

Play for Wales

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Play news and briefing from the national charity for play



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From policy to playful practice

Chwarae Cymru
Play Wales

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Thank you

A heartfelt thank you to everyone who contributed to this magazine – we couldn't do it without you.

This issue of *Play for Wales*, as well as previous issues, is available to download at www.play.wales

Editorial

Playing is one of the simplest and most powerful ways children experience joy. It is how children make friends, test ideas, move, laugh, negotiate, use their imagination, make sense of the world and feel that they belong. Across Wales, we have long recognised, championed and celebrated children's right to play through policy, legislation and good practice.

International Day of Play is a global celebration of every child's right to play, and Playday brings communities across the UK together to champion the importance of play in children's everyday lives. Together, they remind us that children need time, space and freedom to play all year round. As important as campaigns and special days of recognition are, celebrating play is not just about these events.

When we truly celebrate play, we notice, and protect, the everyday moments: children running in a park, jumping in puddles, making up a game, looking for dragons and fairies or rough and tumbling with friends or siblings. To adults, these moments of play may look small, but to children they are massively important.

“To adults, these moments of play may look small, but to children they are massively important. These moments of play, of being well, offer choice and possibility in children's lives.”

These moments of play, of being well, offer choice and possibility in children's lives. They often happen when children are away from adults, and not being told what to do and how to do it.

At the start of a new school year, we should remember that schools are places where many children spend a significant amount of time. A new school year provides an ideal opportunity to remind ourselves how important it is to ensure that play is central to every child's daily experience of school – in and beyond the classroom.

Celebrating play in schools often begins with small, but well considered decisions. From supporting staff to understand child-led play at breaktimes, to encouraging playful approaches in the classroom where humour, exploration and curiosity are welcome, to developing policies that ensure that playtimes are not treated as a reward that must be earned or a privilege that can be taken away. Children have a right to play.

As we continue to celebrate play throughout the year, we take inspiration from schools which have looked at the school day through the eyes of its pupils. Like these schools, all adults should be asking: where and when can children choose how they play, gather with friends, test themselves, have fun? When we see more examples of this for more children, in more places, then we are moving closer to the play friendly country that Wales aspires to be.



Congratulations to the first *Chwarae o Safon* recipients

We are delighted to report that Play Wales' new quality mark, *Chwarae o Safon* (meaning 'play of quality') has now been achieved by two settings.

Congratulations to Wrexham County Borough Council Play Development Team and Kate Wright, a childminder based in Denbighshire. Both submitted a wide range of evidence that meets the quality indicators within our quality assurance scheme.

Playwork quality assurance is the process of looking deeply at playwork practice to improve the quality of children's play experiences in the broad range of settings where playwork takes place. It builds on playworkers' qualifications, training, experience and knowledge of the Playwork Principles.

Chwarae o Safon formalises this process so we can evidence that the setting is meeting the quality expectations of our sector, as set out in the Playwork Principles, National Occupational Standards (NOS) and qualifications. Settings can use a range of evidence produced as part of day-to-day practice, which may include policies and procedures, reflective diaries, publicity, information for parents, feedback, evaluations and team meeting notes.

Mel Kearsley, Play Development Worker at Wrexham's Play Development Team, said:

'We have found the *Chwarae o Safon* process very worthwhile, we were confident that we were running a professional service anyway, however as we started to work through the criteria we realised there were policies we could amend to bring them up to date and areas of practice that we could strengthen, for example recording our reflections and putting them into practice.

Having the quality mark shows to other council departments and professions that we do meet standards and helps to prove our professionalism. I recommend the process to all playwork organisations as it really did help to both highlight our strengths but also areas we could improve. It was also an opportunity to get the whole team involved as it needed evidence from multiple sources.'

Childminder, Kate Wright said:

'I am very pleased to have received the *Chwarae o Safon* Practice and Policy Quality Mark.

When the opportunity to take part in *Chwarae o Safon* came along, I jumped at the chance to reflect on my childcare provision, and to improve, adapt and evidence quality within my setting.

It wasn't a requirement to complete both the practice and policy sections, but I felt it was worth giving both a go. The process has had a positive impact on my setting, helping me to reflect on what I do well and identify ways to strengthen the quality of play



opportunities I provide. If you value play and the right of children to access quality play opportunities, I would highly recommend taking part in the quality mark.'

To find out more about the quality assurance process and costs, please visit: www.play.wales/playwork/quality-assurance

Over the coming months, Play Wales will be offering webinars to support settings with the next steps for undertaking *Chwarae o Safon*. To register your interest in the webinars, email workforce@play.wales



Press Play on Wrexham

Having been longlisted earlier this year, Wrexham has submitted its formal bid in the competition to become the next UK City of Culture in 2029. Wrexham is putting culture – and playfulness – at the heart of plans to establish itself as the world's most playful place.

From the outset, the city's bid has been community-led, involving thousands of local people, including over 1,000 school children, the local Youth Parliament and adventure playgrounds. If successful, Wrexham would become the first city in Wales to win the prestigious title.

The winning city delivers a year long programme of rich cultural activity rooted in their unique identities and drawing on local strengths and stories. The winning city is due to be announced before the end of 2026.

Amanda Evans, Director of Wrexham's UK City of Culture 2029 bid, said:

“In Wrexham, we take play seriously, as a radical exchange that is critical to creativity, collaboration, participation, social cohesion and well-being. Our vision is for Wrexham to be the world's most playful place, where playfulness informs every aspect of daily life...”

Play Wales is pleased to have worked with Wrexham County Borough Council to explore ways it can meet its City of Culture aspirations. The inclusion of children's play as a key feature in Wrexham's bid should be celebrated. Wrexham has a strong history of play and playwork, with a committed playwork network encompassing the three adventure playgrounds and the council's play development team. It should be rightly proud of what has been achieved to date.

For more information about Wrexham2029, visit www.wrexham2029.wales

Promoting play: dates for your diary

We actively promote children's right to play and advocate for good quality opportunities to play all year round, but awareness days help to make play visible to a wider audience and can create lasting change.

Special days and weeks of recognition can be powerful tools for advancing children's right to play because they create a shared opportunity to raise public awareness, influence policy and decision-making, inspire action and bring communities together.

Awareness days help more people understand why play matters. They provide a platform to communicate that play is not a luxury, but a crucial part of a happy and healthy childhood that also supports children's health, wellbeing and development. Over the coming weeks and months, these awareness days will offer us all an opportunity to promote children's right to play:

2026

24 October – United Nations Day
5 November – Outdoor Classroom Day
20 November – World Children's Day

2027

1-7 February – Children's Mental Health Week
15-21 May – Mental Health Awareness Week
11 June – International Day of Play
4 August – Playday

Together, we can use these awareness days and weeks to keep play high on the agenda and take positive action to ensure that every child has the time, space, freedom and opportunity to play.

Play Well in Wales project

In 2025, NHS England and Starlight, the UK charity for play in healthcare, published the *Play well* toolkit.

The toolkit brings together commissioning and service-design guidance, recommended standards and a quality checklist to help services plan, deliver, assess and improve high-quality health play provision for babies, children and young people.

Play Wales has begun working with Starlight to deliver the *Play Well in Wales* project. The project, designed to support a strategic approach to play in healthcare settings across Wales, will run over a two-year period. It focuses on embedding the *Play well* toolkit (developed by NHS England) within two NHS trusts in Wales, alongside providing family support and professional training to strengthen play-based approaches in paediatric care.



Early work includes bringing together health play managers and establishing a Play Well in Wales Task Force with key stakeholders working within the children's health play system in Wales.

Focus on play – Play in healthcare provides information about the importance of play in healthcare settings, and is available to download in our resources library:

www.play.wales/resources-library

Childcare in Wales



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

The Welsh Government has announced all 22 local authorities across Wales are on track to offer 12.5 hours a week of funded childcare for all two-year-olds by the end of March 2027. This expansion will be a significant milestone in the Welsh Government's journey towards a universal childcare offer for children aged nine months to four years.

Play Wales says:

“ Play Wales welcomes the commitment to early years and childcare reform. We call on government to put play at the heart of this important work. Expansion of childcare should be judged not only by the number of places created, but by quality: child-led play, outdoor and nature play, inclusion, and a well-supported, play-informed workforce. *Playing and being well* shows that play builds early brain development, creativity, problem-solving, social skills and emotional regulation. Play should be the foundation for all childcare provision. ”

For the latest updates, visit www.gov.wales

Save the date

The Play Wales national conference returns in 2027, bringing together professionals from across Wales and beyond.

Taking place at the Hilton hotel in Cardiff on 22 April 2027, the conference will feature an inspiring programme of keynote speakers, workshops and networking opportunities. Participants will have the chance to share experiences, exchange ideas and hear from experts working across a range of sectors that support children's play.



The event is a valuable continuing professional development opportunity for play sufficiency officers, playwork and childcare practitioners, elected members and professionals working in health, education, active travel, planning and community development. Whether you are looking to deepen your knowledge, discover innovative practice or connect with colleagues from across the sector, the Play Wales national conference is not to be missed.

For more information and to book your place, visit www.play.wales/events/play-wales-national-conference

International Day of Play



The United Nations has designated 11 June every year as the International Day of Play, recognising the power of play at the heart of a happy, healthy childhood. At the International Play Association (IPA) World Conference in June 2023, members of the IPA, including IPA Cymru Wales, voted unanimously to advocate to the UN for an International Day of Play. Here, we report on how IPA Cymru Wales, and some of its members, marked the day in 2026.

IPA Cymru Wales collaborated with IPA branches in England, Ireland, Northern Ireland and Scotland to join forces with the UK Children's Play Policy Forum to advocate for better opportunities to play in schools.

Together, they called on all schools to join the *Play 31 Challenge* by giving every child 31 more minutes to play on the day. Across all branches, members encouraged schools to extend break times, provided resources to support playful outdoor learning, and create a giant '31' with chalk, loose parts or other materials.

At a time when children's access to play is increasingly restricted, the *Play 31 Challenge* aimed to highlight that school environments can provide a range of rich play experiences which contribute to children's improved health, happiness and life chances.

Marianne Mannello, Branch Secretary for IPA Cymru Wales, took this message to the USA with a visit to Roaring Brook School in Avon, Connecticut. She worked with Wellness Teacher, Holly Rzonca, to co-facilitate workshops

with primary school aged children. The workshops were designed to raise awareness about children's right to play and empower children to discuss their lived experience of play. Feedback from these sessions was presented at a staff sharing session as part of a professional development programme.

We hope to have the opportunity to collaborate again by bringing children from Roaring Brook School together with children from Wales for an authentic international play experience.

Reflecting on the visit, Holly said:

“ The opportunity to co-teach several lessons with Marianne was one of the highlights of my school year. Together, we engaged students and staff alike, creating meaningful and memorable learning experiences. The sessions inspired thoughtful discussion about the role of play in education and child development at our afternoon staff sharing session. ”

Marianne, added:

“ It was a privilege to visit Roaring Brook School and hear directly from children about what play means to them. Their energy and honesty were a powerful reminder that play is not just a break from learning – it is central to children's immediate wellbeing and sense of belonging. I am grateful to the school community for such a warm welcome and for embracing children's right to play. ”

Another member, Linda Platt, Deputy Chief Officer at The Venture in Wrexham, reports how they proudly celebrated.

“ Having provided open access play opportunities for almost 48 years, we were delighted to once again champion the importance of play within our community by promoting the *Play 31 Challenge*. Throughout the day, we welcomed local schools to The Venture, encouraging them to prioritise play as an essential part of childhood. It was wonderful to see so many pupils enjoying the freedom to explore, create, imagine and connect through play for 31 minutes or more.

Later in the day, our open access play provision continued as children and families joined us after school for an afternoon full of adventure, laughter and fun. The playground was filled with energy and smiles, demonstrating the powerful impact that play has on childhood.

To help spread the message beyond our playground, we actively promoted the *Play 31 Challenge* across our social media platforms. We shared resources and content from IPA, Play Wales and the Children's Commissioner for Wales, alongside ideas for 31 loose parts play activities that families and communities could enjoy together. By working alongside these organisations, we reinforced the importance of protecting children's right to play and encouraged others to celebrate this important occasion.

The day was both engaging and inspiring, reminding us why our work matters. Every year that we celebrate, the message grows stronger, reaching more children, families, schools and communities. ”

Clybiau Plant Cymru Kids' Clubs celebrated by delivering Playground Takeovers. Now in its third year, the takeover initiative took place at three schools across Wales, giving children an afternoon of freely chosen, child-led play.

This year's schools were Llanilltud Faerdref Primary School (Rhondda Cynon Taf), Ysgol y Dderi (Ceredigion) and The Rofft School (Wrexham), selected through sector nominations and a public vote.

Across the events, children transformed school spaces using loose parts, creative materials, games and play resources. They built cardboard cities, created dens, explored clay, bubbles, chalk, tools, dressing-up and outdoor play.



At Llanilltud Faerdref, around 180 children took part, supported by enthusiastic staff who embraced the play-focused afternoon. At Ysgol y Dderi, children enjoyed a wide range of activities before the team stayed with the Afterschool Club, where numbers had doubled for the session. At The Rofft School, 176 children and staff enjoyed a wet but fun-filled afternoon, including den building, tinkering and fire pit activities.

Clybiau Plant Cymru Kids' Clubs branch member, Sarah Bird, said:

“ International Day of Play is an important opportunity to celebrate the power of play and remind adults that children need time, space and permission to play. It was wonderful to see children across Wales take the lead, use their imagination and enjoy the freedom to play in their own way. ”

To find out more about how to join IPA Cymru Wales and add your voice to an international movement for play, please visit: www.play.wales/play_policy/ipa-cymru-wales or contact: ipacymru@play.wales



Playday

On Wednesday 5 August 2026, Wales and the rest of the UK celebrated Playday, the annual day for play. This year's theme, Play – here, there, everywhere, gave us a great opportunity to emphasise the need for good quality opportunities for children to play wherever they are – at home, out in their neighbourhoods, and in settings such as school, childcare, and play provision – on Playday, and every day.

Across Wales, it was great to see thousands of children and families enjoying a playful day of fun at local events. Playday organisers collaborated locally to make sure that children and families in their area could mark the national day for play. Here is a small selection of photos of children enjoying at Playday celebrations across Wales.



© Wrexham County Borough Council

Messy painting fun at Wrexham's city centre event



© Seren in the Community

Fun with food at Seren in the Community's event in Cardiff



© Torfaen County Borough Council

'I have a right to play' say children at Torfaen's celebration



© Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council

Toasting marshmallows in Blaenau Gwent



© Valleys Kids

Parachute games at Valleys Kids



Cardboard city at Vale of Glamorgan's Playday



Slacklining fun at Merthyr Tydfil's celebration



Playing with cardboard at Conwy's annual event

Thank you for a summer of play

As we reflect on the importance of celebrating play every day, everyone at Play Wales would like to say a massive thank you to playwork providers across Wales.

Through the energy, care, creativity and commitment of local authority and voluntary sector providers, children have had time, freedom and welcoming places to play. There have been some unprecedented challenges this year, but still, you have set out loose parts, embraced mess and adventure, and – just as importantly – knew when to step back and let children lead their own play.

We know that making a summer of play happen takes months of preparation, flexibility, fundraising and perseverance. Whether you worked or volunteered in a holiday playscheme, adventure playground, childcare setting, local community project, local park or organised a Playday event, your contribution has mattered to children and families across Wales.

Because of you, children have tried new things, spent time with friends and had everyday experiences of the joy of playing. You have gently reminded adults across Wales that children have a right to play – not just for the summer, but year-round.

Diolch o galon – thank you from all of us at Play Wales for giving children a summer of play.

Playday 2027 will
take place on
**Wednesday
4 August!**

Enhancing play in schools across Wales

Key recommendation 15 of the Ministerial Review of Play was to increase and improve play and breaktimes in schools. In this excerpt from its final Progress Report, the Welsh Government provides an update regarding the actions taken to respond to the recommendation.

Investment programmes and enrichment funding continue to provide opportunities for schools to enhance play and breaktime provision, including outdoor and inclusive play spaces. Engagement across government policy areas with inspectors and governors is supporting greater awareness of the value of play, and the importance of protecting time and space for children to play during the school day.

Ambition in Action, Recommendation 15: Enhancing Play Opportunities in Schools

In 2025-2026, the Welsh Government invested £5 million to improve the quality of play spaces and playgrounds. Working in line with their local Play Sufficiency Assessments, several local authorities identified schools as key assets for enhancing children's access to play, both during the school day and within the wider community.

Across Wales, funding has been used to develop a range of school-based initiatives aimed at improving breaktime experiences, increasing access to outdoor space, and strengthening links between schools and communities.

A common approach has been the introduction of play pods, outdoor play packs and loose parts, enabling schools to provide more varied, child-led play opportunities. For example, Denbighshire County Council expanded its investment in play pods and equipment. Similarly, Anglesey County Council provided eight play pods across school and community settings, while Torfaen County Borough Council distributed outdoor play packs directly to schools to enhance everyday play opportunities.

Some authorities have focused on developing outdoor learning and natural play environments. In Cyngor Gwynedd, collaboration with schools and childcare providers supported the development of forest school approaches and play pod provision, helping children engage

Progress continues in supporting play within school settings through policy, inspection and investment activity.

Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) has strengthened its understanding of play, risk-benefit approaches and the Health and Safety Executive's high level statement on play by undertaking training with Play Wales and Clybiau Plant Cymru Kids' Clubs. CIW has also established a Play Champions network within the inspectorate while Estyn has committed to ensuring inspectors understand the role of play and risk-benefit assessment to inform their work. This supports more consistent consideration of play within inspection activity and reinforces the importance of play across educational and childcare settings.

In 2025-2026, £2 million was provided to schools in Wales, with a further £3 million allocated in 2026-2027, to support provision of additional, enhanced enrichment activity in and around the school day and holidays. The terms and conditions make clear play opportunities should be considered in activity development and delivery.

with more natural, open-ended play experiences.

Improving the quality of play during the school day has also been a key priority. Within Cardiff Council, the introduction of Playground Leaders has supported more inclusive, community-based play at breaktimes. This approach has contributed to creating more positive and engaging school environments, recognising the role of play in supporting wellbeing.

Beyond the school day, several local authorities have taken steps to increase community access to school grounds. Within Conwy County Borough Council, work is underway to develop mechanisms to enable school sites to be opened for use after school hours, helping to address local gaps in accessible play space and strengthening the role of schools as community assets.

Other projects, such as Pembrokeshire County Council's programme to extend outdoor play opportunities across schools and Swansea Council's school-based play initiatives, demonstrate how relatively modest investments can deliver improvements in both the quality and availability of play.

Overall, these projects highlight the flexibility of play capital funding in responding to locally identified needs. By using schools as part of the wider play infrastructure, local authorities have been able to deliver low-cost, high-impact improvements that benefit both children's play opportunities and the wider school environment.

School play policies in Pembrokeshire

Over the past year, the Early Years, Childcare and Play Team has undertaken work with schools across Pembrokeshire to promote the importance of play and ensure that children's right to play is recognised within the school environment. Using guidance from Play Wales, the team supported schools to develop and adopt a School Play Policy, providing a clear framework for promoting and protecting opportunities for play.

Developing the policy was a collaborative process, with schools encouraged to share their views and, importantly, to consider the views and experiences of children. The completed policy was presented to school governing bodies across the county, with all but two schools adopting it, demonstrating a strong commitment from schools to recognising the value and importance of play.

The work has extended beyond the development of the policy itself. The team has visited schools to support implementation, including creating engaging wall displays and demonstrating practical and creative ways that schools can embed the principles of the policy into

everyday practice. Schools also received play resource packs to support staff in developing play opportunities and encouraging a stronger play ethos.

This work builds on previous engagement with schools, such as a regular play feature in school newsletters, which has helped to raise awareness of the importance of play and share ideas and resources with school communities.

The response from schools has been extremely positive, with staff showing enthusiasm for developing their understanding of play and exploring practical ways to provide children with meaningful opportunities to play. The approach has helped move the conversation about play beyond simply recognising its importance, towards actively creating environments where children have greater opportunities to experience, enjoy and benefit from play.

Overall, the project has demonstrated the value of working collaboratively with schools, staff, governing bodies and children to promote a consistent understanding of children's right to play and to support schools in putting this into practice.

Play centred transitions in Flintshire

The PlayWell Project is a 12-week, school-based programme developed and delivered through internal collaboration between Flintshire's Play Development team and the Inclusion and Progression team. The project uses play as an early intervention and wellbeing tool, providing targeted support for children who may be experiencing behavioural challenges, difficulties with emotional regulation, trauma or Adverse Childhood Experiences.

Through structured but flexible play sessions, PlayWell creates a safe and supportive environment where children can build positive relationships, develop confidence and learn skills that support them both within school and in their wider lives. Activities are designed around key areas including teamwork, communication, problem-solving, emotional expression, self-regulation, resilience and positive social interaction.

The programme develops progressively across the 12 weeks. Initially, sessions focus on creating safety, trust and positive relationships through play. Children then explore managing emotions, taking safe risks, resolving conflict and overcoming challenges, before moving towards greater independence and applying the skills developed through play to everyday situations.

The partnership between the play development and education teams enables schools to identify children who

could benefit from additional support while drawing on the skills and experience of playworkers to provide a different approach to traditional classroom-based interventions. Early delivery has demonstrated positive changes in children's teamwork, communication, tolerance, self-regulation and ability to play positively with others.

Ultimately, PlayWell demonstrates how play can be used purposefully to support children's wellbeing, strengthen relationships and equip children with practical skills and strategies that can contribute to their longer-term development.



How national education policy supports play in Wales ... making the links

Playing is one of the main ways children explore the world, test ideas, solve problems, develop relationships and build confidence. In Wales, this understanding is noticeable across national education policy. Several Welsh Government education policies create a strong foundation for play-friendly schools.



Curriculum for Wales prioritises wellbeing, child development and authentic learning. Early childhood policy joins play, learning and care. Wider approaches to mental health, community engagement and school improvement can also protect and expand opportunities for play. These policies reinforce that play is an integral part of quality in education, not an optional extra.

Curriculum for Wales: permission to learn through play

Curriculum for Wales offers a clear opportunity to strengthen play through its four purposes, which aim to support children to develop as:

- ambitious, capable learners
- enterprising, creative contributors
- ethical, informed citizens
- healthy, confident individuals.

Providing opportunities to play supports all four purposes: when they have opportunities to play in school, children are making decisions, cooperating, negotiating, taking manageable risks, using their imagination and making sense of their surroundings.

Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care: a joined-up model

The Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care Plan brings together policies and programmes for babies and young children from birth to five years old. Its language is important. Rather than treating play, care and education as separate services, it places the child and child development at the heart of an integrated approach. The plan promotes

high-quality, inclusive and play-based opportunities across childcare, playwork and nursery education.

This contributes to better continuity for children as they move between home, childcare, play settings and school. It also creates a good basis for partnership across sectors. Playworkers, childcare practitioners and teachers bring different but complementary skills to the children's workforce. When expertise is respected, it can result in good transitions for children which means there are immediate positive outcomes, with children feeling secure, curious and ready to learn.

Wellbeing policy: play as part of school life

The *Whole-school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing* framework asks schools to review their provision, building on strengths and addressing gaps. Play belongs within this work. It can provide children with space to process experiences on their own terms, while trusted adults remain available without taking over.

A whole-school approach prevents play from being confined to one lesson or initiative. The framework allows:

- senior leaders to consider play in planning
- governors to ask about playtime and after school use
- staff to reflect on their role at play and breaktimes
- children to help shape their experiences of play in school.

As the Ministerial Review of Play and Estyn's *Healthy and happy – school impact on pupils' health and wellbeing* report noted, this approach is especially important where behaviour management, risk-averse practice or pressure on the timetable have resulted in decreased opportunities for play.

Community Focused Schools: opening up opportunities for play

Community Focused Schools policy encourages partnerships between schools, families, communities and other services. This creates real potential for play. In particular, opening school grounds outside teaching hours provides opportunities to work with local play services and involve families in the development of opportunities to play.

School grounds can be a significant community asset in a neighbourhood, providing a space when local children need somewhere to play. Applying a community-focused approach helps school communities work with partners to address issues such as staffing, insurance and resources. Projects in Wales have demonstrated that this supports children's play and strengthens relationships between the school and the community it serves.

School improvement: learner centred approach

The Welsh Government refreshed its School Improvement Guidance in January 2026. The revised guidance promotes a learner-centred, collaborative approach and focuses on learner progress, experience and outcomes. These core components are helpful, moving improvement away from a narrow focus on attainment and encouraging schools to examine the children's experience in full. This enables play to be part of engagement, wellbeing and learning for all children aged three to sixteen.

As highlighted in our article about school projects in Wales, there is much project work being undertaken as part of play sufficiency action plans and with one-off funding. When considering improvement, schools can reflect on a range of questions to inform meaningful and sustainable action:

- Do all children have enough time to play?
- Do they have access to varied spaces?
- Are disabled children included?
- Are the needs and preferences of older learners considered?
- How often is outdoor learning playful and child-led?
- What do children say about opportunities to play?

Enrichment policy: creating opportunities to play

National funding for school enrichment opportunities, via the Local Authority Education Grant, offers a route for supporting play. It enables local authorities and schools to provide social, cultural, creative and physical experiences outside formal learning – including opportunities to play – around the school day and during school breaks.

The funding aims to encourage attendance, tackle disengagement, improve physical and emotional wellbeing and promote equality of access. The guidance identifies playwork providers among the partners schools may work

with. This creates an opportunity to involve playworkers in shaping provision that responds to children's needs and interests, rather than treating enrichment simply as additional adult-led activity.

Play-based enrichment can take many forms. It might involve playworkers supporting children to:

- build and use loose parts such as crates, cardboard, fabric, planks, tyres and natural materials
- make dens and shelters
- explore the outdoors, dig, and play with water and mud
- lead their own art, music, drama, dressing-up, construction and invention
- adapt and make up playground games
- experience wheeled play.

What matters is not the particular activity, but whether children have genuine choice, enough time to become absorbed, and the freedom to shape and reshape their play.

From policy promise to playful practice

National educational policy points us towards enabling play as part of learner experience, but implementation depends on decisions made every day.

Education leaders and partners can implement policy into practice by:

- protecting uninterrupted playtimes and avoiding the removal of playtime as a sanction
- engaging children in auditing, designing and improving play spaces
- providing varied, accessible environments and flexible materials, indoors and outdoors
- supporting adults to understand play, risk-benefit approaches and appropriate intervention styles
- prioritising and including play into curriculum design, wellbeing planning and school improvement self-evaluation
- working with playworkers, families, local authorities and community organisations
- considering how school grounds can support play beyond the formal school day.

Practical implementation of children's rights to play in schools is supported via Play Wales toolkits and resources, which are hosted on Hwb (www.hwb.gov.wales) and available in our resources library:

www.play.wales/resources-library.

Wales has the good policy foundation needed for a play-friendly education system. When play is valued in curriculum design, early childhood provision, wellbeing, community engagement and school improvement, children do not have to choose between learning and playing. They are supported to do both – because, more often than not, they are doing both at the same time!

Pathway to playwork

An innovative training programme developed by the training team at Clybiau Plant Cymru Kids' Clubs is helping teenagers in secondary schools gain recognised qualifications, build confidence and wellbeing, and explore careers in playwork.

The Pathway to Playwork programme shows how a playwork approach can create meaningful outcomes for teenagers disengaged from traditional education. We spoke to Dawn Bunn, National Training Manager at Clybiau Plant Cymru Kids' Clubs, about its impact and their future plans.

The intention behind the programme is to build on the Agored Cymru Level 1 in playwork by combining it with existing work-related education units to prepare learners for future careers in childcare and playwork. The result is Pathway to Playwork, delivered through a distinctly playwork-informed approach. Instead of expecting teenagers to adapt to traditional education, it meets them where they are. Games, challenges, creative activities, teamwork and practical experiences make learning active and engaging while still achieving accredited outcomes.

The first full delivery took place in Denbighshire between January and April 2026. Many learners joined with low confidence, anxiety in group situations, poor attendance or difficulty engaging with others. The course offers a safe, supportive environment where learners can participate at their own pace, build trust and develop practical coping strategies.

The impact has been significant. The teenagers – pupils in Years 10 and 11 – who had avoided interaction began working in teams and contributing confidently. Learners developed their communication, resilience, independence and employability skills. Staff observed notable changes in the

teenagers who were usually isolated in school but became active, sociable and engaged during the programme.

Of the twelve learners who started the first Denbighshire programme, eight completed successfully. In four months, they achieved an Agored Cymru Level 1 Extended Certificate in Work Related Education, equivalent to two GCSEs at grades D-G, alongside level 1 qualifications in playwork and the importance of play in children's development. For some, this was their first significant educational success.

Work placements were an important part of the original programme and helped promote playwork as a career option. Learners gained direct experience of supporting children's play, communicating with colleagues and understanding child-led practice. Some demonstrated leadership and initiative, while others sought extra hours beyond the placement requirement.

Learning from the first course showed that, while placements were valuable for many learners, not all were ready for a playwork setting. The training team therefore created two pathways:

- **Pathway to Playwork**, which focuses on classroom-based learning and personal development
- **Pathway to Playwork and Practice**, which includes a ten-hour placement element.

This flexibility allows provision to be tailored to the individual needs and readiness of learners while maintaining the programme's core aims.

The revised model is already showing results. Following the Denbighshire course, two courses were delivered in Flintshire. Of the 21 learners who participated, 18 achieved at least partial GCSE qualifications and all engaged successfully with the playwork elements, while continuing to benefit from a focus on wellbeing, confidence and positive relationships.

Perhaps the most striking outcome has been the growth in confidence and self-belief amongst learners. Evaluations show clear increases

from the beginning to the end of the programme. The learners described learning to manage stress, communicate more effectively and feel more engaged in education. One learner said the programme helped them 'find their voice,' another said they had not realised learning could feel 'comfortable'.

Feedback from schools and local authority partners has also been positive. Dan Larkin, Community Focused Schools Manager at Flintshire County Council, said: 'Overall, the course has enhanced learners' knowledge, confidence, and professional practice, leaving them with valuable skills that will have a positive impact on the children and families they support.' The programme is also creating workforce outcomes, with some learners progressing towards level 2 playwork qualifications and others moving into childcare-related employment or volunteering.

The programme ends with a celebration event where learners receive certificates, a portfolio for future achievements and an affirmation sheet with positive comments from peers. For many, the pride shown during these presentations is powerful evidence of the programme's impact.

Looking ahead, Clybiau Plant Cymru Kids' Clubs hopes to see the programme available more widely across Wales. At a time when organisations are seeking ways to engage teenagers, improve educational outcomes and develop future workforce pathways, Pathway to Playwork demonstrates the value of combining accredited learning, personal development and practical experience for those looking at careers in childcare and playwork.

If you would like to find out more about the Pathway to Playwork training programme, contact Dawn Bunn at Clybiau Plant Cymru Kids' Clubs: DawnB@clybiauplantcymru.org

From Ambition to Action: reflecting on progress for play in Wales



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

The Welsh Government's final Ministerial Review of Play report reflects on the progress made and the actions taken since the 2025 update. The report also highlights the ongoing commitment to ensuring every child in Wales has the right to play.

Wales has long been recognised as a nation that values children's right to play. From the introduction of the Play Policy in 2002 to the Play Sufficiency Duty becoming law in 2010, a great deal has been achieved to ensure children have opportunities to play in their communities.

The Ministerial Review of Play, undertaken between 2019 and 2022, provided an important opportunity to take stock of that progress and consider what more could be done to strengthen opportunities for children and young people across Wales. The review resulted in 67 actions aimed at embedding play more deeply across policy, services and communities.

In September 2026, the Welsh Government published its final report, *Ministerial Review of Play: From Ambition to Action*, bringing together the progress made since the publication of the first progress report in 2025. The final report highlights how play continues to influence policy areas as diverse as planning, education, health, safeguarding, workforce development and community wellbeing. More importantly, it showcases the commitment of local authorities, national organisations, practitioners and communities who are turning policy into meaningful change for children.

The report demonstrates that the work of creating a more play-friendly Wales does not begin and end with a set of actions. Supporting children's opportunities to play requires ongoing collaboration, investment and advocacy. Many of the actions arising from the review have now become part of wider Welsh Government programmes and ways of working, helping to ensure that play remains visible across policy development and decision-making.

Alongside updates on national progress, the report features examples from across Wales that show the difference this work is making in practice. From community-led improvements to local play spaces and greater recognition of children's voices in placemaking, to developments in playwork regulation and support for schools to become more play-friendly, the stories demonstrate how a shared commitment to play can create lasting benefits for children, families and communities.



While there is much to celebrate, the report also reminds us that the ambition remains unchanged: to ensure every child in Wales has sufficient opportunities to play. As new challenges and opportunities emerge,

the learning from the Ministerial Review of Play provides a strong foundation on which to build. As this Welsh Government administration takes forward its programme for government, we remain committed to the early years agenda and to creating the conditions that support children's wellbeing, development and right to play.



The report is available in Welsh and English, with HTML, PDF and child-friendly versions to ensure it is accessible to as wide an audience as possible. A BSL version of the report will follow. We hope you will take the opportunity to explore the report, reflect on the progress made, and join us in continuing to champion children's right to play in Wales.

www.gov.wales/ministerial-review-play-ambition-action-may-2026

‘Play is a right not a privilege’

We recently had a chat with Sioned Williams MS, the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Minister for Social Justice and Equality. The Minister’s role includes responsibility for play policy.



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Thinking back to your own childhood, what are your favourite play memories?

There was a patch of grass in front of the terraced houses where we lived. We’d all go out and that’s where we would mix and play with children of all ages. Playing was a part of everyday life, and we would invent all kinds of games, putting up ropes to play tennis in between the trees and playing hide & seek. It was an opportunity to make new friends – it was socially important.

How have your own childhood experiences influenced your views on children’s right to play?

I see how fundamentally important children’s right to play is, and it’s a way of ensuring children develop socially. But, it’s also a sort of measure of equality, in the sense that it’s something every child has the right to, it’s something we should ensure there are no barriers so they can do that. I saw myself how important it was to me, not only to keep healthy, enjoying the imaginative games, learning how

to play with others, and making new friends, but it was something that could be available to everyone, and it should be available to everyone.

What is your vision for children’s play in Wales over the next five years?

This government’s vision certainly agrees that play is a right not a privilege. I’m the Cabinet Minister for Equality as well as the early years and play policy, so it’s something that intertwines with the other policies we are developing to tackle child poverty. One in three children in Wales are in poverty, and we know that tackling this is a main priority for this government. We are working hard on the childcare policy, and play is an integral part of that. So, this isn’t going to change, and we will hopefully build on this for the future. The Ministerial Review of Play shows there are opportunities perhaps, considering the new context in terms of deprivation, technology and the social context we are in, to think again about the options. This report is certainly something we can build on.

Children tell us that they value time, space and permission to play outside with their friends. What do you think we, as members of the community, could do to make it easier for children to play outside?

Securing opportunities to play isn't something the government can do on its own. We are working with partners, and experts like Play Wales which receives core funding from the government to develop policy and to challenge and to offer policy ideas. Local authority partners are crucial in terms of providing opportunities and we provide a £10,000 grant to every local authority to ensure they comply with the duty in terms of assessing play sufficiency, and then seeing where the opportunities and the gaps are. Broader to this, schools, and partners in childcare, partners who offer opportunities for children outside of the school day, all play a part in this. If we keep the right to play central to all this, which is rooted to every policy and to every partnership the government is a part of, together we can ensure that every child has the opportunities needed to play.

In times of financial constraints, what would you say to people who still see play as a 'nice to have' rather than an essential part of childhood?

It's something we need to protect at all costs, because play isn't something that's nice to have. It is completely essential to children's development, to their wellbeing and their health, and of course the social element, which is so important, especially now when children have more options to be on their own, in terms of technology and all kinds of games and devices that are a part of their world. These things aren't going away, so to balance this we have to ensure that opportunities to play are available for every child.

Equality is important. Families' lack of financial resources to provide opportunities for their children is something we need to consider throughout our policies which consider opportunities and fair play for children in poverty, to try to lift them from poverty. We are reviewing our child poverty strategy, and play will be a crucial part of this. In the education portfolio, providing things like funding for playschemes in the holidays, and the Food and Fun programme, where we combine things that are targeted at children experiencing social and financial deprivation, can also provide the opportunities for them to play at the same time.

The Play Sufficiency Duty, as part of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010, is ground-breaking legislation. What do you think is the most significant difference it has made for children in Wales?

It's a silver thread that has to go through every policy. The statutory requirement on every local authority, through the

Play Sufficiency Duty, isn't something that is done once, it's continual. We have commissioned research to assess whether the duty continues to be fit for purpose. We then hope to adopt an honest approach to action that's linked to the research, to look if we need to improve the policy, see what we are achieving at the moment, and look to the future on how we can further strengthen the duty.

Since taking responsibility for children's play, what has struck you most about the opportunities and challenges facing children's play in Wales today?

What's really important is ensuring we keep the element of right central to everything. We have a distinguished history in terms of considering children's rights and the voice of the child. Listening to the child's voice and ensuring that the right to play is central to everything we do is crucial. There are things we can do in terms of considering the evidence we have, the research we have commissioned, the effectiveness of the grants that we provide, but also the broader context in terms of poverty rates, the type of world our children are currently living in, and ensuring we consider all of these factors.

There is continued international interest and respect towards the work that the Welsh Government is doing with regards to children's play policy. What do you see as the Welsh Government's next big opportunity to build on this important legacy?

We have to look at the spaces and the opportunities that are available, those matters in terms of access, what's preventing children from having access to opportunities to play, and that isn't a simple thing. It needs to be considered over a number of policy areas, so one of the things we are trying to do as a new government is ensure that we take a holistic view of these policies, that it isn't a responsibility for one minister. Health, education, poverty and equality all come into this. But also, things like culture and sports and the policies we have around this. They are all connected, and we need to make sure that we are thinking about policies that consider the whole child, and that this is happening across government.

And finally, what message would you like to give to children across Wales about their right to play?

Play is a right not a privilege. Also, the message is clear in terms of the importance of play: it isn't something marginal, or something nice if resources are available, it's completely central to the wellbeing and development and health of our youngest citizens.



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Workforce development

Spotlight on...

In each issue, we talk to a professional in the world of play and playwork to provide an insight into the diversity of the workforce and the job roles in the sector. For this issue, we chatted with Paula Butler, the Play Sufficiency Lead at Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council.

Can you tell us a bit about yourself and how you got into your current role?

I am the Play Sufficiency Lead for Rhondda Cynon Taf, where I work to support opportunities for children to play and be active within their communities. I have a background in working with children, families and community projects, and I have always been passionate about the importance of play in children's lives. My current role allows me to combine that passion with strategic work to help improve play opportunities across the county borough.

What does your role involve?

My role as Play Sufficiency Lead involves working closely with local authority Community Focused School Leads to support schools in creating environments where children have greater opportunities to play throughout the school day. This includes helping schools develop play policies, improve outdoor spaces, introduce loose parts play, and embed a culture that recognises the importance of play for children's wellbeing, development and learning.

A key area of our play sufficiency work is supporting schools to open their grounds for community use at the end of the school day. To support this, we provided grants to 10 schools

to purchase play resources and equipment. During the summer term, each school opened its outdoor environment to local families and communities as part of a pilot initiative.

In addition to working with schools, I collaborate with community organisations, local authority departments, and a range of partners to develop projects, build sustainable partnerships and contribute to the delivery of the statutory Play Sufficiency Duty. This work aims to improve access to high-quality play opportunities for all children and young people.

What is the most important or enjoyable aspect of your work?

The most enjoyable aspect of my work is seeing the positive impact that play has on children's wellbeing, confidence and development. It is rewarding to work with partners who are committed to creating environments where children can play freely and benefit from the social, physical and emotional opportunities that play provides.

What would you say to schools looking to do more to support children's play?

Start by recognising that play is an essential part of children's development and learning. Small changes, such as providing loose parts, increasing opportunities for outdoor play and listening to children's views, can make a significant difference. Creating a culture that values play can have a positive impact on wellbeing, behaviour and engagement.

Is there anything you find challenging about your job?

One of the biggest challenges is balancing competing priorities and resources while promoting the importance of play. However, seeing schools and communities embrace play and witnessing the benefits for children makes those challenges worthwhile.

Playwork National Occupational Standards review completed

Since the end of 2024, Play Wales has been leading a review of the National Occupational Standards (NOS) for playwork, on behalf of the UK Playwork NOS Consortium.

Following the consultation process during March and April 2026, the consortium took account of all feedback received and submitted the NOS for final approval. Feedback about the development process and content of the NOS was very

positive and has contributed to strengthening the final NOS. The NOS have been translated, and final versions of the Welsh and English NOS have now been published on the UK Standards and Frameworks Database: www.ukstandards.org.uk

A consultation report is available – email nosreview@play.wales to request a copy.

To find out more about the development process and to view the full suite of playwork NOS, please visit our website: www.play.wales/workforce

Workforce development

Playworkers Forum 2026

Our annual outdoor event for practitioners

Each year, the Playworkers Forum brings together practitioners from across Wales and beyond for two days of learning, sharing, reflection and playful exploration in a rural outdoor setting.

The 2026 forum continued this much-loved tradition, offering playworkers time away from day-to-day pressures to reconnect with each other, develop their practice and celebrate the profession. This year's programme was shaped around the magic of playwork, the NEST/NYTH Framework for children's wellbeing and how it links to playwork, sustainability and linking theory to practice, practical skills, funding models, growing your own playworkers and reflections on playwork practice.

Held over 1 and 2 July, the forum created space for practitioners to think, talk, make, move, play and reflect together. Evaluation feedback showed that the forum was once again highly valued by participants. Across the evaluation, participants described gaining new practical ideas, renewed confidence, fresh perspectives and a deeper understanding of how the Playwork Principles can support children, families and communities. One participant said the event gave them 'new ideas and inspiration' they could incorporate into community-based support and play opportunities, while another reflected that the forum helped them think creatively about 'how I can introduce more magical moments and more playfulness'.

As in previous years, the forum was about much more than the formal programme. Participants



repeatedly described it as a space for connection, honesty, joy, creativity and renewed energy. One participant called it 'a time away from day-to-day pressures to celebrate playfulness and learn in a beautiful venue', while another described it as a chance to 'connect with colleagues, share challenges' and return to their work feeling 'motivated, refreshed, and better equipped to continue championing play opportunities for children and young people'.

As the 2026 Playworkers Forum came to a close, participants left with new

ideas, strengthened relationships and a renewed sense of pride in the playwork profession. The feedback captured what the forum continues to mean to practitioners: a rare and valuable opportunity to pause, reflect, play, connect and remember the importance of the work they do. Once again, the Playworkers Forum proved itself to be a vital annual gathering for practitioners who are committed to creating better opportunities for children's play.

The Playworkers Forum will be back on 23 and 24 June 2027!

Playful changes at Rhws Primary School

Rhws Primary School in the Vale of Glamorgan has been paying particular attention to opportunities for play for all its pupils in and beyond the classroom. Headteacher Matt Worth tells us more.

Sometimes the biggest changes begin with the uncomfortable feeling that something isn't working. At Rhws Primary School, that feeling emerged during the 2023-24 academic year. Despite the dedication of staff, our Nursery and Reception provision had become increasingly traditional and adult directed. Bright primary colours, plastic resources and tightly controlled activities dominated our classrooms. At the same time, we were successfully embedding inquiry-based learning across the rest of the school, yet in the early years it felt forced.

A visit to Wingate Nursery in County Durham was a turning point. Key staff returned inspired by what they had seen: children leading their own learning in rich, authentic environments where curiosity, rather than compliance, drove the day.

Then Estyn visited. Inspectors identified significant shortcomings in our early years provision, commenting that teachers were not making effective use of the indoor and outdoor environments to enable children to investigate and understand their world. While difficult to hear, this gave us something invaluable: permission and purpose to rethink everything.

Without a budget, Facebook Marketplace and car boot sales became suppliers. Plastic gave way to authentic materials – primary colours replaced with natural tones. Classrooms became calmer, more purposeful spaces that invited children to explore rather than simply complete tasks. Spaces gradually became less structured, allowing greater independence and freedom while maintaining high expectations for learning. The impact was almost immediate.

Children became more confident, resilient and collaborative. They solved problems independently and showed a willingness to embrace challenge that we had not previously seen. Although attainment data in literacy and numeracy remained broadly similar at first, something much more significant was changing. Rather than measuring what children could achieve with adult support during focused tasks, we began observing what they could apply independently during play. Those moments revealed deeper understanding, greater independence and far stronger learning dispositions.

Perhaps most striking were the improvements in behaviour and oracy. Children learned to negotiate, explain, reason,



debate and resolve conflict naturally through play. Learning was no longer something done to them, it became something they actively sought out.

As this first cohort moved into Year 1, our provision evolved with them. Play remained central but expectations increased, with carefully designed environments offering greater challenge while preserving children's agency.

Success of early years transformation prompted a bigger change. We had also developed a highly play-based curriculum within our forest school nurture provision for children experiencing significant social and emotional challenges. Watching these vulnerable learners flourish outdoors led us to ask a simple question: if play works so powerfully for our youngest and most vulnerable children, why should it stop there? A Year 4 trial provided the answer. Given opportunities for tree climbing, den building, construction, role play and imaginative exploration, children demonstrated remarkable creativity, resilience and collaboration.

Today, every child has time every week to explore both forest school and unstructured play. Loose parts, den-building spaces and digging areas have become permanent features of our school environment, with plans to weave play more explicitly into inquiry learning across the curriculum.

The journey has not been without challenges. Staff needed time, coaching and confidence to relinquish control. Parents needed reassurance through presentations and play sessions. Assessment has perhaps been our greatest challenge. We now capture children's development through authentic experiences rather than isolated tasks. This work continues to evolve and has become central to how we understand progress. Our journey with play is far from complete.

What began as a response to an inspection recommendation has become something far more significant: a fundamental shift in how we view childhood, learning and the role of school itself.