

Introduction

All children and young people in Wales have the right to be healthy, respected, and able to reach their full potential. These rights are protected by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), including the right to non-discrimination (Article 2 of UNCRC), the right to have decisions made in their best interest (Article 3), the right to life, survival and development (Article 6 of UNCRC), and the right to express their views and have them taken seriously (Article 12 of UNCRC).¹²

Despite efforts from Welsh Government to promote equality and inclusion through the LGBTQ+ Action Plan, progress in delivering meaningful improvements for LGBTQ+ children and young people has been limited, with many continuing to experience barriers.

Ensuring that LGBTQ+ children and young people can access inclusive education (Article 28 & 29 of UNCRC), appropriate healthcare (Article 24 of UNCRC), and supportive services is essential to realising their rights, as set out in the UNCRC, and enabling them to thrive as equal members of society.

What Children, Young People and Families Have Told Us

Our advice and engagement work highlights a consistent pattern of challenges experienced by LGBTQ+ children and young people.

Bullying is consistently raised as a concern, with children and young people reporting experiencing persistent bullying, verbal harassment, social exclusion and being "outed" by peers. For some, this behaviour extended beyond the school environment into the wider community, creating ongoing safety concerns and contributing to isolation. One young person commented, "harassment is camouflaged by banter." Another young person highlighted the importance of awareness of LGBTQ+ rights, commenting, "everyone should be more aware that LGBTQ+ people have rights too."

These experiences undermine children's rights under Article 19 of the UNCRC, which requires protection from all forms of violence, alongside article 2 which sets out to ensure the right to be free from discrimination. Persistent bullying can also prevent children from fully enjoying their right to education under Article 28.

School responses and safeguarding were frequently perceived by young people and families as inadequate. Parents and young people reported that bullying was often not taken seriously and that

1. ² Welsh Government (2023), *LGBTQ+ Action Plan for Wales: Themes, Evidence and Actions*.

interventions were reactive rather than preventative. One young person commented, “bullying is only ever spoken to when observed but nothing ever changes.” With regards to varying support one student commented “they come up with excuses to permit these things.” And “it feels like we aren’t taken seriously.”

One young person commented*: “If we have a [designated] ‘safe space’ it’s just proof that action is not being taken as the [whole] school should be the safe space.”

It is essential that the systems in place to respond to incidents and bullying consider the best interest of the child, in line with article 3 of the UNCRC. A young person also commented, “punishment without education doesn’t change someone’s behaviour.”

School avoidance and educational disengagement have been linked to experiences of bullying and discrimination. Some LGBTQ+ children and young people developed Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) as a result of feeling unsafe in school, leading to reduced attendance and disengagement from education.

When children feel unable to attend school because they do not feel safe or included, their rights under Articles 28 and 29 of the UNCRC are compromised. These articles recognise not only the right to education but also the importance of education taking place in an environment that supports every child’s development.

Mental health and wellbeing were reportedly affected by these experiences. Families reported increased anxiety, self-harm, suicidal ideation and suicide attempts, often associated with sustained bullying, discrimination and a lack of support. Difficulties accessing timely mental health services can further exacerbate distress.

These experiences raise significant concerns in relation to Article 24 of the UNCRC, which recognises every child’s right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health and access to appropriate healthcare services.

Intersectionality and additional vulnerabilities were also highlighted. LGBTQ+ children and young people with Additional Learning Needs (ALN) often faced compounded disadvantages, including heightened vulnerability to bullying and greater barriers to accessing appropriate support. A young person reflected, “LGBTQ+ people should be respected like everyone else while also having their boundaries and beliefs respected. Being LGBTQ+ shouldn’t change the rules for yourself, you are still a being.”

Access to gender-affirming care was identified as a concern by some families. Concerns centred on the potential disruption or withdrawal of treatment and the impact this could have on young people’s wellbeing and mental health.

Access to appropriate healthcare should be guided by the child's best interests under Article 3, their right to express views about decisions affecting them under Article 12, and their right to the highest attainable standard of health under Article 24 of the UNCRC.

What do we know?

Evidence from Wales highlights that LGBTQ+ children and young people continue to experience bullying, discrimination and poorer wellbeing outcomes than their peers. Evidence cited within the Welsh Government's LGBTQ+ Action Plan found that 60% of LGBT learners frequently or often heard homophobic language in school, while 49% heard biphobic language and 51% heard transphobic language. LGBTQ+ people in Wales are also more likely to report loneliness than their heterosexual³⁴ SHRN data suggests that transgender and gender diverse (TGD) young people report poorer mental health and well-being compared to cisgender peers⁵⁶

Taken together, this evidence suggests that many LGBTQ+ children and young people continue to face barriers to enjoying their rights without discrimination (Article 2), to education (Articles 28 and 29), and to health and wellbeing (Article 24).

The evidence highlights the importance of inclusive schools, supportive families and accessible services in improving wellbeing and educational outcomes. However, there remains limited Wales-specific evidence on the mental health experiences of and outcomes for LGBTQ+ children and young people. Strengthening data collection, research and evaluation would support better understanding of the barriers LGBTQ+ children and young people face and would help identify where progress is being made.

2. ⁴ Welsh Government (2023), *LGBTQ+ Action Plan for Wales: Themes, Evidence and Actions*.

3. ⁶ SHRN. (2026). How Secondary Schools Can Shape Health and Well-being for Transgender and Gender Diverse Young People: Using SHRN Data. [Online]. <https://www.shrn.org.uk>. Last Updated: February 25, 2026. Available at: <https://www.shrn.org.uk/how-secondary-schools-can-shape-health-and-well-being-for-transgender-and-ge> [Accessed 3 August 2026].

Consistent with Article 12 of the UNCRC, listening to children's voices and lived experiences is essential to ensuring that policies and services respond effectively to their needs and improving outcomes across Wales.

In addition to this it is important to consider that LGBTQ+ children and young people are growing up in a wider context where prejudice and hostility remain prevalent. In 2023–24, hate crimes recorded across Wales indicated that 19% were motivated by hostility towards sexual orientation and 5% by hostility towards transgender identity⁷. While these figures are not specific to children and young people, they highlight the continued presence of anti-LGBTQ+ prejudice in Wales and the importance of creating safe, inclusive environments where children can learn, participate and thrive within their communities.

What is happening to support children and young people?

Welsh Government policy and legislation demonstrate a significant commitment to improving outcomes for LGBTQ+ people. Through the LGBTQ+ Action Plan (2023), Welsh Government set out its ambition to make Wales the most LGBTQ+ friendly nation in Europe and committed to addressing inequalities across education, health, housing, community safety and participation in public life. However, continued monitoring and action are needed to ensure these commitments translate into meaningful and consistent improvements in the lives of LGBTQ+ children and young people across Wales.

The Curriculum for Wales also introduced mandatory Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) in 2022, ensuring learners receive inclusive and age-appropriate education about relationships, diversity, rights and identity.

Schools and education settings have responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between different groups. Schools are responsible for developing anti-bullying policies, inclusion strategies and wellbeing initiatives. The Welsh Government's Rights, Respect, Equality guidance provides statutory guidance on preventing and responding to bullying, including bullying related to sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression.

Support services and community organisations also play an important role. Across Wales, third-sector organisations provide youth groups, peer-support networks, advocacy services and information resources that help LGBTQ+ children and young people access support, build confidence and connect with others who share similar experiences.

7 Welsh Government. (2024). Written Statement: National Hate Crime Awareness Week 2024. [Online]. <https://www.gov.wales/>. Last Updated: 14 October 2024. Available at: https://www.gov.wales/written-statement-national-hate-crime-awareness-week-2024?utm_source=chatgpt.c [Accessed 3 August 2026].

Ongoing developments and challenges remain. Recent legal developments, including the Supreme Court judgment in *For Women Scotland Ltd v The Scottish Ministers* (2025), have prompted Welsh Government to review the LGBTQ+ Action Plan. Health boards, local authorities, schools and community organisations continue to work together to improve access to support and promote wellbeing. However, evidence suggests experiences remain inconsistent across Wales, with some children and young people continuing to face barriers to accessing inclusive services and support that meets their needs.

What needs to happen?

Publish guidance for supporting transgender and gender-diverse learners

Following publication of the EHRC Code of Practice, the Welsh Government should publish comprehensive guidance for schools that reflects the legal framework while providing clear, practical advice on supporting transgender and gender-diverse learners in Wales, consistent with children's rights and safeguarding responsibilities.

Strengthen inclusive educational environments

All children and young people have the right to learn in environments free from discrimination, bullying and prejudice. Schools should be supported to take a whole-school approach to inclusion, ensuring that policies, curriculum content, staff training and wellbeing support reflect the diversity of learners and foster a sense of belonging for LGBTQ+ children and young people.

Creating inclusive learning environments is fundamental to ensuring children can enjoy their rights to education without discrimination under Articles 2, 28 and 29 of the UNCRC.

Tackling hate crime and prejudice-based bullying

As the Welsh Government progresses its work to strengthen the reporting of racist incidents in schools, we would like to see this work broadened to include other forms of prejudice-based bullying, including homophobic, biphobic, transphobic and misogynistic incidents. Developing a consistent, intersectional approach to data collection would provide a more complete understanding of children's experiences of discrimination, recognising that many children experience multiple and intersecting forms of prejudice. Improved data would support more targeted interventions, strengthen accountability and help ensure that schools are safe and inclusive environments for all learners.

A more robust reporting framework would support implementation of Articles 2, 3 and 19 of the UNCRC by helping to identify patterns of discrimination and harm, ensuring children's best interests are considered, and strengthening measures to protect them from violence and prejudice.

Improve access to mental health and wellbeing support

Access to timely, appropriate and inclusive support services is essential. Mental health services, school-based support and wider wellbeing provision should be equipped and resourced to meet the needs of LGBTQ+ children and young people, with professionals receiving appropriate training and support to provide affirming and inclusive care.

This would support children's right to the highest attainable standard of health under Article 24 and help ensure their best interests remain a primary consideration in decisions affecting their care (Article 3).

Listen to and involve children and young people

Policies and services affecting LGBTQ+ children and young people should be developed with them, rather than for them. Welsh Government, local authorities, schools, health services and third-sector organisations should continue to create opportunities for LGBTQ+ children and young people to influence decision-making and shape the services they use.

Embedding meaningful participation in policy and service design is essential to fulfilling Article 12 of the UNCRC.

Improve evidence and accountability

Improving data collection, research and evaluation would strengthen understanding of the experiences and outcomes of LGBTQ+ children and young people in Wales and help identify where progress is being made. Regular monitoring of the implementation of the LGBTQ+ Action Plan and other relevant policies will be important in ensuring that commitments lead to meaningful improvements in the lives of children and young people.

Strengthening monitoring and accountability would support implementation of Article 4 of the UNCRC, which requires governments to take all appropriate measures to realise children's rights in practice.

What are we doing?

Our work on this issue

We have listened to the voices and experiences of LGBTQ+ children and young people through our engagement and casework. Through our Community Ambassadors scheme, we have met with LGBTQ+ school groups to help shape our responses to Welsh Government consultations and policy development.

We have met regularly with Welsh Government officials to advocate for the publication of comprehensive guidance for schools and have participated in Welsh Government focus groups on the LGBTQ+ Action Plan process evaluation.

Over the next year we will:

- Continue to amplify the voices and experiences of LGBTQ+ children and young people, including through our outreach and engagement and Community Ambassadors scheme.

- Engage with Welsh Government and key stakeholders on the development of guidance, policy and practice.
- Monitor progress on commitments affecting LGBTQ+ children and young people and advocate for improvements where needed.