

INTERVIEW OPPORTUNITY AT PORTFIELD SPECIAL SCHOOL – TAITH

Date and time	Friday 2 February – 11:55
Interviewer and organisation	Redacted – Section 40
Length	10 minutes
Format	<p>Radio and possible video interview during in-person at visit at Portfield Special School.</p> <p>The interview is embargoed until 12/02/24.</p> <p>Redacted – Section 40 who went on the Taith visit will also take part in the interview, and - if possible – one of the learners.</p>
Location	At Portfield Special School (a quiet room for interview has been requested).
Press officer	Redacted – Section 40
Brief summary	<p>Press officer has spoken with the reporter Thursday pm, and has received assurance that line of questioning will be solely on the purpose of the visit.</p> <p>This briefing, however, does include some wider lines on Taith and ALN policy, and some hot topics in the Education portfolio.</p> <p><u>Background</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You're visiting Portfield Special School in Haverfordwest to talk to pupils and staff who have taken part in an exchange trip to Sweden and Belgium, which has been made possible thanks to Taith funding. • Many of the Portfield pupils have never been abroad before, and the Taith funding has enabled the school to access the specialist equipment needed for a foreign exchange trip, such

	<p>as hiring a specialist bus which makes accessible travel possible for disabled adults and children.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The exchange has provided the pupils with greater levels of independence, self-help and communication skills. • The latest application window for Taith is open now and closes on 20 March.
Key messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's fantastic to see the impact Taith is having, enabling us to break down barriers to international exchange and opening up opportunities for all. • It's been great to speak to pupils and staff at Portfield school about how their Taith trip has helped build confidence, broaden horizons, and grow aspirations, and how they are looking forward to welcome students from abroad to . • Since launching in 2022, Taith – the Welsh Government's international learning exchange programme – has awarded funding to support nearly 12,000 learners and staff to learn, study and volunteer at over 90 countries • I would encourage schools and all educational settings across Wales to apply for Taith funding, and the application window is open till 20th March. Go to Taith.wales to find out more and to apply.

TAITH

1. What is TAITH?

- Taith means 'journey' in Welsh. And it's our international learning exchange programme established to create life-changing opportunities for people in Wales to learn, study and volunteer all over the world. It is available for learners at all types of education settings.
- Taith is committed to making international exchange more inclusive and accessible, and supporting people previously underrepresented in international exchange to access opportunities. This includes people from disadvantaged backgrounds, ethnic minority backgrounds, Disabled people and people with additional learning needs.
- Taith has provided opportunities for nearly 12,000 learners and staff, and over 90 countries world-wide are involved.

2. Why do you invest in Taith?

- Learning about Wales and its place in the world is central to our approach to education.
- Taith provides learners with transformative opportunities to take part in an international learning exchange. It broadens learners' horizons and raises their aspirations.

3. How have learners from Portfield school benefitted from taking part in Taith?

- In November 2023, nine learners visited Calvert Trust in Flanders, Belgium; a further trip to Uppsala, Sweden, will take place later this month.
- The school will also host reciprocal trips before the end of the current school year.
- Five learners with visual impairments and complex needs, along with four staff members, from Belgium will visit 13-17 May 2024.

- Four learners and three staff members from Sweden will visit 20-24 May 2024.

4. How can schools apply to be a part of Taith?

- We are currently taking applications from educational settings.
- The application window is open till 20th of March, so go to [Taith.wales](https://taith.wales) to find out more and how to apply.

5. How will the recent budget cuts impact on this work?

- The Welsh budget is under unprecedented pressure caused by the combination of record and persistent inflation, more than a decade of austerity, and the UK Government's mismanagement of the economy.
- We have worked hard across Government to make difficult yet prudent decisions which protect people and help to minimise, as far as possible, the impact of the financial crisis.
- We have protected front-line services in schools, colleges and universities.
- The areas where we have been able to make reductions in revenue funding come from underspend in demand led budgets and grants.
- The figures for Education cuts stand out as being significantly higher than other portfolios in figures - £74.7m. It is important to stress that this is 5.3% of the budget, which is lower than some other portfolio areas.
- We are releasing £11.5m from the UPFSM budget of £70m. This is a demand-led grant to local authorities and despite the reduction there remains sufficient budget to cover the current roll out plans.
- We are continuing to invest in Taith, and are currently taking applications from education settings.

Additional Learning Needs

ALN Funding

- Wales is facing the toughest financial situation since the start of devolution. We have had to take some really difficult decisions to radically reshape our budget to focus funding on the services which matter most to the people of Wales.
- Supporting learners with ALN and implementing ALN reform is a key funding priority, with record levels of government funding supporting this area.
- Over £62 million of revenue and £40 million capital grant funding has been invested in ALN between 2020 and 2023.
- This increased investment is maintained with over £53.6 million is protected in the draft budget for 2024-25 to support ALN reforms and boost support for ALN learners. This is in addition to protecting the local authority budgets for education through the Revenue Support Grant.

ALN Reform

- The reforms the Welsh Government are making to the education system in Wales have equity and inclusion at their heart. We are committed to delivering a system where individual needs are identified early, addressed quickly and all learners are supported to reach their potential.
- This is systemic change, requiring time and commitment within an education environment that is still feeling the impact of the pandemic.
- ALN Implementation is being monitored through the evaluation of the ALN system and Estyn Thematic Reviews. In its first review (in September) Estyn commended the enthusiasm for person-centred practices, how it aligns with the Curriculum for Wales, and how it has strengthened person-centred planning and the relationships between schools and families. Estyn also highlighted the need to strengthen consistency in the application of the Act and Code.
- We know there is still more to do and we are continuing to work collaboratively with the education sector to take action and co-produce solutions.

ALN Workforce

- A skilled workforce is crucial to the success of our education reforms. All staff who work with children and young people with ALN have a responsibility for

ensuring that their learners' needs are identified and provided for. We are supporting practitioners to develop their skills through a national approach to professional learning and a professional learning entitlement which includes ALN.

ALN/SEN numbers (if raised)

- It is correct to say that there has been reduction in the number of pupils registered as Special Educational Needs (SEN) / Additional Learning Needs (ALN) since implementation of the ALN Act began.
- I commissioned Estyn to conduct a review into the implementation of the Act, which published in September and Estyn found that while the numbers identified had declined, there has been a steady increase in the number of pupils whose ALP (Additional Learning Provision) has been identified in a statutory IDP (Individual Development Plan) as the new system is implemented.
- Estyn reported that: *"The sensitive work between school ALN Co-ordinators and parents, particularly where pupils are considered not to have ALN where previously they would have had SEN, has generally resulted in parents being reassured that the provision made meets the needs of the pupil."*
- That said, I recognise that there is still more to do. I am concerned that there may still not be a consistent approach in defining ALN pupils across Wales. Further work is therefore ongoing, including workshops with all local authorities to improve everyone's understanding and ensuring a more consistent approach.

HOT TOPICS

Redacted – not in scope for relating to misinformation, messaging strategy, or reputational risk.