilot, to provide free public transport (to include bus and rail travel) for under 18s.
- Undertake a full review of the Learner Travel Measure 2008 and associated guidance.

PAGE 10

# Introduction

by the Children's Commissioner for Wales

Since the dawn of Welsh devolution, Wales has defined itself as a country which has valued and promoted children's rights. Wales has some world-leading legislation and provision, such as being the first country within the UK to enshrine the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into law through the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011. Yet, in practice, there remain some significant issues affecting our children and young people – issues that are affecting their life-chances and their ability to reach their full potential.

Children and young people are active citizens and have a right to have their voices heard in all decisions that affect them. Children who are aged 16 and above can also vote in Welsh Government and Local elections in Wales - there could be no more important decision than the party who enters government.

Based on our engagement with thousands of children and young people, professionals and other key stakeholders, our Manifesto for Children and Young People identifies five key areas to focus on, with the aim of making life better for children and young people in Wales.

These areas are:

1. **Children's Rights:** strengthening of the legislation to bring stronger duties and powers to uphold children's rights
2. **Safeguarding:** strengthening our safeguarding governance arrangements
3. **Child poverty:** targeting and eradicating deep child poverty in Wales
4. **Education:** reviewing school governance and providing better support for schools to meet the needs of children with additional learning needs
5. **Transport:** making public transport and learner transport free and accessible



If successfully delivered, these commitments will create a Wales we'd all want to see for our babies, children and young people. We urge all political parties and all candidates to commit to our asks to help us achieve a Wales where all children's rights are respected and realised – a Wales for all children.

**Rocio Cifuentes** MBE

Children's Commissioner for Wales

September 2025

\* We have also collaborated with partners across the children's sector in Wales to produce and endorse the following:

- Bil Pob Plentyn
- Welsh children's charities' Champions for Children manifesto

# 1 Children's Rights: strengthening of the legislation to bring stronger duties and powers to uphold children's rights

## RATIONALE

Embedding children's rights in legislation in Wales is a key way to safeguard children. At the moment, the Government has to consider children's rights when making new laws and policy, but they don't have a duty to act in a way that upholds children's rights, unlike the duty now in place in Scotland. Public bodies like local authorities, health boards and schools are not under any specific duties to uphold children's rights in their decisions.

Our office was established in 2000, but our founding legislation has never been reviewed. The legislation which established our office was passed by the UK Parliament as this pre-dated devolution, so has never been considered by the Senedd. The list of bodies that fall within the remit of the Commissioner's powers needs to be revisited to ensure the Commissioner has the power to act in all devolved areas of children's lives. In addition, whilst it is welcome that Wales was the first country to have a children's commissioner, legislation for the other UK nations has added in additional powers and responsibilities that we do not have, including the power to request specific data from public bodies related to rights issues.

Internationally, the Paris Principles, the set of international standards that define the role, composition, status, and functions of National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs), state that institutions like us should report to the Parliament and not the Government as we do. We have long felt that this needs to change to allow for true separation and independence from the Government as well as allow for greater transparency and accountability.

Following recent reviews of both the Well-being of Future Generations Act and the remit of the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales, it is now time for our remit to be reviewed to reflect the current landscape of public bodies, and to strengthen our ability to meet the needs of children and young people in 2026 and beyond.

## OUR ASKS:

- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) should be fully incorporated into Welsh law, with direct duties on public bodies to act compatibly with children's human rights.
- Amendments are needed to the Children's Commissioner for Wales' legislation to review the powers of the office and the bodies included within our remit. We should also be accountable to the Senedd and not to the Government.





#### If these changes are not made:

- Unlike in Scotland, it is not possible to challenge the decision making of all public bodies in Wales. In Scotland, decisions related to children involved in court proceedings have already been found to be a children's rights issue, since their law was recently passed.
- Children will not have the advocacy and support they need to access their rights in all areas of their lives without further consideration of the remit of the Children's Commissioner for Wales.

# 2 Safeguarding: strengthening our governance arrangements

## RATIONALE

The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) reported in 2022, making a recommendation that Wales should have a new body – a Child Protection Authority – to look at the ways that activity groups, clubs, and religious organisations keep children safe. We believe that this gap still needs to be filled, to keep children safer.

Neither the National Independent Safeguarding Board in Wales, Care Inspectorate Wales, nor our office have remit or responsibility in respect of faith-based organisations, or sports groups. This remains a significant loophole in the current safeguarding arrangements in Wales. There is no designated role for the regional safeguarding children boards either. We believe that this gap still needs to be filled, to keep children safer.

We have concerns about how lessons and recommendations resulting from Single Unified Safeguarding Reviews (SUSRs) and previous Child Practice Reviews (CPRs) are implemented in Wales. These safeguarding reviews, which take place following serious incidents of harm or death to a child, are lacking in accountability and governance. We want to ensure that recommendations are SMART, and implemented in full in a timely way, both in the originating regional area and organisations, and across Wales more widely. This is to ensure all those working with children in Wales are aware of and are implementing lessons learned through reviews.



## OUR ASKS:

- The IICSA recommendation to establish a Child Protection Authority needs to be delivered.
- New legislation is needed to close safeguarding loopholes to enable independent oversight of religious organisations, and non-affiliated sports clubs.

## If these changes are not made:

Religious organisations and non-affiliated sports clubs will continue to operate without external scrutiny and oversight of their safeguarding procedures, risking further concerning cases of harm and abuse of children. Without more oversight, when recommendations emerging from CPRs or SUSRs are made to keep children safe, nobody will know if these have been achieved.

# 3 Child Poverty: eradicating deep child poverty

## RATIONALE

Poverty rates during childhood are related to poorer long term outcomes, in terms of educational attainment and health outcomes/life expectancy.

Child poverty rates in Wales remain largely unmoved since devolution. Around 1 in 3 of all children are living in relative income poverty. However, new research by Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Bevan Foundation shows us that the proportion of people living in very deep poverty has risen, so 47% of those in poverty are in deep poverty, with a growing distance between household incomes and the poverty line, illustrating the depth and severity of poverty in Wales, particularly affecting families with children.

We know that 200,000 children are living in relative income poverty in Wales, but younger children are disproportionately affected, with 40% of children aged under 5 living in poverty. Households where one member has a disability or is from an ethnic minority background are also more likely to be experiencing poverty.

Every child has a right to adequate nutritious food and clean water and no child in Wales should go hungry. Universal free school meals in primary schools should be maintained to help tackle child poverty. To eradicate the inequity, young people in secondary schools should also be afforded universal free school meals.

We also know that holiday hunger is a real and persistent problem experienced by children in Wales, and whilst we welcome increased funding for School Holiday Enrichment Programmes, this needs to expand further to reach all children who need it.





### OUR ASKS:

- Introduce a Welsh Child Payment akin to that of Scotland – parties will need to find a way to achieve this, either through the existing devolution settlement or through legal changes that would allow this to happen.
- Extend universal free school meal provision to secondary school age children.
- Ensure that all those entitled to claim Welsh administered benefits can easily do so.
- Extend Summer holiday provision such as the Food & Fun (School Holiday Enrichment Programme) scheme to meet the needs of those in deep poverty.

### If these changes are not made:

- Children will routinely go without food, particularly secondary age children and during school holidays.
- Children will miss school because of costs like transport, uniform, and not having enough food to concentrate and learn.
- Children will miss out on opportunities to socialise and take part in activities outside of school due to financial strains.

# 4

## Education: Strengthening school governance and properly resourcing schools to meet Additional Learning Needs

### SCHOOL GOVERNANCE

School Governors hold a hugely important and complex role, managing schools' operations, overseeing children's learning, working within tight budgets, and keeping children safe. Yet school governors are volunteers, and there is no requirement for any particular skills such as legal, finance, administration or HR.

There is currently a wide variation in how Governing Bodies work across Wales, resulting in different standards and experiences for children. There must be structural change so that school governing bodies are better equipped to support and meet the needs of children in their school, and that Governors understand their role in providing appropriate challenge as well as support for Head Teachers.

### Additional Learning Needs (ALN)

Children with Additional Learning needs are entitled to support to fully participate in education and school life. However, for learners with Additional Learning Needs (ALN) to have their right to education fulfilled, more resourcing is required. Specialist staff members, training for all staff, accessible physical environments and facilities and access to assistive technology are all examples of where increased funding could ensure that mainstream schools achieve genuine inclusivity, in line with the vision of the ALNET Act. Children and their families also need better help and guidance to understand the complex world of the ALN legislation, as do teachers, schools and local authorities, to ensure all children's needs are being met.

### OUR ASKS:

- Undertake a comprehensive review of how School Governing Bodies work, to consider how school governors are recruited, trained and supported, as well as exploring skills auditing and remuneration.
- Take all necessary steps to ensure the sufficiency and transparency of funding and resource for ALN provision across Wales and consider the findings of the Audit Wales review, as well as consider the ringfencing of budgets.
- Increase support for families to understand and navigate the ALN system.

### If these changes are not made:

- There will continue to be inconsistencies that could lead to inadequacies in school governance arrangements in Wales
- Children will disengage from education, and will not achieve their potential without the support they need to access education – letting down a generation of children.



# 5 **Transport:** making public transport for children and young people free and improving learner transport

## RATIONALE

Young people across the whole breadth of Wales raise the prohibitive costs and poor availability of public transport with us at every turn. They feel let down, unable to get to school or college safely and on time, and prevented from socialising with friends, seeing family members, or attending clubs and leisure activities.

Responding to the climate emergency, and achieving Net Zero targets necessitates a shift in people's daily transport habits. We need to minimise the barriers for young people to routinely use public transport and active travel to get around, so that this becomes the 'new normal' and a habit for life.

## OUR ASKS:

- Expand upon the current £1 fares pilot, to provide free public transport (to include bus and rail travel) for under 18s.
- Undertake a full review of the Learner Travel Measure 2008 and associated guidance.



## If these changes are not made:

- Children will not have access to all of their rights – accessing education, attending health appointments, seeing friends and family, joining clubs and engaging in sport and leisure opportunities.
- Those from poorer backgrounds will be disproportionately disadvantaged; poorer access to education, health, employment and training opportunities will have life-long and even inter-generational effects.
- Climate targets will not be achieved without a significant change in everyday travel habits, and the worst effects of climate change will impact most severely on the most vulnerable children.

