

Rising 4s Policy Review – Gap Analysis



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Rising 4s Policy Review

Early Years Provision Gap Analysis

Context

Carmarthenshire is the only one of the 22 Local Authorities in Wales to have a Rising 4s Policy, whereby children can leave part-time nursery education and enter full-time primary education in the term of their fourth birthday. This creates three entry points during the year for children entering full-time education and has implications for resourcing at both individual school and local authority levels which have been documented elsewhere in other reports. There are compelling arguments to review this provision and bring Carmarthenshire into line with other authorities by consulting on a change to this policy. A policy change would mean the implementation of either of the following options:

- **Children enter full-time provision in the term following their fourth birthday.** This is the case in three other LAs, which include Pembrokeshire and Ceredigion, Carmarthenshire's nearest neighbours.
- **Children enter full-time provision in the September following their fourth birthday.** This is the case in eighteen other LAs.

The rationale for change was presented to Cabinet in October 2022 and although there was broad agreement that consulting on removing the Rising 4s Policy would be desirable, Cabinet understandably wished to explore the implications in more detail. Carmarthenshire operates a very mixed economy of pre-school provision across the Authority. There is a mixture of maintained and non-maintained early years settings and a combination of both 3-11 and 4-11 schools. Between them they provide 10 hours per week of statutory education for nursery children and a range of wrap around care options to meet varying demand across the county. Provision is further complicated by the geographical context of Carmarthenshire with schools in urban, rural, and often fairly remote rural settings. Removing the Rising 4s Policy would mean that children currently in part-time provision in both maintained and non-maintained settings would remain in that provision for a longer period of time before becoming eligible for full-time depending on which of the above options were to be implemented. This could have implications for existing capacity to meet wrap around care requirements as well as provision of the 10 hours education element in some settings.

A gap analysis has been undertaken to identify the potential impact of removing the Rising 4s Policy in each individual school. The gap analysis illustrates the complexity of the picture in Carmarthenshire but enables us provide recommendations for schools where gaps in provision may be created by removal of the Rising 4s.

The range of current provision in primary schools is as follows:

3-11 Schools

These schools admit children into their nursery class in the term following their third birthday. The school provides between 10 and 12.5 hours per week of statutory education for these children on a part-time basis, usually in either a morning or afternoon session. This maintained provision is funded from the schools' delegated budget and schools receive 50% of the Age Weighted Pupil Value (AWPV) for primary aged children for each nursery child attending. The children either go home or attend a non-maintained setting such as a Cylch

Meithrin, usually on the school premises when not attending the education provision. Such provision is paid for by parents. Working parents are able to claim funding from Welsh Government for some or all of this provision.

In most cases, 3-11 schools can make adequate provision for both education and wrap around care and are unlikely to be greatly affected by the removal of the Rising 4s Policy from point of view of provision of the education element. As part of the consultation, these schools will need to review their capacity if children remain in part-time provision for longer, but this will be offset by having fewer children entering full-time education.

4-11 Schools

4-11 schools admit children on a full-time basis in the term of their fourth birthday. The 10-12.5 hours education is provided either in a non-maintained setting such as Cylch Meithrin or private nursery either on the school premises or in the local community, through Flying Start provision or, as in a number of schools, not at all. Non-maintained settings either on school premises or in the community also provide wrap around care. Parents pay a sessional charge for all non-maintained provision but can claim an element of this back from Welsh Government.

In some cases, the 10-12.5 hours education element in 4-11 schools is provided by the non-maintained setting for which the setting receives an element of funding from the Local Authority. In such cases, the setting is subject to inspection by Estyn and receives advisory support from the Education Support Team. Not all non-maintained settings have the capacity to deliver this provision either because of a lack of appropriately trained staff or because of an unwillingness to come under Estyn scrutiny.

Some of these schools provide an additional element of care in the form of breakfast clubs and registered or non-registered after school clubs (ASC) according to whatever demand exists. A non-registered ASC can provide care for up to 2 hours and a registered ASC can provide full wrap around in accordance with the requirements of parents.

It is in 4-11 schools where the impact of removing the Rising 4s Policy may be greatest. There will, in theory, be less available provision for children who at present enter full-time education soon after their fourth birthday and will be required to wait longer, potentially up to a full year for those who turn 4 in the Autumn term. This impact will be most acute where there is a lack of non-maintained provision either on-site or in the local area. Where the gap can be filled by non-maintained settings in providing the education element alongside the care element as described above, the impact will be less but whilst this may be an option in some cases, it will not be in others. There may also be an issue in 4-11 schools which have Flying Start provision which caters for 2-3 year olds in economically challenged areas of the county. Whilst currently, children leave Flying Start provision to enter full time school in the term of their fourth birthday, the removal of the Rising 4s policy could mean that there is nowhere for these children to go in the local area until they are able to go full time.

One potential solution for 4-11 schools where there is limited alternative provision for those children unable to start full-time school earlier is to consider changing their age range to 3-11. This would enable the school to deliver the 10-12.5 hours per week education element. This consideration would need to be made on a school-by-school basis and in line with other school organisation requirements. There are likely to be some financial implications as an

increased number of nursery children will come under maintained provision at 50% but this will be offset to some extent by fewer children receiving 100% funding by turning full-time.

Gap Analysis

There is a range of different scenarios which relate to each individual school, and these are summarised below. The 95 primary schools can be grouped under a number of broad types which serve to illustrate the complexity of the issue. Recommendations can be made for each school based on the context for each type if the Rising 4s Policy is removed following consultation:

1	3 - 11 school with non-maintained delivering care provision on school premises
2	3 - 11 school with Flying Start provision
3	3 - 11 school
4	4 - 11 school with Flying Start or approved non-maintained delivering PT education to 3-year-olds on school premises
5a	4 - 11 school with non-maintained delivering PT education to 3-year-olds on school premises
5b	4 - 11 school with approved non-maintained delivering PT education to 3-year-olds in the community in close proximity to school
5c	Type 5a and 5b schools but where there are concerns regarding the quality of education provision or the future sustainability of the setting
6	4 - 11 school with no PT education either on site or in close proximity. There may also limited local provision of care element

The following information is intended to summarise the information and recommendations:

Type 1-3

In total, these schools account for **44% of all primary schools** and all are 3-11 schools. By virtue of being 3-11 schools, they all provide the 10-12.5 hours education element for 3-year-olds on a sessional basis either in the morning or afternoon.

Type 1 and 2 schools also provide either non-maintained care or Flying Start provision on site.

Type 3 schools do not have additional care provision on site, but this is due to there either being no demand for this and/or there is adequate provision in the local community, whether through organisations such as Mudiad Meithrin or private nurseries offering day care. The implication for all of these schools is that if the Rising 4s were removed, children would remain in part-time provision for longer before entering full time education. This may generate a financial saving to the schools' delegated budget as children will continue to receive 50% funding rather than move to 100% for up to two additional terms. The removal of the Rising 4s could have implications in some 3-11 schools by creating surplus teaching staff as the number of full-time learners joining at the current entry points in January and April would be fewer. This would require evaluation on a school-by-school basis as part of the consultation process. However, subject to an analysis of space requirements for the additional nursery children and a consideration of whether it might create demand for additional wrap-around care in some schools, it is suggested that removing the Rising 4s would require no further action in these schools.

Type 4

These account for **3% of all schools**. These are 4-11 schools where the 10-12.5 hours education provision is delivered either by Flying Start or approved Mudiad Meithrin settings on the school premises. Provision of wrap around care is by Flying Start or there is deemed to be sufficient capacity in the local area via private providers. There would need to be assessment of the capacity of these non-maintained settings to retain 4-year-olds for longer prior to them becoming eligible for full time school. However, if the capacity exists, this could be to their economic advantage as their numbers of part-time children over the year should increase. It is suggested that removing the Rising 4s would require no further action in these schools.

Type 5a

11 schools (11.5%) are 4-11 schools but have non-maintained settings on the school premises who deliver the 10-12.5 hours education element, in most cases through Mudiad Meithrin. However, there are concerns that in around half of these non-maintained settings, the standard of education provision is either of insufficient quality to meet Estyn requirements or there are question marks over the future sustainability of the provision due either to a lack of qualified staffing or to low demand meaning that there are insufficient pupil numbers to maintain future viability. This would suggest that there may be a gap in the equity of provision for children in these schools if removal of the Rising 4s meant that they would remain in part-time provision for longer before entering full-time education.

It is suggested that these schools move into a further Type 5c (red) group as below. For those Type 5a schools where there is adequate and sustainable provision in the on-site non-maintained setting, it is suggested that no immediate action would need to be taken subject to an assessment of capacity to be able to retain more part-time children for longer. There will, however, need to be an assessment of the financial and staffing implications in each of these schools of fewer children turning full-time in January and April as part of the consultation process.

Type 5b

16 schools (17%) are 4-11 schools but have non-maintained settings in the community and within a reasonable distance to the school premises and who can deliver the 10-12.5 hours education element. However, as with Type 5a above, there are similar concerns regarding quality of education standards and/or future sustainability in 6 of these settings.

It is suggested that these schools are also considered under the Type 5c (red) group as below.

For those Type 5b schools where there is adequate and sustainable provision in the community in non-maintained settings close to the school, it is suggested that no immediate action needs to be taken subject to an assessment of capacity to be able to retain more part-time children for longer as there appears to be adequate provision for these children.

There will also need to be an assessment of the financial and staffing implications in each of these schools of fewer children turning full-time in January and April as for Type 5a. However, the status of type 5a and 5b schools would need to be monitored and reviewed on an annual basis to ensure that they are meeting the required standards of provision and are sustainable in terms of pupil numbers and staffing.

Type 5c (red)

12 schools (13%) are Type 5a and 5b schools where there is non-maintained provision available either on school premises or in the local community which can meet the care needs of children and families but may not be able to meet the 10-12.5 hours education element to a required standard, as described above. Removal of the Rising 4s will mean that children in these schools will remain part-time for longer and under the status quo, this could lead to a lack of equity in provision.

It is therefore recommended that consideration is given on an individual school basis to some of them becoming 3-11 schools in order that they can be appropriately funded and staffed to deliver part-time education for 3-year-olds on school premises under the control of the school. This will require a redistribution of funding with the additional 50% funding required for these schools coming from the savings made from reducing the numbers receiving full funding from going full-time in January and April.

Type 6

22 schools (23%) are 4-11 schools where there is insufficient provision of either or both of 3-year-old education and wrap around care, both in school and in the local community. In many cases these are very small schools, often in geographically remote areas where family networks may provide the care support for parents or where there is simply a lack of demand for formal care provision and where non-maintained provision is unlikely to be viable.

These are the schools where the removal of the Rising 4s may have the greatest impact due to a lack of alternatives for parents if children are forced to enter full-time provision up to a year later. For some of these schools, it is recommended that consideration is given on an individual school basis and in line with other school organisation strategies that they become 3-11 schools to enable delivery of part-time education to 3-year-olds.

For those where this is deemed to be the most appropriate strategy, it will be an improvement on the situation for children and families as things currently stand making provision for them which does not exist now.

Summary

In conclusion, the gap analysis suggests that removal of the Rising 4s Policy so that children move from nursery to reception classes and begin full-time education later, the following recommendations would apply across the 95 primary schools in Carmarthenshire:

- 44% of schools are 3-11 and would require little action.
- 19% of schools are 4-11 and would require little further action in the first instance. These would need to be monitored to ensure sustainability of non-maintained provision of education and/or care.
- 36% of schools are 4-11 and it is recommended that, on an individual school by school basis and in line with other school organisation strategies, consideration is given to them becoming 3-11 to ensure equity of provision.

