

My story



When I was younger I grew up in a loving, supportive family – parents and 2 brothers and extended family and friends. Both my brothers were diagnosed with Dyslexia and their education consisted of being in a small class doing the basic subjects – maths, English and Welsh and weren't given the opportunity to sit any exams. I wasn't an A* student but I remember feeling guilty when my parents would celebrate my successes in school.



Later as a mother of a child who was diagnosed with Dyslexia, Dyspraxia and attention deficit I found myself constantly “fighting” to ensure that my son had the same opportunities as other children – my friend would jokingly say I was like a little terrier determined to get the best for my son. He initially had 10 hours support but then the Education Department changed the way that the support was offered and it became the school's responsibility to decide how the funding was used and his individual support was stopped. He was lucky in a way that there was a child who needed a full time 1-1 because of his physical needs and therefore she would support my son as well, she would move up every with them and she was the one “constant” person. As the time came closer to him moving to Secondary school the concerns and anxieties I felt when he first started school returned. Although he was used to being in a class of 30 moving to secondary was going to be a big move and I worried how he would cope in mainstream classes without any additional support. Initially I was told that there was no provision for a smaller class, that the need wasn't there, and I remember feeling scared for him but trying to be positive about the process in front of him. Eventually they informed me that there would be smaller class after all, but with opportunities to socialise with other children, they weren't isolated. I remember feeling relieved and hopeful, and other than the initially issues of him being bullied in the first few months, constant phone calls to the school to

share my concerns, not having phone calls back, leading me to speaking to the Head of Year when I saw her outside school – it was sorted and he was settled for the next 3 years until it came time for him to choose his subjects for GCSE. The lack of options, “hands on” opportunities were few for a child who was not good at writing or completing tests/exams which would cause him to become very anxious. He was able to choose 2 subjects which had interest in and something he could see himself doing in the future – cooking, but then the third was just to fill the gap. Tests and exams continued to cause him anxieties and no matter how many times I would ask for additional support the only thing they offered was an extra 15 minutes to complete the paper. He struggles to get what is “in his head” down on paper – having someone to read the question to make sure he understood the question and scribe for him would have made a huge difference for him. In hindsight although lockdown in general was difficult for everyone it meant he didn’t have to sit his GCSEs. School didn’t expect his grades to allow him to go to college, but he was still accepted on the course he had applied for and thrived there.



In my job now I speak to a lot of parents who are in similar circumstances and transitioning to Secondary school especially is a difficult time. They have told me that the child's needs are not severe enough to attend Specialist school, but Secondary school is a scary option. There are children who would struggle in a large school, they would find it difficult to move from one class to another, lots of other children around etc but the alternative is being in a Nurture room isolated from their friends. There is nothing in between. This is making them feel they have no option but to home school them.



According to a census completed in Autumn 2023, an estimated 92,000 children were in elective home education. This is an increase from an estimated 80,900 in the previous Autumn term. Some of the reasons include dissatisfaction with the school or especially educational needs (Children with special educational needs (SEN) may not always receive the necessary support in schools, prompting parents to educate them at home. (<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/elective-home-education>).

A report by the Senedd which looked into how Welsh children were being denied their education. It notes that "A Senedd committee says children and young people with disabilities or additional learning needs are being let down by decision-makers at the most crucial time in their lives". It goes on to say "we can't fail our young people anymore. You only get one chance at an education, and it should be the best chance".

It talks about parents saying that they are having to fight for support for their child including education, and denying them the education they need can have a significant impact on their wellbeing and physical health which can impact future opportunities. Lack of suitable childcare during school holidays was also mentioned.

<https://senedd.wales/senedd-now/news/welsh-children-being-denied--their-education/>

Now to my ask, I appreciate things have improved since my brothers were in school with no opportunities to have any kind of qualification, my son's experience, and how things are now I feel that more needs to be done.

However, there is more work that can be done. We need to capture the child's wishes and feelings as well as the parents (they are the ones who know their child best), look at the current inflexibility – such as an alternative to the current situation where they are placed in a room and isolated from their peers, and when choosing their subjects in preparation for Year 9 and 10 to ensure that the decisions made at this time will benefit them in the future (having more options for "hands on" experiences, independent living skills, preparing for adulthood). The system needs to be more child centred. In an ideal world having a school for those children who don't meet the criteria for a Specialist School and will struggle in mainstream which would reduce the number of children who are home schooled and improve their abilities and experiences in the future.

The time our children spend in school is an important time in their lives, their experiences will have an impact on the rest of their lives. Continuing on as things are, without making any changes will not only affect our children's future but for some their mental health. Having a learning difficulty can be hard for the child, they often feel that they are different to their peers, they are vulnerable and can be led to committing an offence as they want to fit in. It is also difficult for their families as they are the ones who see the impact it's having on their child, they are continuously having fight to ensure that their child gets what they are entitled, the best start to the rest of their lives.

