



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

GUIDANCE, DOCUMENT

# Flying Start childcare: guidance

Explains what childcare providers must do to ensure they provide quality childcare.

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# About this guidance

Flying Start is the Welsh Government's targeted Early Years programme for families with children under 4 years of age in some of the most disadvantaged areas of Wales.

The core elements of the programme have been shown to influence positive outcomes for children and their families. These include:

- Funded quality, part-time childcare for 2–3-year-olds
- An enhanced health visiting service
- Access to parenting support
- Support for Speech, Language and Communication development.

## Policy context

The Welsh Government's work on children's rights is based on our commitment to the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Wales has led the way on children's rights, enshrining them in law through 'The Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011'. Wales was the first country in the UK to do so. The Measure requires Ministers to have due regard to the UNCRC when exercising any of their functions.

Underpinned by children's rights the Welsh Government's ambition is for each and every child in Wales to have the best possible start in life. Children's rights are the driving force behind key programmes and policies like Flying Start.

Welsh Government's **Children and Young People's Plan** sets out a cross-Government approach to policy, services and support for children and young people in Wales. The heart of this Plan is about enabling children to obtain their rights. It sets out **Seven Priorities for delivery during this Senedd term**. One

of these Priorities focuses on children's early years:

“ All children should have the best start in life, including good early years services and support for parents or carers. They should be supported at home, in childcare and in schools, and when they move between these places. ”

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act (WFGA) is about improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. It aims to make the public bodies listed in the Act think more about the long-term, work better with people, communities and each other, look to prevent problems in future generations and take a more joined-up approach as well as integrating outcomes and performance measures.

The provision of quality Flying Start childcare services is directly in line with WFGA goals relating to 'A Healthier Wales' and 'A More Equal Wales'. The emphasis placed by Flying Start on early intervention aligns with the preventative and long-term requirements found in the 'Sustainable Development Principle', which is a feature of the Act.

Childhood experiences, particularly during the early years, have a significant influence over future health and well-being. Studies show there is a strong association between Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and poorer life outcomes. While preventing ACEs is always the goal, one of the ways to mitigate the impact of ACEs, and improve outcomes, is by working in a trauma-informed way. The ACE Hub Wales and Traumatic Stress Wales have co-produced, with stakeholders, a Trauma Informed Wales practice framework for Wales. The framework sets out the key principles of trauma-informed practice and establishes a range of different practice levels **Trauma-Informed Wales**.

Another important protective factor, against childhood adversity, is resilience. There are a variety of resilience building sources, including the development of

social and emotional skills, communication skills, access to social and leisure activities, friends, and a relationship with a trusted adult. This need not be a parent/carer and could be a member of the childcare setting team [ACE Resilience Report Bangor University](#).

Flying Start staff, in collaboration with other multi-agency professionals (as part of a team around the family approach), are essential in the early identification of concerns relating to adverse childhood experiences and trauma and can play a crucial role in mitigating their impact on children.

## Audience

This guidance is intended for those responsible for delivering, planning and managing childcare for children receiving Flying Start support. This is guidance to support the delivery of quality Flying Start services and is not intended for use as an inspection framework. It should be read in conjunction with [Welsh Government guidance relating to Flying Start](#).

## Introduction

The provision of high quality, part-time childcare for 2–3-year-olds is integral to the Flying Start programme. Quality childcare contributes to the acquisition of skills and abilities, socialisation and the ability to play and concentrate. These are crucial, not only to a child's subsequent ability to learn, but also to participate effectively in groups, whether in the classroom, the labour market or society.

Research suggests that quality Early Childhood Play Learning and Care (formerly Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)) leads to improvements in children's development in later years, such as enhanced language skills; better educational performance in mathematics and reading; and an increase in

positive behaviour/outcomes. Children who attend quality early years settings are more independent, concentrate on their play for longer and, on entry to school, are more co-operative and better prepared for the challenges they meet [Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) (2003); Schweinhart et al (1993), Love et al (2005)]. One of the findings of the EPPE study is that high quality pre-school care is linked to better intellectual attainment and improved social relationships.

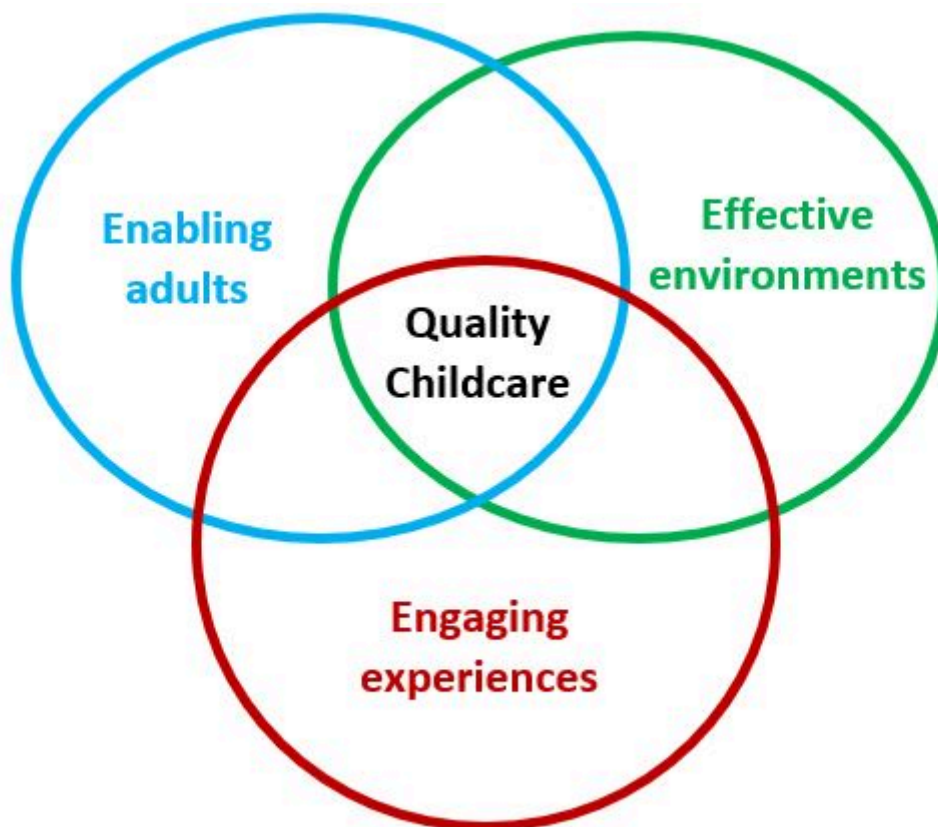
The Effective Pre-school, Primary and Secondary Education Project (EPPSE) findings, published in 2014, further emphasises the significance of high-quality pre-school experiences and the longitudinal impacts these experiences can have on educational attainment.

A focus on high quality provision should therefore underpin all aspects of Flying Start childcare. A suite of Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care resources are available to support practitioners in providing quality early childhood play, learning and care (A Quality Framework for Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care in Wales, Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care in Wales: A Reflective Practice Toolkit and Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care: Developmental Pathways for 0-3) <sup>[1]</sup>.

Flying Start childcare should not only aim to be of the highest quality but should strive to be the benchmark for quality childcare throughout Wales.

There are 3 key measures of quality in a successful Flying Start childcare setting:

1.
  - a. Enabling Adults
  - b. Engaging Experiences; and
  - c. Effective Environments.



Enabling adults, effective environments and engaging experiences all contribute to the provision of quality childcare and provide the foundations on which all future development will be built.

Flying Start is based on the following expectations:

1. Staff working with young children should be suitably trained and qualified, have an understanding of how children develop and learn, and be sensitive and responsive to their needs and feelings.
2. The role of the adult within the setting is to support and enrich children's learning, rather than to direct it.
3. Children need a caring, stimulating environment. The environment both

indoors and outdoors, will be safe and secure, whilst being appropriately challenging, where children can be happy and feel valued as individuals.

4. Children should learn through first-hand, play-based experiences and discovery, where experimentation and independence are encouraged.
5. Learning and play opportunities for children under the age of 3 years should take account of their interests and needs, provide opportunities for them to develop their confidence and self-esteem, and develop the early skills, knowledge and concepts appropriate to their stage of development.
6. Activities and experiences planned for children should be sensitive to their individual differences and should take account of cultural norms and values. Children should have the opportunity to learn about other cultures and individuals' experiences and setting practice and policies should be developed with ethnic minority partners and designed through an anti-racist lens. See [Anti-racist Wales Action Plan](#).
7. The opportunities provided should build on what children have experienced in the home and while attending sessions such as Parent and Toddlers groups or 'Cylch Ti a Fi'. There should be a clear link with early language development, play and foundation learning pedagogy.
8. Robust assessment through observation of children's daily activities should be used to support children's progress, learning and development.
9. Evidence-based assessment arrangements include assessing a child's development at the start of their time in a Flying Start childcare setting. This should be the basis for ongoing assessment of progress to inform future plans. The assessment arrangements should identify children with additional needs at an early stage and staff should use this information to work with appropriate professionals.
10. Trusting partnerships must be developed between parents/carers and staff. Parents/carers should be included in all discussions about their child and be guided in ways to support their child's development outside the setting.
11. Settings should develop close links with relevant agencies that can support children and their families. Information should be shared, and the agencies' support or advice sought as necessary.



12. A range of strategies must be in place to ensure smooth transition between different environments, particularly the transition from home to Flying Start, and then on to early education.

## Effective Environments

The quality of the physical environment has an impact on the quality of childcare provision. The physical environment in Flying Start settings should be safe, secure and offer access to resources that promote children's development and build on their natural curiosity. Settings should be welcoming and friendly to children and parents/carers and provide a rich environment for play. Poor environments can restrict children's experiences, which could have an adverse effect on their development.

Flying Start settings should have a freely accessible quality outdoor space available for daily use. Plans for new setting developments/refurbishment should consider access to quality outdoor environments. All outdoor spaces should offer the appropriate areas for learning and staff should be supported to maximize the benefit of outdoor spaces, taking full advantage of them.

Children require access to safe and secure outdoor space which is interesting and easily accessible. The outdoors is an ideal area for active learning, **encouraging appropriate risk taking**, learning first-hand about nature and the weather and where large scale and messy activities are possible. Research suggests that the outdoor environment positively influences children's disposition to learning and self-regulation. The level of care shown in the environment's management also gives powerful messages to both children and adults about the way they are valued by the setting leaders. Several organisations provide information on providing stimulating play environments for children. These include **Play Wales** and **Learning Through Landscapes**.

Sufficient safe and secure space, both indoors and outdoors, must be available

to create large and small play areas where children can, for example, use large and small construction materials. The environment must provide opportunities for role play, experimenting and investigating, art and craft activities and for sharing books. Appropriate space should also be provided for adults to work with individual children and small groups. There should also be quiet areas where children can reflect and rest.

Appropriate space should be available to store children's work and easy-access storage areas should also be provided to encourage children to select materials and equipment which support their development as autonomous learners.

Staff will also need quiet areas which allow them to work with parents/carers or to have confidential discussions when necessary.

For the healthy development of children, it is important to create an environment which promotes the benefits of being healthy, and in which healthy attitudes and behaviours are encouraged. ECPLC settings are being encouraged to work, with local support, towards the **Healthy and Sustainable Pre-School Scheme National Award Criteria**. This takes a whole setting approach to a range of health issues and is assessed locally.

Receiving good nutrition in the early years is vital to our children having the best start in life. This period is a critical window during which the foundations for a child's development are established affecting their lifelong health and wellbeing.

Data from the 2020-21 Welsh Child Measurement Programme<sup>[2]</sup> reported around one in three children started primary school already overweight or obese, and those in the most disadvantaged areas are nearly twice as likely to be obese. Obese children are five times more likely to become obese adults. Whilst obesity is a major concern due to its significant health consequences, there are other diet-related concerns caused by poor diets in childhood, including dental decay (the major source of hospitalisation of young children) and poor growth rates.

ECPLC settings, including Flying Start settings, play a crucial role in influencing children's dietary behaviours and their life-long health.

Flying Start settings should be working to the highest standards to optimise the food and drink offer to the children in their care by implementing the Food and Nutrition for Childcare Settings **Best Practice Guidance** (Welsh Government, 2018). Local public health dietitians will also be able to support settings with advice on local initiatives such as healthy snack awards, and on accredited training on nutrition in early years provided through '**Nutrition Skills for Life**'.

Children need time to settle into a new environment, develop relationships with staff and peers and adjust to new routines. Children need time to observe and handle familiar materials that they can return to on a daily basis. Staff should support this 'settling in' stage and not overwhelm children with too many activities and resources.

It may be necessary to modify or adapt accommodation and resources to ensure that all children can access the provision, regardless of their needs or any disability.

Where possible, settings should be within "pram pushing" distance of the child's home. For practical reasons this is considered to be a walk of around 10-15 minutes. Local solutions must be identified and agreed by the Welsh Government where this isn't possible.

All children and families are unique and there may be circumstances when the Local Authority considers that it is in a child's best interests to attend a childcare setting outside their home Local Authority. Guidance in respect of Cross Border principles can be found in Appendix 2.

Flying Start childcare delivery models must meet locally identified needs. Local Authorities have the flexibility and discretion to determine the composition of their Flying Start Childcare provision which may include:

- mixed settings (Flying Start and non-Flying Start children)
- Flying Start only settings
- Maintained schools
- Voluntary/ community/ independent settings including day nurseries, English and Welsh medium play groups, cylchoedd meithrin and childminders.
- Local Authorities need to follow their own procurement rules when formulating Service Level Agreements, which must be verified by their own legal services department.

All Flying Start settings must be registered with CIW and must meet the **National Minimum Standards (NMS) for Regulated Child care**. However, Flying Start settings are expected to be of a higher quality than most childcare provision and should be exemplars of best practice.

When planning the provision of local Flying Start childcare services, Local Authorities should make the necessary links with the Childcare Offer for Wales, the Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme (formerly the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools and Colleges Programme) partnerships and with local Welsh Education Strategic Plans (WESPs) to ensure that local provision is planned strategically.

## Enabling Adults

Staff appointed to work in Flying Start childcare settings must be of the highest calibre in order to deliver high quality provision. Staff should be responsive, affectionate and readily available. They should be committed to their work with children and to the ethos of enhanced quality, which is a cornerstone of the Flying Start programme. To enhance and support children's development, staff should be appropriately trained (**Qualification Framework - Social Care Wales**) and staff development should ensure continuity, stability and also improve quality (**Continuing Professional Development (CPD) - Social Care Wales**).

The EPPE (2003) study found that the higher the staff qualifications, particularly the leader/manager, the greater the progress made by the children.

Staff working in Flying Start settings must have experience of working with young children and must have the qualifications outlined within Social Care Wales's Qualification Framework to work within the Early Years and Childcare Sector in Wales. The list identifies the qualifications required to work within Flying Start. It sets out the current qualifications required (and equivalents), past qualifications which are accepted and suggested work-based qualifications for career progression and CPD.

Where staff do not have the required qualification, the Flying Start plan must show how and by when staff will be trained to the required standard. This will need to be monitored by the Childcare Advisory Team to ensure that progress is on schedule and qualifications are completed within the agreed time.

All childcare staff must undertake at least five days Continuing Professional Development (CPD) or professional learning per year, as designated by their Childcare Advisory Teams. This training is in addition to any training requirements outlined in the NMS. Professional learning should meet the needs of staff members and ensure that all staff have the knowledge, skills, attitudes and understanding required for the job. The cost of backfilling during training should be factored into the Local Authority's budget for delivering Flying Start.

Social Care Wales has developed the **CPD toolkit for Social Care, Early Years and Child Care Managers and Workers** that can be used to support Continuing Professional Development.

Continuity of staff is important. Children can show signs of increased anxiety or social withdrawal when their carers are constantly changing. Children learning to communicate will often use their own unique ways and forms of communication that consistent staff will become familiar with. A caregiver who is familiar with the child is likely to learn such forms of communication and be able to respond,

whereas a new caregiver is more likely to fail to understand (Melhuish, 1991). Furthermore, to fully benefit from play experiences, a child must have a secure relationship and attachment to a parent figure in a childcare environment (Ainsworth and Bowlby, 1991). It is therefore good practice for Local Authorities to introduce strategies that will enhance continuity of staffing within Flying Start.

When discussing practice, Selleck and Griffin (1996) suggest that working with and meeting the needs of the under-3s and their families is a rewarding yet demanding task which can be emotionally and physically draining. Staff need time to reflect on their practice and share concerns with colleagues. Sensitive supervision, in-service training and the formation of networks can help to meet this need.

The adult to child ratio at Flying Start settings is the same as other childcare settings.

Full details of the minimum ratios can be found in the [National Minimum Standards for Regulated Childcare](#).

Over and above the minimum staffing ratios, additional trained and qualified staff should be employed to provide cover to allow the leader/manager to perform additional duties, such as to meet regularly with parents/carers, undertake home visits and attend meetings where this is required. This cover should be for a minimum of three sessions per month where staffing arrangements allow.

Volunteers **cannot** be counted within the number of adults as part of the minimum adult child ratio within a Flying Start setting.

Speech, Language and Communication (SLC) is one of the core strands of Flying Start, and as such all practitioners in Flying Start settings must have, as a minimum, the 'core' level of skill development specified in the All Wales [SLC training pathway](#). Responsive interactions between adult and child are key to supporting SLC development.

## Engaging Experiences

Play opportunities are crucial to the way children become self-aware and the way in which they learn the rules of social behaviour. To ensure that learning opportunities are maximised, the emotional climate needs to be trusting and respectful.

This environment will promote a sense of belonging where children demonstrate high levels of physical and emotional well-being and are highly engaged in their learning.

Value must be given to perseverance and a positive attitude to learning encouraged. Children's efforts, achievement and progress should be recognised and celebrated.

Play opportunities are fundamental to cognitive and intellectual development, which enables children to develop high aspirations, a positive self-image and a disposition to learning. Children will naturally problem solve during their play and should have ample opportunities for deep level involvement and uninterrupted active learning which is in line with their stage of development. During these periods, time should be built in for creating, reasoning, questioning, speculating and for reflection.

Staff in Flying Start settings will need to have a secure knowledge and understanding of the way children develop and learn. They will need to be able to facilitate learning through high quality play. Flying Start childcare must embrace pedagogy which values the important role of play in supporting child development. An understanding of developmentally appropriate experiences should be at the heart of a child's experience in a Flying Start childcare setting. Formal academic instruction in the preschool years may not be in the best interests of many children and, in fact, may be damaging to some of them in the long term (Katz, 2015).



Speech, Language and Communication (SLC) underpins all areas of learning and effective communication is an essential life skill. Flying Start childcare settings must plan carefully to support the development of children's SLC skills. Responsive interactions with adults during first-hand sensory experiences such as sharing books, singing, exploring role-play and the outdoor environment will provide children with a rich and practical learning experience.

Through increased development of speech, language and communication skills (and later, literacy), children acquire ways to access knowledge and also the tools with which to think and learn (Riley, 1999). Children need language to develop thinking skills, and the more thinking they are doing, the more their language will develop (Siraj-Blatchford, 2005).

The early years of a child's life are important in their own right and not just as preparation for formal education and adulthood. There is strong evidence to indicate that rather than preparing children for something to come, the best preparation for later stages is to have the richest and most appropriate experiences during each phase (Tovey, 2017).

Each child enters a setting as an individual with their own personal experiences in life and will be at their own unique stage of development. Arrangements should be made to ensure a smooth transition into the Flying Start setting for the child and parent/carer, including the wider multi-agency team. What children know, can do, are interested in and need should be the starting point for their learning, which should be captured in the one-page profile.

Planning should be sufficiently flexible to allow staff to adapt and re-structure plans as a result of on-going observation during the daily life of the setting.

Flexible pedagogical frameworks with an emphasis on outdoor play and problem solving which focuses on process and developmental goals, rather than on subject outcomes, form the most appropriate learning approaches for this age group.



Staff and parents/carers should work together to develop a variety of stimulating indoor and outdoor experiences which will excite and interest children, whilst motivating and extending their learning.

Sensitive and robust assessment of children entering Flying Start childcare is essential to identifying additional support and any interventions required to help meet individual needs. Continuous assessment should take place throughout a child's journey in the Flying Start setting and should celebrate achievements and progress made. An ongoing record of observation should be kept informing next steps in planning. This will ensure planning focuses on the individual child and builds upon what they can do in order to meet their developmental needs. This will also allow early identification of emerging needs in preparation for transition to the Curriculum for Wales.

Children will usually move into early education at the end of their time in Flying Start childcare. Flying Start childcare staff should therefore reflect a philosophy and pedagogy similar to that promoted through foundation learning, in their practice. Smooth transitions should ensure that children settle quickly into their new setting. A summative assessment of the child's progress must be undertaken at the end of their time in Flying Start childcare to inform transition arrangements. Flying Start childcare staff along with any other relevant partners should work closely with education providers to foster strong links to embed this transition process.

## **Childminders**

Childminders offer professional childcare and early education for children from birth up to the age of 12 years within a domestic premises that is not the child's own home. Childminders are well placed to support the early development of children and work closely with parents and carers to provide flexible, tailored and responsive childcare services.

The purpose of Flying Start childcare is to provide enriching experiences for children to learn, develop and socialise with their peers in a supportive professional environment. Childminders play a vital role in ensuring that Flying Start childcare meets the needs of parents or carers and uphold the professional and quality standards which are a feature of Flying Start childcare provision.

Where childminders provide Flying Start childcare, Childcare Advisory Teams should work with them, as with other Flying Start providers, to support their provision to ensure that 2–3-year-olds in their care receive high quality childcare services.

[1] The Early Childhood Education and Care Quality (ECEC) Framework is under development and will be a tool for understanding quality in an ECEC context when it is published.

[2] Only reported for two health boards because of the Coronavirus pandemic

## Support for achieving high quality

Support for achieving high quality is best delivered via a Childcare Advisory Team. The Childcare Advisory Team's main function will be to improve the quality of Flying Start childcare settings and support Flying Start staff within their area.

This function needs to be led by, or include, a professional early years Advisory Teacher with qualified teacher status. However, the Childcare Advisory Team's skills and qualifications should be considered 'in the round' and the exact make-up of the Childcare Advisory Teams can be determined locally using a skill-mix approach. The skill-mix within the Childcare Advisory Team should hold the

qualifications recognised for Flying Start, as outlined within Social Care Wales's Qualification Framework to work within the Early Years and Childcare Sector in Wales.

The Childcare Advisory Team must have an understanding of the different needs and stages of development of young children, particularly the differences between a 2-year-old and a 3-year-old. The Childcare Advisory Team will promote good practice among Flying Start staff so that children can transition smoothly to learning within the Curriculum for Wales.

The Childcare Advisory Team must have experience of working in the sector and be able to develop and deliver professional learning for childcare professionals. The Childcare Advisory Team will engage with each Flying Start setting at least once a month to provide support and advice to the staff. The Childcare Advisory Team will also agree a delivery plan with each Flying Start setting.

All Flying Start settings should have an evidence-based quality assurance system in place, which will be monitored by the Local Authority using an appropriate tool, which in turn should inform the Setting Improvement Plan. Examples of quality assurance tools and other assessment tools to improve program quality that may be used are: ITERS 3 (Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale), SSTEW (Sustained Shared Thinking and Emotional Wellbeing), Healthy and Sustainable Pre School Scheme (SPSS), National Quality Assurance Schemes or locally designed tools. Quality assurance is a specific type of quality improvement which provides recognition that a setting has made progress against a set of agreed standards and to an accredited level. The quality assurance tool adopted should be sensitive, and proportionate, to the wide range of childcare providers utilised across the Flying Start programme in Wales.

This requires an independent review of the setting's quality by a trained professional, backed up by procedures to ensure consistency, equality and

objectivity. Many childcare sector organisations have their own quality assurance scheme and provide support in implementing the scheme.

Settings are encouraged to explore what support is available via membership of one of the main childcare umbrella organisations<sup>[3]</sup> in Wales which provide professional advice, and support along with a range of other benefits.

The sharing of best practice should be encouraged through local forums or networks and childcare providers should be encouraged to visit other settings both within and outside the Local Authority for the purpose of sharing high quality practice. Staff should be expected to feedback observations and learning to the wider team to support ongoing development within their own setting.

<sup>[3]</sup> These are Early Years Wales, Clybiau Plant Cymru Kids' Clubs, Mudiad Meithrin, National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA Cymru) and PACEY Cymru.

## The number and length of sessions

Flying Start childcare will focus on improving the outcomes for young children to enable them to transition into early education and in the longer term. Children can access this provision from the beginning of the term following their second birthday, up to the end of the term in which they celebrate their third birthday. There may be some degree of flexibility provided where this does not synchronise with local school intake arrangements.

The core Flying Start childcare offer is made available to parents/carers of all eligible 2–3-year-olds for 12 ½ hours per week, 39 weeks of the year, in line with school terms. In addition, there should be a minimum of 15 sessions of flexible childcare and/or play provided for the child or family during the school holidays.

Sessions should be for 2 ½ hours per day, 5 days a week, so that the child gets the maximum benefit from the programme. However, the Flying Start setting has some flexibility in how the 5 sessions are split across the week, where a parent/carer requests a different arrangement, such as when they attend a training course or go to work. Both the Flying Start setting and the family must agree on this arrangement.

A flexible approach to the number of sessions attended is often required to cater for the needs of parents/carers or children. For example, if a parent/carer decides to bring the child for three sessions only, this should be accommodated. However, providers should encourage parents/carers to take up their full entitlement where possible.

Flying Start plans should set out arrangements for managing childcare places to maximise the take up of places and ensure value for money in terms of re-allocation.

## **Equality, inclusion and additional learning needs**

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) states that all children have the right to high quality care that lays firm foundations for the rest of their lives and maximises their innate ability. The convention emphasises the need to respect a child's identity alongside their family traditions by recognising their distinct culture and valuing the language of the home.

All children and their parents/carers must be treated as equal regardless of age, disability, gender, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation and be fully involved in the life and work of the setting. The early detection of additional learning needs is essential if appropriate support is to be provided, as early intervention is more effective than support provided later.

Every effort should be made to ensure that all parents/carers of eligible children within the area are offered and encouraged to take advantage of the Flying Start provision available. This will support the early identification of needs and, where necessary, ensure that support can be provided as early as possible.

'The Early Years Transition and Special Educational Needs' (EYTSEN) study (Sammons et al, 2003) highlights the benefit of good quality early years provision for children who have, or are at risk of developing, additional learning needs. EYTSEN found that for cognitive outcomes, children with multiple disadvantages (in terms of child, family and home environment characteristics) were more likely to be identified as at risk of developing additional learning needs. The research suggests that high quality provision may help to reduce the incidence of additional needs (cognitive and social/behavioural), especially for the most disadvantaged and vulnerable groups of young children. The study also found that children who did not have English (or Welsh) as a first language, were more likely to be at risk when they entered pre-school, but that they caught up when they were older, probably as their language ability improved. Children who tended to stay at home and did not attend early education were found to be particularly vulnerable. It was suggested that encouraging these children to attend provision such as Flying Start may help to improve their educational outcomes.

Decisions about the most appropriate intervention programmes for these children should be taken by a multi-agency panel of experts, set up by the Local Authority, to ensure that appropriate support is provided. Parents/carers and Flying Start staff should be fully involved at all stages of this process.

In some instances, it may be necessary to adapt the accommodation and provide specific resources and equipment to ensure that all children, including those with disabilities, can access the Flying Start provision.

Local authorities have duties under the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 and the ALN Code for Wales<sup>[4]</sup> in relation

to children under compulsory school age who are not attending a maintained school. Further guidance is available in chapter 11 of the [ALN Code for Wales](#). Under the ALN system, local authorities are responsible for making decisions about whether a child under compulsory school age, who does not attend a maintained school, has ALN and, where required, for preparing and maintaining an Individual Development Plan (IDP).

Early education and care providers are essential to helping ensure equality of access. As well as raising awareness of the ALN system, ALN training should help providers understand how to facilitate person-centred planning meetings and emphasise how important good transition is to ensuring support into Nursery for children with ALN and those children with emerging needs but unidentified ALN or an IDP.

Staff in Flying Start settings are expected to attend ALN training and, as far as possible, implement strategies recommended by the Childcare Advisory Team.

**[4]** The ALN system as provided for by the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 and the Additional Learning Needs Code for Wales, replaces the previous special educational needs (SEN) system.

## Welsh language provision

Flying Start should fully support the Welsh Government's aim to ensure all our young people exit the education system ready and proud to use the Welsh language in all contexts. This means ensuring Welsh-medium and bilingual childcare provision is actively promoted and that clear pathways to Welsh-medium education are available. It also means providing clear and useful information to all parents/carers about the opportunities bilingualism offers, and the options available to them, to ensure they can make an informed choice regarding their child's linguistic development.



The **Flying Start speech, language and communication guidance** contains additional information on the benefits of bilingualism and multilingualism, including the evidence base for identifying and supporting bilingual and multilingual children with Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN).

Each Local Authority is required to prepare a WESP. These statutory plans set out how local authorities' plan to grow Welsh-medium education over the next ten years. All local authorities have committed to their ambitious targets of increasing the provision of Welsh-medium education to support the aims and objectives set out in Cymraeg 2050. WESP Regulations were revised in 2019 to include emphasis on careful planning of Welsh Medium early years provision in order to support successful delivery of the WESP outcomes. It is recognised, as set out in Cymraeg 2050, that early introduction to the Welsh Language through Welsh medium Childcare provision is the best route for our children to develop bilingual skills. Local Authorities must consider their WESP targets when planning delivery of Flying Start provision and may benefit from exploring the support that's available from the main childcare umbrella organisations in Wales.

Childcare Sufficiency Assessments are also carried out by Local Authorities to identify gaps in provision, including gaps in Welsh language childcare provision. Local Authorities have a duty to ensure the provision of sufficient Welsh-medium childcare, including Flying Start childcare, as stipulated in the Childcare Act 2006.

We know Welsh language early years services and language acquisition work best where there is a clear pathway into primary education and beyond; however, we also know that by establishing Welsh language services in areas where they have not historically been prevalent, we can raise awareness and create new opportunities to access Welsh language provision. This should be considered by local authorities when planning their Flying Start childcare services.



Children in Flying Start areas must be given the option of attending a childcare setting which offers Welsh language provision. As part of the Flying Start Performance Data Monitoring, Local Authorities must record the number of children whose parents/carers have specifically requested Welsh-medium childcare. The number of these requests which lead to an offer in their preferred language must also be recorded.

## **Involvement of parents and carers**

Flying Start childcare should be signposted to eligible parents/carers by the Flying Start team at the appropriate time. Parents/carers should be involved in the choice of the type of setting their child attends.

Parental involvement in their child's education from an early age has a significant effect on educational achievement and continues to do so into adolescence and adulthood (Department for Schools, Children and Families, 2008). Staff should therefore develop close partnerships with parents/carers and share information about their child for them to gain maximum benefits from the provision. Parents/carers should be encouraged to engage in transition arrangements prior to starting Flying Start childcare. Other agencies should also contribute and share relevant information that will enable all partners to cater for each child according to his/her needs.

Staff should be sensitive when working with parents/carers, particularly with the most vulnerable families, such as teen parents/carers, lone parents/carers and workless households. Flying Start staff must ensure that these families do not feel overwhelmed, so that the child receives the full benefit of the scheme.

If when working with parents/carers, staff feel that there is more support needed that goes beyond the support provided by Flying Start, the Families First programme can support parents, families and young people to ensure they are

exposed to the best support and opportunities available to give them the best start in life as possible.

The Families First programme is universal and promotes the development of multi-agency systems of support for families, placing emphasis on early intervention and prevention. Families First is a voluntary programme that can be accessed by one or both parents/carers.

The EPPE (2003) research found that the quality of the Home Learning Environment (HLE) has an impact on children's development. The research demonstrates that, whilst there is a link between parents' social class and levels of education and children's outcomes, what parents do with their children is more important than who they are.

The research identified that where parents undertook activities such as reading to children; teaching them songs and rhymes; painting and drawing; playing with letters and numbers; and providing opportunities for them to play with their peers, all helped to promote children's intellectual and social development. The EPPSE (2014) findings reinforce the importance of the early years HLE and the positive effect this continues to have on academic outcomes. Staff in Flying Start settings should, therefore, be proactive in helping parents/carers to support their child's development and learning at home.

Staff should be proactive in contacting families with children who are eligible to attend Flying Start childcare, to secure parents'/carers' support and children's attendance at the settings. Sensitivity and initiative may be needed to engage some harder-to reach families, so that their children receive their full allocation of childcare. Persistent shortfalls in attendance may be filled by flexible arrangements or Outreach arrangements. Each Local Authority needs to have policies in place to encourage parents/carers towards maximum take up, such as taster sessions outlining the benefits to their children and themselves before the entitlement period begins.

Parents/carers must be included in discussions about their child and be guided in ways to support their child's development, as well as their wellbeing and development outside of the setting. Staff should welcome parents/carers into the setting and show them that they are valued as the children's first educators and carers.

Ensuring that parents/carers are aware of the aims of the setting and allowing them to see how practitioners relate to young children can build parents'/carers' confidence and could renew their interest in learning. Parents/carers should also be encouraged to engage as much as possible in the life and work of the setting.

When children become eligible for their early education entitlement, some children of working parents/carers may also be eligible for additional hours of government funded childcare under the Childcare Offer for Wales. The Childcare Offer consists of two elements, the existing early education entitlement delivered through the Curriculum for Wales and additional hours of government funded childcare. Parents/carers can obtain further information about the Childcare Offer and their eligibility from their local Family Information Service.

Flying Start childcare practitioners should promote the Childcare Offer for Wales, as appropriate, and signpost families to suitable sources of information as children come to the end of their time in a Flying Start childcare setting.

## Supporting attendance

Good attendance rates are vital to ensuring children get the maximum benefit from their time in Flying Start childcare environments. Maximizing attendance at childcare provides children with the consistency and continuity required to develop key cognitive and social skills and gives them the stability they need to nurture a sense of belonging.

Attending a Flying Start childcare setting is a valuable opportunity for children to benefit from a professional childcare environment from an early age to establish stable routines and to help facilitate a smooth transition into the Curriculum for Wales.

Setting clear expectations for parents/carers about the importance of maintaining high levels of attendance not only reinforces the value of engaging fully with the programme but also helps to prepare children for regular school attendance later in life.

Local Authorities should have robust procedures in place to manage attendance at Flying Start childcare settings and these should be clearly outlined in formal attendance management policies. Effective attendance management policies should reinforce the role of individual childcare settings in managing attendance and should clearly outline the steps to be taken when a child does not attend their scheduled Flying Start childcare session. Local Authorities are free to design suitable policies and procedures locally, but these should meet the minimum requirements as set out at Appendix 1.

Furthermore, Local Authorities should proactively encourage attendance via effective engagement with parents and families and through the promotion of positive messages via their chosen communication tools i.e. information sheets, social media channels etc.

## **Data and Monitoring**

Local Authorities are responsible for ensuring that attendance is recorded effectively across all Flying Start childcare settings. Programme managers/ Childcare Advisory Teams should receive regular attendance reports from setting managers, and these should be used to monitor attendance and, where possible, allow corrective action to be taken where attendance levels are a cause for concern.

## Attendance Targets

Local Authorities are expected to strive to continually improve attendance rates at Flying Start childcare settings; though it is recognised there is a delicate balance to be struck between managing attendance effectively and providing flexible services to children and families.

To encourage a commitment to continual improvement the Welsh Government has set national targets for attendance at Flying Start childcare settings which will be set for Local Authorities on an individual basis. These are based on national averages<sup>[5]</sup> and provide a staggered set of aspirational target rates for Local Authorities to aim for.

The rates set for Flying Start childcare settings are as follows:

75% - Minimum Target

80% - Mid Range Target

85% - Higher Target

Ultimately it will be beneficial for parents/carers and children to become accustomed with expectations of higher levels of attendance as minimum expectations of school attendance, for those of statutory school age, is set at 95%.

Account Managers will discuss local attendance rates at Flying Start childcare settings with Local Authorities at formal account management meetings and at other times throughout the year as the need arises.

## Unallocated Spaces

Unallocated spaces occur when a Flying Start childcare space is funded and available but is not allocated to a child. Unallocated spaces can be caused by a number of factors which can include;

- Spaces unallocated as a result of staffing ratios prescribed by the National Minimum Standards.
- Spaces unallocated as a result of unpredictability of local take up and demand.
- Spaces unallocated as a result of local childcare commissioning models.

Whilst we recognise that some level of unallocated spaces is inevitable, Local Authorities should make every attempt to minimise the number of spaces that are unallocated within their Flying Start childcare settings. The following steps should be followed by Local Authorities to ensure unallocated spaces are kept to a minimum.

- Where possible Local Authority childcare staff should be flexible and should move settings to follow demand.
- Long term unallocated spaces should be offered on a needs basis via Outreach.
- Commissioned spaces should be purchased on a needs basis whenever possible and, where this isn't possible, Local Authorities should look to gradually reduce their number of block purchased spaces as part of their commissioning model or seek to fill through the Outreach element of the programme.

**[5]** The National Attendance rate in Flying Start childcare setting in 2017/18 was 78%.

## Summary

Positive outcomes for the child are fundamental to Flying Start. As this document has explained, extensive research shows that high quality childcare helps to deliver positive outcomes. The most important aspect of the funded Flying Start childcare offer for 2-to 3-year-old children is that the childcare provided must be of the highest quality possible. A high-quality childcare environment, coupled with high-quality consistent staff, will provide a high-quality experience for the child and a flying start in life.

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## **Appendix 1: Flying Start childcare setting attendance management minimum standards**

Each Flying Start childcare provider should have the following in place as part of their attendance management policy/childcare registration processes.

### Parents/Carers

- Local Authorities should promote the benefits of a child attending a Flying Start childcare setting i.e. Children who attend pre-school childcare develop better cognitive skills and are better prepared for learning when they enter early education.
- Clear expectations should be set from the outset regarding attendance



including consequences of poor attendance.

- Parents/carers should be given information about what constitutes valid reasons for non-attendance.
- Parents/carers should be offered a reduced service if this better suits their needs.
- Clear procedures should be in place where a parent or carer is required to contact childcare settings prior to the session beginning to inform of child's absence.

## Workforce

- Clear processes should be in place for all types of absence (authorised and unauthorised) including a separate process for staff to follow for any children with safeguarding issues. Settings must be aware of their legal duties when dealing with any safeguarding matters.
- Childcare staff should be given clear instructions of which processes need to be followed when an absence occurs.
- Processes should be in place to manage what is considered to be persistent absence, the definition of persistent absence should also be provided to parents/carers when the Flying Start childcare offer is taken up or upon induction to childcare settings.
- Every childcare setting should have an attendance agreement. This is an agreement with parents/carers which acknowledges the importance of the childcare space and commits the child to attend every session where possible. It should also outline the escalation process and subsequent consequences if attendance is poor. A copy of the agreement should be given to the parent/carer and another kept in the child's individual record at the childcare setting.
- Childcare settings should promote activities and events which are taking place at settings in order to show the value of the service provided and to promote the programme.
- Each Local Authority should have a mechanism in place to review monthly data from childcare settings. Ensuring interventions are made to address

issues that arise.

- Policies and procedures should be reviewed regularly and clearly communicated to staff and parents/carers when changes/updates occur.

## **Appendix 2: Cross Border Principles**

### **Flying Start Childcare: When an eligible Flying Start parent requests childcare outside the home Local Authority for their child.**

#### **Overarching Cross Border Principles**

It is paramount that all decisions are made in the child's best interests.

Whenever possible Flying Start childcare settings should be within "pram pushing distance" of a child's home. For practical reasons this is considered to be a walk of around 10-15 minutes.

Children should attend 5 sessions per week for 2.5 hours each day. However, the ability to take a flexible approach is highlighted within the Flying Start Childcare Guidance, which is to accommodate requests by parents for different arrangements when there is a specific need.

All children and families are unique and there may be circumstances when the Local Authority considers that it is in a child's best interests to attend a childcare setting outside their home Local Authority. Such circumstances (which are listed in no particular order) may include but are not limited to:

- where there are safeguarding issues or evidence of complex family dynamics

- when a child is already settled in a childcare setting
- when it would reduce the number of transitions and unnecessary changes to a child's routine
- when there is a Flying Start childcare setting closer to the family home other than the designated one within their own home Local Authority
- employment/training arrangements of parent
- shared care living arrangements
- Any other factors deemed to be assessed by the Local Authority to be in a child's best interests

## **Guidance for when requests are made for Flying Start Childcare Outside the Home Local Authority in Wales and England.**

- All parental requests should be considered against the principles listed above.
- Flying Start eligible children should attend a childcare setting in Wales whenever possible. The setting will need to be commissioned by a Local Authority as a Flying Start provider and have agreed to meet the quality Flying Start childcare guidance. They will also need to be registered with Care Inspectorate Wales or Ofsted and adhere to the National Minimum Standards that are relevant to Wales or England.
- All Local Authorities will need to have a Cross Border procedure that is clear, fair, and transparent for parents, childcare providers, and the wider Flying Start Team. An appeals process may need to be considered.
- The home Local Authority will maintain decision making about whether it is possible for them to support an individual child to access childcare outside their home Local Authority and whether it is in the best interests of a child.
- The home Local Authority will need to formally agree (possibly via a Service Level Agreement or protocol) with the bordering Local Authority where the childcare setting is situated the arrangements for the child. There is no legal

requirement for a service level agreement, but formal arrangements need to be agreed.

- The childcare setting will need to agree, and they will need to have capacity in respect of occupancy.
- Formal Agreements to include how the childcare setting will receive payment, who will have responsibility for monitoring the quality of the setting and how information associated with Additional Learning Needs (ALN) and Safeguarding issues will be shared between the home Local Authority, the bordering Local Authority, any other agency involved with the family and the childcare setting.
- As all Flying Start settings across Wales receive support from a range of professionals including advisory teachers, unnecessary duplication of visits by staff from the home Local Authority should be avoided where possible.
- Local Authorities will need to ensure that responsibilities under the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 and the Additional Learning Needs Code for Wales 2021 (the ALN code) are adhered to in any cross-border arrangements. There will need to be communication with the relevant Early Years Additional Learning Needs Lead Officer who is based within each Local Authority.
- Under the ALN code “where a Local Authority maintains an Individual Development Plan (IDP) for a child it must secure the additional learning provision and any other provision described in it”. It would be the responsibility of the home Local Authority to decide whether a child has ALN, and they would be responsible for preparing and maintaining the IDP. **[The Additional Learning Needs Code for Wales 2021 \(gov.wales\)](#)**
- All Information sharing will need to comply with the Data Protection Act 2018, the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and individual Local Authority and Health Board information sharing protocols.

## **Additional Guidance for when requests are made for Flying Start Childcare Outside the Home Local Authority**

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## in England.

- Whenever possible Flying Start eligible children should attend a childcare setting in Wales as there are no comparable commissioned quality Flying Start childcare settings in England. Furthermore, children will not have the opportunity to develop Welsh Language skills within settings based in England.
- It is not a requirement of Welsh Government to fund Flying Start Childcare outside Wales. However, there may be times when it is in an individual child's best interests to attend a setting in England and that will need to be the basis of all decision making alongside the ability of each Local Authority to develop suitable protocol arrangements. If it is assessed to be in the child's best interests, then the points below need to be considered:
  - The childcare setting would need to be commissioned as a single child Flying Start provider by the home Local Authority, they will need to agree to meet (within an agreed timeframe) the quality Flying Start childcare guidance and any other requirements of the home Local Authority such as registering onto their portal. They will also need to be registered with Ofsted and adhere to the National Minimum Standards applicable in England.
  - There are some differences between the National Minimum Standards of England and Wales which include ratios alongside their qualification's framework. This will need to be highlighted to the parent.
  - Ofsted will not be aware that Flying Start is funding a child and will need to be advised to ensure that any safeguarding or quality standard issues are communicated with the home Local Authority.
  - All Flying Start settings across Wales receive support from a range of professionals including advisory teachers. When childcare is requested in England this may not be possible at the same level as those in Wales, but the monitoring of quality needs to be considered when arrangements are established.

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