



# State of Play 2025

# 1. Introduction

Play Wales has undertaken a review of the local authority Play Sufficiency Assessments (PSAs) and Play Action Plans submitted to the Welsh Government in June 2025.

This is the tenth national review Play Wales has undertaken. It builds on the State of Play report commissioned by the Welsh Government in 2000, subsequently updated by Play Wales in 2003, 2006, 2009 and 2011. Since the commencement of the Play Sufficiency Duty, Play Wales has reviewed the PSAs submitted in 2013, 2016, 2019 and 2022. We have also reviewed various Progress Reports in interim years.

This review was undertaken between August and October 2025. Play Wales has reviewed the PSAs, Executive Summaries and Play Action Plans from the 22 local authorities. This report provides an overview of:

- the policy background
- the Play Sufficiency Assessment statutory guidance and tools to support
- the Play Sufficiency Assessment required processes
- the Play Sufficiency Assessment Form
- the summary of key messages and the main themes emerging from the 2025 PSAs
- recommendations for the future.

A Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis of the play sufficiency themes is included in Appendix 1.

The report includes specific information on particular aspects of the PSAs:

- Links to the Anti-racist Wales Action Plan
- Inclusion of disabled children and children with Additional Learning Needs (ALN)
- Play in education and schools
- Neighbourhood planning.

This is reported later in appendices 2 to 5.

As well as reviewing all PSAs and Action Plans, this analysis has been supplemented by discussions, workshop support and engagement with play sufficiency lead officers across most local authorities.

The State of Play 2025 is intended to inform future actions and activity.

## 2. Policy background

The Welsh Government has been committed to children's play since devolution, publishing the world's first national play policy in 2002. As part of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010, the Welsh Government legislated in support of children's play. A statutory duty was placed on local authorities to assess and as far as is reasonably practicable, secure sufficient opportunities for children to play. This has become known as the Play Sufficiency Duty.

Play Sufficiency Assessments are undertaken and submitted every three years. The first of these triennial PSAs were submitted in March 2013. Local authorities also produce and submit annual Play Action Plans and report on these through annual Progress Reports.

Between 2019 and 2022, the Welsh Government undertook an in-depth and collaborative review of its play policy work. The Ministerial Review of Play had two aims:

- To assess the Welsh Government's work relating to play policy
- To help the Welsh Government shape how it develops and progresses the play agenda.

The review was managed by the Early Years, Childcare and Play Division of the Welsh Government. An internal project board of cross-policy Welsh Government officials was established, which provided overall scrutiny for the project in the early stages. A cross-professional steering group of play and playwork specialists, and policy officials from across the Welsh Government was set up to support the review.

Play sufficiency and funding was one of the themes of the Ministerial Review of Play. A key report recommendation was to ensure that Welsh Government policy instruments include measures to support children's ability to make the most of opportunities to play.

In response, through collaborative working with Play Wales and local authority play leads, the Welsh Government reviewed and refreshed the suite of PSA documents. A PSA form has been published, along with other related templates and a refreshed *Play Sufficiency Assessment toolkit*. The statutory guidance, *Wales – a Play Friendly Country*, for local authorities was refreshed and published in March 2025.

### 3. Play Sufficiency Assessment statutory guidance and tools to support

*Wales – a Play Friendly Country* is statutory guidance to local authorities on assessing for and securing sufficient play opportunities for children in their areas. It supports local authorities in complying with the duties under section 11 of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010.

It lists the Matters that need to be considered:

- **Matter A:** Population
- **Matter B:** Providing for diverse needs
- **Matter C:** Space available for children to play
- **Matter D:** Supervised provision
- **Matter E:** Charges for play provision
- **Matter F:** Access to space/provision
- **Matter G:** Securing and developing the play workforce
- **Matter H:** Community engagement and participation
- **Matter I:** Play within all relevant policy and implementation agendas.

The *Play Sufficiency Assessment toolkit* was originally developed in 2012 to provide support to all local authorities in fulfilling their duties, as set out in the Play Sufficiency Assessment (Wales) Regulations 2012. The toolkit was prepared by Play Wales and the Welsh Government in conjunction with play providers across Wales as a means of supporting the implementation of the duty.

Local authorities use a Play Sufficiency Assessment Form with over 100 criteria across the nine Matters. This form has been reviewed and updated for subsequent assessment cycles to ensure that changes in policy, legislation and funding programmes are up to date and included. For 2025, the nine Matters have been mapped into four themes:

#### Population information

This theme relates to:

- **Matter A:** The number of children in respect of each age range within its area
- **Matter B:** The needs of children from different cultures and backgrounds within its area
- **Matter E:** Whether there is a charge for play provision and where there is a charge

#### Places where children play

This theme relates to:

- **Matter C:** The space where children can play, including open space, and any other space
- **Matter F:** Traffic measures that are used to promote access to play
- **Matter I:** The extent to which education and local development planning policies take into account the need to enhance play opportunities for children

## Supervised provision

This theme relates to:

- **Matter D:** Supervised play provision
- **Matter G:** Playwork training and workforce development

## Policy, engagement, advocacy and information

This theme relates to:

- **Matter F:** Measures used to promote access to play, including the provision of information, publicity and events
- **Matter G:** Training opportunities for the play workforce
- **Matter H:** The level of community engagement and participation
- **Matter I:** The extent to which other policies of a local authority take into account the need to enhance play opportunities for children.

## 4. The 2025 Play Sufficiency Assessment review – required processes

*Wales – a Play Friendly Country* sets out several underpinning principles which the Welsh Government expects local authorities to work to when responding to their duties to assess and secure sufficient play opportunities. There are also required processes for each local authority to articulate through their PSA Executive Summary:

- Partnership working
- Consultation and participation
- Maximising resources.

### Partnership working

The review of the 2025 PSAs indicates that this is an area in which most local authorities improved since 2022. The findings of the 2022 review indicated that uncertainties and changes brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic had impacted on partnership working and collaboration in preparing the PSAs and Action Plans.

The refreshed PSA form seems to have provided an opportunity to collaborate across local authority departments for both the assessment and action planning processes. Many PSAs report holding face to face workshops and meetings. Where these have taken place, there are examples of good collaboration interdepartmentally within local authorities. In addition, in these areas, there is an increased mention of the establishment of Play Sufficiency Groups, or similar, across PSAs and the Play Action Plans.

In those areas where town and community councils are present and actively involved in supporting play, they continue to feature as important partners. In addition to directly providing services in a few cases, there are some examples of match-funding for holiday playschemes and equipped play areas.

Third sector partners continue to be mentioned across many PSAs as important service providers. However, this tends to focus on direct services or projects in specific communities or for targeted support or specialist services. There continues to be little evidence to suggest that local authorities support them financially to meet core infrastructure costs. Therefore, sustainability for these organisations continues to be an issue.

## Maximising resources

There appears to be progress in maximising available resources to support children's opportunities to play across most local authorities. Although there are examples of budget reallocation to increase capacity and avoid duplication, it should be noted that many areas have not seen an increase in funding for play since 2022. Where it is most evident that funding is used well, there is a dedicated play sufficiency officer, or similar.

Play lead officer roles, responsibilities and approach to play sufficiency continues to vary across local authority areas. As noted in the Ministerial Review of Play, the ability to make use of funding continues to be closely related to the presence of a designated play sufficiency lead officer with enough authority and seniority to make decisions and carry influence. It is a challenge for local authorities to maintain strategic and monitoring groups, access funding and to liaise with stakeholders to allocate funding well where there is no officer with direct responsibility for play sufficiency. Where local authorities have invested in play development capacity and play sufficiency infrastructure, more in-depth research and collaboration is taking place.

There is currently no national dedicated funding stream to local authorities for play or for play sufficiency functions. However, the Welsh Government has frequently made capital and revenue funding available to local authorities for play sufficiency via the All Wales Play Opportunities Grant (AWPOG). The most recent AWPOG allocations for 2025 have focused on supporting local authorities to undertake their PSAs, with an additional allocation to respond to play sufficiency actions. The review of PSAs indicates that local authorities value that this fund has been allocated at the start of the financial year. This has enabled a more strategic and meaningful response.

There are key Welsh Government programmes that support play, play development, and play provision across local authorities. These include:

- **Children and Communities Grant** – supported inclusive play projects, ensuring access for children facing particular disadvantage.
- **Flying Start** – funding has been integrated into early years play provision, promoting social and emotional development for children under five.
- **Families First** – supports development work.

A particular feature across PSAs is the impact that the Playworks Holiday Project has had in supporting growth in the infrastructure to support local delivery and work more strategically. The Playworks Holiday Project funding, distributed via the Children and Communities Grant, has supported both the development and strengthening of provision. It also enabled sustainability of staff so training and knowledge is being built upon and developed. Most PSAs note the positive impact this fund is having on the ability to work more strategically and sustainably.

Local authorities have also used several other Welsh Government programmes to further enhance opportunities to play. Examples include:

- **The Active Travel Act** – enabling safe routes to play spaces, particularly for children in areas with limited transport options.
- **Safe Routes in Communities (SRIC) funding** – creating safer walking and cycling routes to play areas, enhancing accessibility and safety.
- **Bilingualism Strategy** – expanding Welsh language play services.

The UK Shared Prosperity Fund is also mentioned as contributing to opportunities to play across many local authority PSAs. Whilst it is difficult to gauge collaboration on the allocation across some areas, there are good examples of strategic approach in a few areas.

Other sources of funding identified include:

- Community safety funding from Police and crime commissioners
- Town and Community Council contributions
- Levelling Up funding
- Public Health teams
- Regional Partnership Boards.

Many of the PSAs discuss investment in play areas. Many are funded outside of play policy funding allocations and are funded as part of local authority core budget or through town and city development grants. The inclusion of capital funding in the Welsh Government's 2025-26 budget to improve outdoor play is noted across Play Action Plans. It is a welcome resource being used to contribute to enhanced facilities, particularly supporting local authorities to consider accessibility issues.

## Consultation, participation and engagement with children

There appears to be a continued commitment to ensuring that the underpinning principles of consultation, participation and engagement are adhered to. All the assessments indicate some level of engagement with children and parents. The PSA Executive Summary refresh has enabled local authorities to summarise what they have found out from children about their lived experiences.

A standard Play Satisfaction Survey for children is included in the *Play Sufficiency Assessment toolkit*. While most local authorities have used the survey in the standard form, others have adapted it or developed their own version. While each local authority must approach the PSA in a way that best meets its local needs and situation, the use of non-standard surveys means that opportunities to consider an all-Wales picture of children's views of play sufficiency is not possible.

Through the survey, children tell us what's good about the play opportunities in their local area and tell us how satisfied they are about when, how and where they can play. Play Wales has analysed the surveys completed by nearly 8,000 children across 16 local authority areas as part of their PSAs in 2025. Our report, *What children say about play in Wales: 2025*, was published in October 2025.

As well as paper or web-based surveys, most local authorities have taken a more qualitative approach to gathering the views of children, specifically through focus groups with children facing particular disadvantage and structural barriers to play. There are good examples of neighbourhood-based play sufficiency work. However, this has mostly been possible with external support for existing well established play development teams.

Several action plans mention the commitment to undertake more in-depth consultation with children and communities. This is both as action research at neighbourhood level or with focus groups of children. This commitment is more common where there is play development capacity either within a local authority or a partner organisation.

## 5. The Play Sufficiency Assessment Form

As in past Play Sufficiency Assessments, the content of them reflects the infrastructure, capacity and play sufficiency knowledge locally. In several instances, particular criteria is reported on in more depth. This is likely to reflect the work plan or knowledge of the officer completing the overall assessment.

Since the first PSAs, local authorities have used a Red, Amber, Green (RAG) status tool to communicate status quickly and effectively.



The PSA RAG status tool is a self-assessment intended solely for use by the local authority to assess criteria based on staff capacity, local policies, partnership working, financial resources and commitment to play locally. It is not intended to be used as a comparative measure across local authority areas.

The redesigned PSA form appears to have resulted in a more collaborative and considered approach in most local authority areas. However, there are a few PSAs which suggest that sections of the PSA have been completed by departments in isolation from one another. Whilst this is not new, this results in some of the criteria being misunderstood or not completed.

There continues to be variation in the use of the PSA form – this is understandable as it relates to local issues and capacity. This review has highlighted these issues:

- The level of detail for each criteria varies across all PSAs.
- As a result of reduced capacity, many of the sections are shared with local authority colleagues to complete. This results in some of the criteria being misunderstood or not completed.
- There is inconsistent use of the RAG status tool.
- Where sections have been completed in isolation it appears that the analysis is subjective, rather than an agreed corporate assessment.

## 6. Summary

Analysis of the PSAs indicates that the Play Sufficiency Duty continues to act as a national driver for the planning of play provision locally. Many local authorities made good use of the ability to meet face-to-face post COVID-19 lockdown measures to hold play sufficiency workshops. In most cases, these were supported and facilitated by Play Wales.

These events reinvigorated interest in play and for many areas, provided new officers across most policy areas with an opportunity to consider how their work impacts on opportunities to play. Many PSAs show continued evidence of the benefits of cross department working to contribute towards securing play sufficiency.

Despite the challenges of recent years, all PSAs demonstrate a commitment to delivering positive change, with a recognition that it is necessary to be mindful of existing capacity and resources. There is no doubt that the support and range of funding from the Welsh Government continues to result in increased interest and activity to secure play opportunities across Wales.

## 7. Recommendations

This section sets out the recommendations for the Welsh Government and Play Wales to consider. These recommendations have been taken into account as part of the review of Play Sufficiency Assessments, Executive Summaries and Play Action Plans. Play Sufficiency Network meetings, and workshops and engagement at local authority level have also informed the recommendations.

**Continue to highlight play, play development and play sufficiency funding in other appropriate policy areas.**

**Consider reviewing the Children and Communities Grant guidance and other funding streams to include play sufficiency and funding for play development in relation to securing play sufficiency.**

**Identify and promote Welsh Government funding programmes which might be used for play sufficiency actions.**

**Revisit the PSA form to consider if it needs guidance regarding the completion and analysis.**

**Further support the Play Sufficiency Network to function as a community of practice.**

**Undertake focused work with the Play Sufficiency Network to:**

- **identify ways to share ideas and projects**
- **revisit the Play Sufficiency Assessment forms and templates to consider if guidance regarding the completion and analysis is needed**
- **explore the effectiveness and use of the tools which accompany the *Play Sufficiency Assessment toolkit*.**

**Consider ways to promote good practice ideas for local authorities to undertake hyperlocal research with children about neighbourhood-based play sufficiency work.**

**Explore ways to consider access to play within the Homes and Places section of the Anti-racist Wales Action Plan.**

**Continue to gather and publish on the Play Wales website, Play Sufficiency Report Card evidence to highlight play sufficiency actions, specifically around anti-racist and inclusive practice, neighbourhood interventions and work in schools.**

**Play Wales to engage with One Voice Wales to raise the profile of play sufficiency within Town and Community Councils.**

## Appendix 1: SWOT analysis of the play sufficiency themes

This section identifies common strengths and shortcomings through a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis across the Play Sufficiency Assessments (PSAs) as part of the review. For this PSA process, local authorities have also completed a SWOT analysis, partly informed by what children told them through consultation and engagement.

Places to play theme		Strength	Weakness	Opportunity	Threat
Some PSAs refer to Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG)	Dedicated capital funding programme to improve facilities and access issues	Reduction in maintenance budgets Limited resources generally	Replacement Local Development Plans across all areas Placemaking policies	Designated play areas are reliant on funding Changing mindsets regarding design and provision changes is challenging	Play officers are stretched to fully engage with matters regarding planning policy, play space location and design
There are complementary policies which protect and improve open space	Good examples of provision for outdoor play which can be developed	Limited skills of staff Some Open Space Assessments are dated	Commitment to undertake access audits Commitment to undertake play value assessments	Financial pressures on maintenance budgets also impact on the level and quality of provision – with the bottom-line being safety rather than quality	Parents are concerned about safety which limits children making the most of neighbourhood play
Welsh Government funding programme to support outdoor play	Town and community councils in some areas are supportive	There is some confusion in the terms used within the criteria which means the interpretation varies	Better promotion of the value of informal open space (links to Matter F) Increased recognition of the importance of outdoor play	Address misunderstandings related to play street provision, using examples of good practice from other areas	20mph default speed limit supports discussions and helps address road safety concerns in the majority of areas

Population theme			
Strength	Weakness	Opportunity	Threat
<p>Continued improvement in the way that data is gathered and used</p> <p>Better understanding of the range of data that is available</p> <p>The sharing of data between officers and organisations is showing improvement</p> <p>More up to date information via 2021 census</p> <p>Increased provision for specific groups</p>	<p>There continues to be limited information for some groups of children</p> <p>Continued shortfalls for some groups, such as Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children, older children and Welsh language provision</p> <p>Specialist services tend to be located in more populated areas</p> <p>Providing for diversity can be complex and is not a 'one size fits all' solution</p> <p>Partnership working when funds are available</p> <p>Good examples of inclusive services which are staffed</p> <p>Comprehensive reporting on children with diverse needs</p> <p>Where there is capacity, ideas of home-based low-cost play ideas are shared via social media and in settings</p> <p>Growing awareness of the play needs of older children and teenagers</p>	<p>Developing protocols for sharing data</p> <p>Developing partnership approaches to data gathering and analysis</p> <p>Use the skills of local specialists</p> <p>Build on good partnership working supported by Welsh Government programmes and policy</p> <p>Period dignity projects support girls to be more involved in staffed provision</p>	<p>Limited resources to use data and to plan effectively</p> <p>Increasing numbers of children with Additional Learning Needs (ALN)</p> <p>Families are seeking individualised provision, this is not always practicable</p> <p>Specialist services are difficult to design, fund and sustain</p> <p>Competition for funding, which is limited</p> <p>Targeted funding may cause some groups to feel disengaged and under served</p> <p>Shortage of staff and funding to support the inclusion of children with complex needs</p> <p>Availability of free provision relies on grant funding/continued funding</p> <p>Cost of living crisis is impacting on the ability of children to access some opportunities, particularly those with a charge attached to them, or where equipment is required to take part</p>

Supervised provision theme			
Strength	Weakness	Opportunity	Threat
<p>Range of partner involvement, particularly in provision for recreational activities</p> <p>Good use of Welsh Government funding</p> <p>The importance of playwork provision has been elevated through funded programmes such as Summer of Fun and Winter of Wellbeing</p> <p>Funded playwork qualifications are available</p>	<p>Assessing quality in playwork settings</p> <p>Provision can be challenging to reach children facing structural disadvantage</p> <p>Concerns about Dewis Cymru ability to reach parents with up to date information about provision</p> <p>Misunderstandings about the level of qualification needed in staffed playwork settings</p> <p>Playwork features in some Childcare Workforce Development Plans</p>	<p>Quality assurance scheme (Chwarae o Safon) for playwork provision, developed by Play Wales and partners will be available soon</p> <p>There is an increase in infrastructure for playwork qualification delivery</p> <p>Undertake workforce audits</p> <p>Include playwork in workforce development plans</p> <p>There are some restrictions to some of the training on offer</p>	<p>Supervised provision is heavily reliant on continued funding</p> <p>Expectations and increased demand in services</p> <p>Recruitment and retention issues continue to be a major issue</p> <p>Make better use of the definitions of play and recreation provided in the refreshed statutory guidance (and General Comment no. 17)</p> <p>Identify good examples of where play development teams or organisations contribute to the delivery of the Food and Fun programme</p>

Policy, synergy and advocacy theme			
Strength	Weakness	Opportunity	Threat
<p>PSAs can name a lead member and officer for play</p> <p>Many refer to how the PSA may inform the Wellbeing Plans, Regional Partnership Boards and other strategic groups</p> <p>Play research has made the links between play and wellbeing</p> <p>The profile of the importance of play has been raised</p> <p>Recognition of the need for collaboration and establishment of play sufficiency monitoring groups</p> <p>Increases in social media and other communication activity to support play promotion</p> <p>Good examples of informal engagement with communities through outreach work and family play days</p> <p>Good examples of neighbourhood engagement emerging</p>	<p>Concerns about 'consultation fatigue' limited some survey work</p> <p>Play monitoring groups are difficult to sustain</p> <p>Officers who have understood and supported play sufficiency have left their posts/roles over time – capacity and knowledge has been lost in some policy areas</p> <p>Officers across all policy areas are stretched</p> <p>Some sections of the template are completed in isolation, leading to misunderstanding of some of the criteria</p> <p>Good examples of regional working</p>	<p>Work in partnership with Play Wales, to deliver Understanding Play Sufficiency workshops developed by Play Wales</p> <p>Develop and deliver short seminars or workshops for other council departments</p> <p>Develop a clear strategy for engaging children, parents and communities using examples from practice</p> <p>Undertake a review and use of engagement methods and tools and share good practice via the Play Sufficiency Network</p> <p>Work with partners such as Town and Community Councils and housing associations to upskill them</p>	<p>Consultation can be seen as a one-off exercise that doesn't result in improvements or changes</p> <p>Limited capacity and skills to undertake engagement activity varies</p> <p>Threats to funding and capacity if play is not valued across the local authority area, particularly during times of restructure</p>

## Appendix 2: Links to the Anti-racist Wales Action Plan

The Anti-racist Wales Action Plan (ArWAP), published in June 2022, aims to make a measurable difference to the lives of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people and sets out a vision of an anti-racist Wales by 2030.

Developed in collaboration with Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people, it contains eleven goals and actions for the childcare and playwork sector. These actions, captured in the Childcare and Play Chapter of the plan, focus on improving the experience within the workplace, offering more culturally appropriate provision and vitally, improving the experience of children.

To support work on actions relating to this chapter, the Welsh Government convenes an Anti-racist Wales Action Plan Childcare and Play and Governance Group and various sub-groups. In its Anti-racist Wales Action Plan: 2024 update, the Welsh Government reports on the achievements of the various groups:

- The launch of Wales's first early years anti-racist learning resources and the *Creating an Anti-racist Culture in Settings* toolkit.
- To complement this a Tube Map has also been developed to complement the toolkit to support individuals at all levels to identify appropriate resources and training.
- With support from Diversity and Anti-Racist Professional Learning (DARPL), Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) is collaborating to develop racial literacy among inspectors.
- CIW leaders have formed an anti-racist champions group and are committed to ongoing professional development.

The ongoing focus of the various groups is:

- The continued promotion of anti-racist leadership
- Improving data collection on protected characteristics
- Supporting Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities' access to services
- Continuing to develop practical tools and resources and provide ongoing professional learning for addressing racism in play and childcare settings.

## Play Sufficiency Assessment and Anti-racist Wales Action Plan

The Play Sufficiency Assessment (PSA) should cover the extent to which opportunities to play are understood, encouraged and appropriate to the requirements of children from diverse communities and cultures.

*Wales – a Play Friendly Country* statutory guidance sets out nine Matters local authorities need to consider.

Two specific Matters relate to anti-racist practice:

- **Matter B – Providing for diverse needs:** directs local authorities and partners to aim to offer play opportunities that are inclusive and encourage all children to play and socialise.
- **Matter H – Community engagement and participation:** directs local authorities to consult widely on children's, their families' and other stakeholders' views on play and recreational provision. Local authorities should make efforts to engage groups that might be less likely to be able to engage without tailored support. This can include, but is not exhaustive:
  - children from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds
  - Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children.

The *Play Sufficiency Assessment toolkit* contains various resources and templates to support local authorities. This includes a Play Satisfaction Survey which can be implemented at local level, along with further guidance on consulting on play.

## Play Sufficiency Assessment Review 2025 and Anti-racist Wales Action Plan – achievements

Meeting and providing for the play needs of children from diverse communities and cultures is recognised as important in all the Play Sufficiency Assessments. There is a general approach to inclusivity and diversity across all areas, and this is most evident when reporting in the Supervised provision theme. Most of the positive activity appears to be in identifiable actions to address the shortfalls. Examples of emerging activity include:

- creation of local equalities forums, or similar
- creation of youth advisory forums
- communication activity that is clear and easy to understand by communities
- cultural awareness training for staff
- focused engagement activity with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities
- using interpreter services where needed
- undertaking DARPL training
- translation of key documents and information into a variety of languages.

## Play Sufficiency Assessment Review 2025 and Anti-racist Wales Action Plan – challenges

Some PSAs report small numbers of specific ethnic groups living in the area. Many note the challenges that families face with regards to knowing what is available in the community. When there has been engagement, language has been identified as a key barrier to involvement. While local authorities do not identify specific demand for culturally specific opportunities to play, there is a need to strengthen links to increase the skills and knowledge of staff and to ensure that families know what is on offer and how they can engage.

## Conclusion

The findings of the *What children say about play in Wales: 2025* report identified inequalities to neighbourhood play related to ethnicity. Children from minority ethnic backgrounds reported lower levels of satisfaction with opportunities to play. Factors include fewer friends to play with and feeling less safe or welcome in their communities. These patterns reflect broader social inequalities and underline the importance of addressing inclusion and belonging as part of play sufficiency planning.

Through our involvement with the ArWAP Childcare and Play Governance group, Play Wales has engaged with community mentors involved with the ArWAP, to seek guidance as to how to effectively seek the views of ethnic minority children and families. We hope to continue this work to develop focus group techniques and ideas to ensure that they are culturally appropriate.

Play Wales will continue to engage with the ArWAP and aim to raise the profile of including opportunities to play within the Homes and places chapter of the plan. Play Wales has reviewed and updated its *Developing play and early years provision in Gypsy and Traveller sites* toolkit. We will identify ways to share the toolkit with key stakeholders developing provision and opportunities to play.

## Appendix 3: Play in education and schools

International empirical evidence suggests that school playtime initiatives aimed at enriching play opportunities are linked to a range of improvements in academic skills, attitudes, attention and behaviour, and to improved social skills, improved social relations between different groups of children, and better enjoyment of and adjustment to school life.

The Children's Commissioner for Wales undertook a Monthly Matters survey with teachers and children in May 2024 relating to play and break times in school. In the *Break/Play Times – A Snapshot Survey of Children and Young People in Wales* report, barriers highlighted by teachers in providing children with playtimes were a lack of resources and time, and pressures related to delivering their curriculum. The survey noted children also wanted more time and equipment when asked about making playtime better.

The Ministerial Review of Play Steering Group considered the range of national policy and delivery initiatives that support children in accessing their right to play across educational settings. The discussions highlighted the need to ensure that play is valued in these settings, not only for instrumental educational outcomes, but also for the immediate wellbeing benefits it brings to children of all ages.

The *Ministerial Review of Play Steering Group's Final Report* made two key recommendations linked to play in schools, which the Welsh Government accepted and agreed actions in response.

- **Key recommendation 14:** Promote the importance of play and the use of school grounds as a community asset for play through community focused school policy.
- **Key recommendation 15:** Increase and improve play and break times in schools.

Play sits within a range of Welsh Government education policies:

- **Community Focused Schools:** the incorporation of play in the guidance covers three areas:
  - engaging with parents through the family engagement officer role to promote the benefits of play and encourage family/child play interaction
  - schools linking up with play organisations and community groups to make connections to what is already offered within the community
  - the potential for schools to provide play space outside of the school day through the opening up of school grounds.
- **Framework on embedding a whole-school approach to emotional and mental well-being:** whole school approach statutory guidance provides a defined process for schools to develop and embed their own whole school approaches which is consistent, equitable for learners and staff and which is not intended to be overly bureaucratic, rather working in common with existing school improvement processes. It is about emphasising the good things that we should all be doing as a matter of course. The Welsh Government's *Framework on embedding a whole school approach to emotional and mental well-being* makes it explicit that play should not be removed from children at school as a form of punishment.

## Play Sufficiency Assessment and schools

*Wales – a Play Friendly Country* statutory guidance sets out nine Matters local authorities need to consider. Play and education policy is covered in **Matter I: Play within all relevant policy and implementation agendas**. As part of their PSAs, local authorities must assess to what extent:

- children are provided with an interesting play environment for breaks during the school day
- children are provided morning, lunchtime and afternoon play breaks
- schools provide play opportunities during out of school times, including before school, evenings, weekends and holiday periods – including open access to school.

## Play Sufficiency Assessment Review 2025 and schools – achievements

All of the PSAs share examples of good practice where schools have developed opportunities for play throughout the school day. Some indicate that they have undertaken engagement with schools as part of the PSA. However, overall take up is low.

Particular examples of success include:

- play friendly schools (or similar) projects implemented by play development teams
- play development teams facilitating Continuing Professional Development (CPD) sessions for staff
- local authority, and in some instances, voluntary sector play team facilitation of playtime
- local authority play team facilitating ‘playful’ sessions linked to curriculum delivery
- after school play sessions delivered as part of Community Focused Schools
- development of school play policies.

## Play Sufficiency Assessment Review 2025 and schools – challenges

The biggest challenge facing local authorities in assessing opportunities to play in schools and implementing actions to address shortfalls is that there is not a standardised approach or play in schools strategy within each local authority. Any successes are variable – school based responses are, in many cases, reliant on a particular individual within the school community.

## Conclusion

As the Ministerial Review of Play points out, a child spends more than six hours a day and 38 weeks of the year at school, for at least 12 years of life, so children have considerable time to play in this setting. Children say that playtimes are an important part of their school day. In the Wales Children’s Omnibus Survey (2022):

- 98% of the children surveyed said they look forward to play/break time at school
- 82% like play/break time as they can spend time with their friends.

Despite this, this review of 2025 PSAs suggests that across local authorities, school playtime was decreasing, despite efforts locally to address this. There are concerns about diminished opportunities for play, especially for vulnerable groups, for example disabled children and neuro-divergent children and those living in poverty.

## Appendix 4: Play and neighbourhood planning

The Ministerial Review of Play included a theme of spatial justice. In the context of the review, spatial justice was about two factors:

- Children's fair and just access to what public space has to offer
- Children's participation in what public space has to offer.

The focus here is on general public space and particularly neighbourhoods. Spatial justice is therefore about children's 'everyday freedoms', a term used to refer to children's ability to move freely around their neighbourhoods and also to what neighbourhood public space offers for children to play or meet up with friends.

The Ministerial Review of Play Steering Group discussed a range of well-known contemporary barriers that prevent and discourage children's play. There are a number of factors that have decreased the opportunity for children to realise their right to play, for example:

- changes in neighbourhoods, including increased car use, increased traffic (moving and parked), changing work patterns
- parental restrictions due to perceptions of neighbourhood safety (traffic, bullying, racism, stranger danger)
- increase in participation in structured activities and educational demands
- children are 'out of place' in the public realm, increasing intolerance towards children and young people playing and meeting up.

The steering group made key recommendations when considering the theme of spatial justice:

- **Key recommendation 8:** Ensure that the principle of play as a matter of spatial justice is recognised and understood throughout *Planning Policy Wales*.
- **Key recommendation 9:** Ensure that the views and experiences of children inform the ways in which neighbourhoods are planned and managed.

## Play Sufficiency Assessment and neighbourhood planning

*Wales – a Play Friendly Country* statutory guidance sets out nine Matters local authorities need to consider. It notes that Town and Country Planning is an important factor in providing spaces where children can play. Play and planning policy is covered in **Matter I: Play within all relevant policy and implementation agendas**. The Welsh Government expects PSAs to assess the extent to which:

- planning of the built environment including housing and use of public and open spaces provides for children's opportunities to play
- the Local Development Plan recognises and addresses the outdoor play needs of children of various ages.

## Play Sufficiency Assessment Review 2025 and neighbourhood planning – achievements

The Play Sufficiency Assessment review has identified that the Play Sufficiency Duty has enabled local authorities to explore and address issues of spatial justice for children. There has been evidence of this evolving since the first PSAs were undertaken in 2013. Key partnerships locally are with planning, housing, highways, active travel, green infrastructure, open spaces, town centre managers, Town and Community Councils, police and other professionals whose work involves the design, management and organisation of public space.

Particular examples of success include:

- development of Supplementary Planning Guidance as part of the Local Development Plan process which considers the design of 'playable space' and opportunities to play
- improved design of designated play areas to include non-prescriptive play features and more appropriate use of boundaries and fencing
- the integration of play sufficiency principles within spatial planning, green infrastructure and open space policies ensures that children's play is considered within broader environmental and community strategies
- a growing recognition of the importance of small, localised and informal spaces that support children to play 'close to home'
- developing partnerships with Active Travel and Placemaking plans
- developing play street programmes
- consideration given to 'no ball games' signage
- good use of funding from Active Travel Fund and UK Levelling Up programme
- some emerging examples of hyper-local neighbourhood-based research with children.

## Play Sufficiency Assessment Review 2025 and neighbourhood planning – challenges

- Disparity relating to the management of provision. Responsibility for designated play areas in many local authorities lies with Town and Community Councils, or smaller groups. This can create inconsistency regarding the quality and quantity of designated spaces for play.
- Some local authorities report decreases in maintenance budgets.
- Despite the provision of several design and management training opportunities being offered by Play Wales, take up has been low amongst key local authority officers.
- In some areas, despite various planning policies which promote nature-based and non-prescriptive play features, there is often a default of traditional fixed play equipment, driven by adult expectations and limited awareness of alternative approaches.
- Partnership working is reliant on the skills, capabilities and capacities of local authority officers working across play sufficiency, active travel and local planning.

## Conclusion

The synergy between the benefits of a successfully implemented Play Sufficiency Duty and the wellbeing goals of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 can and should be optimised, through more explicit guidance for the development of wellbeing plans.

The underlying principle of placemaking through wellbeing in planning policies strongly supports spatial justice for children, and efforts should be made to support local authorities (and, where relevant, Town and Community Councils) to bring planners and play sufficiency staff together. Engagement with the principles and guidance in these policies should be encouraged both at local and national levels.

## Appendix 5: Inclusion of disabled children and children with Additional Learning Needs (ALN)

The analysis of play surveys from local authorities suggests that some disabled children report facing isolation and exclusion in terms of their opportunities to play, with many reporting loneliness. This may be due to an environment that is poorly designed, attitudes which reinforce differences or the effects of conditions and impairments which limit self-independence and participation. When we design spaces that get it right for disabled children, more children can play alongside one another, developing a better understanding of the full range of abilities. These early experiences are important to shape tolerance and understanding of difference.

Article 23 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) clearly states that disabled children have rights. The article opens with the statement that disabled children:

'should enjoy a full and decent life, in conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance and facilitate the child's active participation in the community'.

The UK Children's Play Policy Forum and the UK Play Safety Forum recommend the following definitions for the terms 'accessible' and 'inclusive' in the context of play space, from their joint position statement, *Including Disabled Children in Play Provision*:

'An *Accessible Play Space* is a space which is barrier-free, allows users access to move around the space and offers participation opportunities for a range of differing abilities. Not every child of every ability will be able to actively use everything within an accessible play space.'

'An *Inclusive Play Space* provides a barrier-free environment, with supporting infrastructure, which meets the wide and varying play needs of every child. Disabled children and non-disabled children will enjoy high levels of participation opportunities, equally rich in play value.'

These terms shouldn't be used interchangeably, as confusion around this terminology can contribute to a lack of appropriate play provision.

### Play Sufficiency Assessment and disabled children

The PSA should cover the extent to which opportunities to play are understood, encouraged and appropriate to the requirements of children from diverse communities and cultures.

*Wales – a Play Friendly Country* statutory guidance sets out nine Matters local authorities need to consider, with these Matters relating to inclusive practice:

- **Matter B – Providing for diverse needs:** directs local authorities and partners to aim to offer play opportunities that are inclusive and encourage all children to play and socialise. This includes carrying out access audits for all play provision and ensuring there is a well-known and agreed mechanism which is used to identify the need for separate provision for disabled children.
- **Matter C – Space available for children to play:** directs local authorities to undertake access audits at all designated play spaces and implement proposals to improve access and safety.
- **Matter F – Access to space and information:** asks local authorities to report on activity to improve the access to space and the information it provides to children and their families.

- **Matter H – Community engagement and participation:** directs local authorities to consult widely on children's, their families' and other stakeholders' views on play and recreational provision. Local authorities should make efforts to engage groups that might be less likely to be able to engage without tailored support. This includes disabled children and children with Additional Learning Needs (ALN).

## Play Sufficiency Assessment Review 2025 and disabled children – achievements

- Where capital investment programmes have been available, issues of inclusivity have been well considered and provided for. All local authorities report some action to create accessible play space when refurbishing or developing new playgrounds.
- Within the Supervised Provision theme, all PSAs reference the availability of staff training around inclusive practice.
- Many local authority and voluntary sector playwork providers delivering a programme of provision, also offer supported spaces for disabled children or inclusive provision. Most of this activity is during the school summer holidays. These spaces are dependent on a number of factors, such as:
  - the extent of support needed (1:1 support is a challenge for providers)
  - the skill set of staff
  - the accessibility of buildings and spaces.

## Play Sufficiency Assessment Review 2025 and disabled children – challenges

- Lack of regular and sufficient funding in the level of staffed provision needed to meet demands
- Poor retention of experienced and specialist staff due to low pay and lack of regular number of work hours available
- Lack of buildings that can cater to the increased needs of the children, such as, parking, location and accessibility
- Increased anxiety in parents of disabled children leading to worry about children being included in community-based provision
- Growing numbers of neurodivergent children and children with ALN
- Parental expectations regarding the level of provision needed
- Misinterpretations of the terms inclusive and accessible play space.

## Conclusion

Meeting the play needs of all children continues to be a priority across all PSAs. However, the everyday experiences for disabled children and children with ALN is varied. The findings of the *What children say about play in Wales: 2025* report identified inequalities to neighbourhood play related to disability. Disabled children and children with ALN reported the greatest level of dissatisfaction. Disabled children (and their parents) continue to feel that their choices are much more limited, with 13% saying that they could hardly play anywhere. Also, 16% of disabled respondents say that adults didn't like, or hated them playing out.

The school holidays are difficult for all parents. Disabled and neurodiverse children do not appear to have the same choices as neurotypical children. As a result, they will find the holidays difficult due to lack of opportunities to play and socialise with friends and peers. This is detrimental to their development and progress made in term time and can setback their social development.

All PSAs reference the Welsh Government £5 million investment to improve and refurbish play spaces, with several local authorities committing additional funding for designated play areas. Improving inclusivity and accessibility appears to have been a fundamental part of this work.

[www.play.wales](http://www.play.wales)

Play Wales is the national organisation for children's play, an independent charity supported by the Welsh Government to uphold children's right to play and to provide advice and guidance on play-related matters.