

Chwarae Cymru
Play Wales



Championing children's play: a manifesto for Wales

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Play Wales is calling for the next Government in Wales to continue its longstanding commitment to prioritising play. We ask all political parties to carry on supporting the implementation of the statutory Play Sufficiency Duty. We urge you to make cross-policy commitments to ensure that children's opportunities to play increase and improve.

Strategic leadership

Play Wales urges the next Welsh Government to continue its strong tradition of supporting children's right to play, through policy, legislation and funding programmes. Prioritising children's play brings proven benefits to children, families and communities, both immediately and in the long term.

We call on the next Welsh Government to:

- continue to implement the recommendations of the Ministerial Review of Play
- consider applying the Play Sufficiency Duty more widely as part of any legislative proposals affecting babies, children and families
- plan strategically for workforce development, to ensure that everyone who works with children has a good understanding of the value of play
- work to identify funding across ministerial portfolios to ensure that children's play and play development work is adequately resourced and funded
- support Bil Pob Plentyn and commit to ensuring that public bodies have a statutory duty to actively listen to, protect and support every child in Wales. It will also, specifically, strengthen children's statutory right to play.

Playful neighbourhoods

Play is more than an activity that takes place in designated spaces and at particular times. For all children to feel they have a sense of belonging, they need to be able to experience everyday freedoms, moving around their neighbourhoods safely, and playing and socialising with friends.

Play friendly neighbourhoods provide accessible play areas, streets that are safe, travel routes with opportunities to play actively along the way, and access to playwork provision.

We call on the next Welsh Government to:

- ensure that the principle of play is recognised and understood throughout *Planning Policy Wales*, the Welsh Government's guidance for land use and development
- ensure that all initiatives relating to children and families clearly and explicitly recognise that play is essential
- support community-based, staffed playwork provision, delivered by a qualified workforce.



Playful schools

Playtime (break time for older children) – those parts of the school day when children of all ages play, socialise and relax with their friends – is a valued constant in their school lives. Having enriching play opportunities is linked to a range of improvements in academic skills, behaviour, relationships, enjoyment and adjustment to school life.

Children say that playtime is an important part of their school day. Despite this, school playtime is under threat in Wales. Children say they have missed playtime to catch up with work or because a teacher feels they have misbehaved. Statistics also show that afternoon playtime opportunities are decreasing in time and frequency.

We call on the next Welsh Government to:

- **make a minimum amount of playtime mandatory in the school day**
- **proactively promote the Welsh Government's *Framework on embedding a whole school approach to emotional and mental well-being*, which states explicitly that play should not be removed from children at school as a form of punishment**
- **direct school governing bodies to make their outdoor space available for playing after school, wherever practical**
- **ensure that all staff who work in schools have access to play training, either as part of their initial training or through Continuing Professional Development.**

Play in times of uncertainty

Opportunities to play are particularly beneficial during times of uncertainty. Many children in Wales are displaced due to homelessness, spending time in hospital or being cared for in residential facilities. Often, opportunities to play can be overlooked in these settings.

During and immediately following times of uncertainty, playing:

- offers children a feeling of normality, fun and joy during an experience of loss, isolation and trauma
- helps children overcome emotional pain and feel a sense of control over their own lives
- helps children make sense of what is happening to them
- offers children an opportunity to explore their own creativity.

We call on the next Welsh Government to:

- **develop standards and guidance for play in healthcare settings**
- **ensure a strategic approach to training and qualification routes for practitioners working across healthcare and residential care**
- **ensure that play provision is considered as part of all homelessness needs assessments when allocating families to temporary accommodation.**

Benefits of play

Playing is central to children's physical, mental, social and emotional health and wellbeing.

There is a well-established body of solid evidence that shows the contribution that play, particularly self-organised play, can make to children's lives. This shows that play contributes to children's long-term and immediate wellbeing, to their physical health and to their mental health and resilience.

Several studies have concluded that play:

- **supports socialisation:** when they play, children interact with others, build attachments to peers, deal with conflict, and learn respect and tolerance.
- **is crucial for good health and wellbeing:** being active through play contributes to children's health and happiness, helping them physically and emotionally.
- **supports children in feeling part of their neighbourhoods and wider communities:** playing allows children to learn about the world around them, make connections, and develop a sense of identity and belonging.
- **supports learning and development:** play builds the structures of the brain, as well as valuable skills such as critical thinking.
- **builds resilience:** playing boosts children's emotion regulation, confidence and creativity, enabling them to cope with stress and challenges throughout life.

Play Wales

Play Wales is the national charity for children's play. We envision a future where play is valued in Wales for being crucial to a healthy and happy childhood. A country where children can freely explore, discover, develop and grow through play. We campaign for a play-friendly Wales by leading with intention, collaborating with inclusivity, educating with enthusiasm, and supporting with sensitivity.

We worked closely with the Welsh Government on its groundbreaking play sufficiency legislation. Section 11 of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 places a duty on local authorities to assess and secure sufficient play opportunities for children in their area. We also drafted the report for the Ministerial Review of Play Steering Group (2022) and accompanying background paper.



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