

Our Ref/Ein Cyf:
Your Ref/Eich Cyf:

Date/Dyddiad:

13th February 2012

Please ask for/Gofynnwch am:

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William Powell AM
Chair Petitions Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
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CF99 1NA

Dear William

Petition on provision of early years education

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the National Assembly's Petitions Committee regarding the provision of early years education in Wales. Providing and securing childcare is an important function of the local authority and has been shown to encourage development in children with a recent study demonstrating the lasting impact on educational achievement. Ensuring provision of adequate childcare also provides additional benefits to the parents, carers and community and can allow parents to return to employment.

When securing provision for free childcare local authorities take into account a full range of factors such as the needs of disabled children, locality and transport, the specific needs of rural communities and access to Welsh provision, in accordance with the Welsh Government's policy statement on childcare *Nurturing Children, Supporting Families*. Local authorities work hard to ensure that sufficient childcare is secured in every locality which allows all children access good-quality provision, and in addition to the factors outlined above, the needs of working parents are considered in the planning process. This not only takes into account the Welsh Government's policy statement on childcare but is also in line with national and local government, commitments to tackle family poverty.

Local authorities secure provision of early years education through a variety of maintained and non-maintained settings. The census shows that there are approximately 170,000 children under the age of 5 in Wales, with 70,293 children accessing nursery provision from the local authority. In 2010/11 there were 63 distinct nursery schools in Wales providing for 1,572 pupils in 10 local authorities in Wales.

The Welsh Government has placed a duty on local authorities to undertake a formal Childcare Sufficiency Audit, to assess current demand for childcare in their area. Each local authority has to

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produce an action plan, based on the findings of the audit, which addresses how future supply will meet the anticipated demand. Local authorities are in the process of updating the audit for this year and will then adjust their action plans for provision accordingly. Although all local authorities have a duty to ensure effective childcare, each local authority has different demands so will fulfil this function in a different way according to the needs of their community.

If you require any further information about the provision of childcare for 3 and 4 year olds in Wales, then please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris Llewelyn', written in a cursive style.

Dr Chris Llewelyn
Director Lifelong Learning, Leisure and Information