

Children & Young People's Manifesto



Plaid Cymru | Party of Wales

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“It is time Wales was governed by a party that will put children and young people at the core of its agenda once again. A Plaid Cymru government will not let our young people down.”

**Helen Mary Jones,
Shadow Minister for Children and Young People.**



Background

While Plaid Cymru was in government, The Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011 was enshrined in law. Its intention was to ensure the distinct needs and rights of children and young people were considered when making legislation and policy. In doing this, Wales was the first country in the UK to adopt the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) as the basis of all policies for children and young people.

Since then, the Welsh Labour Government has failed to make progress in the field of children and young people's rights. In 2012, a decision was made by the Welsh Labour Government not to pursue a Children and Young Persons (Wales) Bill to continue this progress and strengthen the right of children and young people across Wales. Furthermore, in all 45 pages of the Well-being of Future Generations Bill adopted in April 2015, there is no mention of children and young people's rights and no mention of the Welsh Government's commitment to end child poverty. The failure to put an end to the reasonable punishment defence against children and young people in the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Bill pays testament to the little attention paid to the rights of children and young people under the present government.

As the former Children's Commissioner for Wales, Keith Towler, said in 2014 in his annual report:

“...there have been times in the last year where I have felt that we might have become too comfortable in our role as an international trailblazer, and almost forgotten our national vision for children and young people.”

A culture of failure

The Welsh Government has, along with the UK Government, committed to end child poverty by 2020. However, the Child Poverty and Social Mobility Commission's State of the Nation 2014 report concludes that this target is highly unlikely to be met. Wales has a long way to go if we are to end child poverty. In the UK, only Yorkshire and the Humber have higher levels of child poverty. Half of three year olds in deprived areas of Wales are below the expected level of development.

In 2014 only 26% of children and young people eligible for Free School Meals achieve five good GCSEs including English and Maths compared to 38% in England. Our children aren't inherently less intelligent than children from other countries in the UK and yet our PISA ratings rank us lowest in terms of maths, science and literacy. For some reason, the Welsh Labour government accepts this and has dropped its targets. As a comparison, Scotland scored over 500 points last year, which means that the new target for Wales in 2021 would put it on a par with Scotland in 2013.

To reverse this culture of failure, we need an education revolution.

It is time Wales was governed by a party that will put children and young people at the core of its agenda once again. After all, the future of our nation lies in their hands. Failing to invest appropriately in the youngest amongst us now will mean years of failure to come. We can't afford to continue to take the future of our country for granted. What our children and young people need is a government with a clear and ambitious vision. A Plaid Cymru government is the change Wales needs.



Plaid Cymru – The Change Wales Needs

A Plaid Cymru government will nurture Wales's children and young people from cradle to career.

We will make sure every child in Wales has the best possible start in life. It's in every single one of our interests.



Listening to Children and Young People

We will listen to our young people, whatever their background, so that their voices are heard about the issues that affect them directly, and not missing from debate. We will promote participation in society at all levels.

We will introduce a Youth Parliament for Wales that can work with the Government, National Assembly and young people across Wales to ensure that their voices are heard. Wales is the only country within the European Union whose young people have no democratic body of their own. We will ensure that every Local Authority area has an effective Youth Forum to enable young people to have a voice in local decision making.

We will allow votes at 16 for National Assembly and local government elections and introduce compulsory citizenship classes in schools so that young people can better understand the political process.

We will promote the role and work of School Councils so that the pupil voice is heard at all levels and in school decisions

We will ensure a national approach to advocacy so that all children in Wales know that their concerns will be presented and listened to.

We will also legislate to make the Children's Commissioner accountable to the National Assembly not the Welsh Government, and will change the Commissioner's title to 'The Children and Young People's Commissioner'.

Healthier Children and Young People

Good physical and mental health are the best gifts that we can give our children and young people.

We will provide children and young people with opportunities to play and to learn through play, both through the official school Foundation Phase and outside of formal education. This will help children and young people to stay fit, healthy and active.

To achieve this, we will work with schools, sports clubs and youth work organisations to provide opportunities for children to participate in physical activity throughout their school careers and beyond, setting them up for life. We will target specific groups, such as girls in their teenage years, who are less likely to participate in physical activity.

We will help children to prevent mental health issues where possible. We will increase the support provided to Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services, which have been under-funded and over-subscribed in recent years. Preventative services are key to resolving problems in their early stages. Including mental health awareness as part of the education curriculum will reduce stigma.



Educating Children and Young People

Plaid Cymru will ensure a cradle to career education for children in Wales, focusing on lifelong learning. We will give Welsh children and young people the ambition to improve themselves and reach their potential.

We will increase childcare for three-to-four year-olds to 30 hours per week. This will reduce the gap in educational development between children from different socio-economic groups.

We will improve teaching in Welsh schools, ensuring that all children reach their educational potential.

Our aim is to create a truly world class professional education workforce. We will raise the status of the teaching profession, improve the quality of teacher training and give teachers greater freedom and responsibility in deciding what and how they teach. This will all be within a national framework, agreed with teachers themselves, as to how we drive up standards in Wales to among the best in Europe.

We will give every teacher in Wales a 10% premium payment in return for creating the most highly trained and motivated teaching workforce in the UK. The National Teaching Premium will help us attract and retain the most talented into the teaching profession, and help keep good teachers in the classroom rather than force them up the ladder of management for career reasons.

In return for the National Teaching Premium we will expect the teaching profession in Wales to set an agreed national strategy for raising standards of educational attainment in Wales relative to UK and international educational performance, equivalent to reaching an average top 10 placement in Europe across the five areas covered by the PISA tests – literacy, numeracy, science, problem-solving and financial literacy by 2026. By 2025, we will ensure that all eleven year old children in Wales can read well.

We will implement the recommendations of the recent Donaldson review into the school curriculum, including the focus on technology. We will continue to provide additional support for children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Schools whose teaching is not meeting our high standards will be given extra support so that pupils are not left behind.

Following their compulsory education, all young people will have the opportunity to follow a learning pathway towards further qualifications – either through an academic route into higher education or through apprenticeships, work-based learning and other vocational pathways so that our young people are appropriately trained for their career of choice. A better skilled workforce in Wales will mean more jobs, higher wages and a reduction in poverty in our communities.

We will use Wales share of the UK apprenticeship levy to create 50,000 additional apprenticeships and ensure the value of this route is explained fully to pupils.

We will introduce an under-25 Jobs Guarantee, where we will commit to identifying employment, education or training for any young person who has been searching for work for more than four months.

We will create a voluntary National Citizen Service programme open to all 18-25 year olds within Wales involving an approved 9-12 paid, full-time placement focusing on inter-generational care or digital inclusion.

We will enshrine in law young people's right to have access to the informal learning and personal growth provided by youth work in statutory and voluntary settings.

We will reform student finance so that Welsh domiciled students who work in Wales after graduation will receive £6,000 per year during the first five years after graduating, up to a maximum of £18,000. This will ensure that our best and brightest have the opportunity and incentive to stay or return to Wales after completing their studies.

Tackling Children and Young People's Poverty

Plaid Cymru wants to end child poverty in Wales. It is unacceptable that one third of children in Wales are in poverty, showing that previous anti-poverty schemes have failed. Like the Children's Commissioner we do not believe that we should be content with these figures.

Plaid Cymru will launch a child poverty action plan as part of our tackling poverty strategy.

We will use the Welsh Government's discretionary housing payments power to compensate in full those families affected by the withdrawal of benefit under the Bedroom Tax so that this money can be spent on food and warmth.

We will target support for housing energy efficiency improvements at families with children as this will cut energy bills for families and help improve children's health and educational attainment.

We will help to increase family incomes, by assisting parents to get into training and better paid work, and through additional childcare and supporting out of schools activities that allow parents to work the number of hours that they wish.

Helping Children and Young People

Plaid Cymru want every child and young person to be raised in a safe and loving environment.

One of the first actions of a Plaid Cymru Government will be to make smacking and hitting children illegal in Wales, giving children the same rights as adults against physical violence.

We will promote healthy relationships to children and young people, so that they can recognise when a relationship is physically or emotionally abusive and when others are being abused.

Tackling children and young people's sexual exploitation is another priority. We will work across services, with police forces, health services and local authorities to identify children at risk and properly resource support to prevent sexual exploitation of children and young people, whether that takes place in the home, in the community or on-line.

We will provide support to social services and other services to appropriately support young people in difficult circumstances. If possible and appropriate we will reduce the number of Looked After Children and support children and young people to stay with their families. Preventative services and appropriate early intervention around the family and the child can prevent greater problems at a later stage.

Looked After Children will be provided with educational and emotional support to achieve their potential, and allowed to stay with their carers until they feel confident of making their own decisions, under the 'When I'm Ready' scheme. Where possible, Looked After Children will live within their local area, rather than moved out of county. We will support local authorities to recruit foster carers to assist with this.



A Future for our Children and Young People

Plaid Cymru policies will help our children and young people to have a better future.

We will actively work to reduce inequalities across Wales. This includes the gender pay gap between men and women. We will promote careers in traditionally masculine areas such as engineering to young women through gender aware careers' advice, support women to start new businesses and play a role in public life. We will work to prevent bullying and hate-crimes, with proper record-keeping in school and from the police.

Our actions are putting our environment in danger. Plaid Cymru will increase use of renewable energy in Wales and reduce our carbon emissions. We will reduce waste and increase recycling. Wales will be a sustainable nation.

Our bilingual nation and culture is special and enriches people's lives.

All children will have the chance to become fluent and confident in both Welsh and English so that they are able to participate fully in Welsh society and beyond.

This will be achieved through both inside and outside school and community organisations, creating a genuinely bilingual generation of children and young people across all parts of Wales.

