

Senedd Cymru
Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg

Ymchwiliad i effaith argyfwng Covid-19 ar blant
a phobl ifanc yng Nghymru

COV 131
Ymateb gan: Parents Voices in Wales

Welsh Parliament
Children, Young People and Education Committee

Inquiry into the impact of the Covid-19 outbreak on
children and young people in Wales

COV 131
Response from: Parents Voices in Wales

Mental Health

We as volunteers, along with the third sector, have worked tirelessly to support families and their CYP during this pandemic. The enterprise shown has been fantastic not only directly with young people via CIC, charities and Youth Workers but online Communities, social media and with the empowering of parents with information and support.

We are aware that mental health and wellbeing support from schools has been variable and some have adapted better than others in maintaining connections and support. Some Local Authorities have not considered it a priority in their Risk Assessment to schools which has been an opportunity missed for.

From our work we know that Mental health services are being inundated with referrals as CYP issues escalate without early intervention. This of course would frequently have been picked up by/involved school staff but there is now no community support. We would like to see early help via phone calls, digital support and advice to families and young people by schools/other services so we can ensure that these CYP affected by COVID return to school in September ready to learn.

Parents are reporting their CYP are being discharged early from mental health services or their calls are not being returned. This period of urgency requires swift action and enterprise so we call upon mental health services to work with communities from September, parent groups such as ourselves and third sector to tackle this wave in referrals.

Education

For the minority of CYP who have received virtual teacher led lessons, they have had the connection and direction from schools that was needed. This has been reported by parents as an invaluable resource. Our group poll showed that only 28% of CYP were engaging with curriculum education and the majority of these were accessing virtual teacher led lessons.

The majority of CYP have not received this and families have been left to cope with learning alone from PDF files and links to resources. The majority of working parents who do not have time available nor hold a PGCE so have struggled and ultimately many CYP have disengaged leading to poor lifestyle habits as a result.

We recognize that schools having to adapt to the crisis ie home working, childcare arrangements, hubs and complete the predicted grades process has obviously impacted on education provision but after this length of time and the evidence that education in all years across Wales was being compromised, more should have been done by schools and Local Authorities.

This does not mean that the children have not received any form of education. Many parents/carers report teaching their children new skills. However, with the huge gaps in curriculum based learning for many where does this leave our learners for September? How can we progress with another year without CYP having completed the latter?

We believe that virtual teacher led lessons (livestream and recorded) should be undertaken retrospectively for those learners that wish to catch up over the summer holiday. Could we request that Local Authorities utilize the Hwb and upload work already provided so each schools doesn't reinvent the wheel? Can we not now work collaboratively as a nation to blend our resources together? We need education across Wales to support parents and carers in this so we can engage our CYP again so they have purpose and direction.

Special Education Needs

We ask for the consideration by all agencies for Special Education Needs learners for whom this pandemic has caused additional challenges in accessing adequate provision in all areas. In terms of education provision for this cohort going forward requires much careful thought and planning.

School Return

Some of our families reported their children would not be attending school on June 29th or were content with the reduction to three weeks.

Other families were disappointed with the lack of full time education as deficit in online teacher led education from school has led to disengagement with pupils, anxiety and worry of young people and negatively impacting on their mental health and ultimately wellbeing. Families believed that the four week connection would add some structure for their children, a chance to see peers and teachers face to face, to reignite their interest in education and to connect with their teachers should they not have that support at home. For these CYP, losing that opportunity has been extremely disappointing. As one of our parents quoted 'one week less for schools is an extra week of trauma for some children.' A public poll on social media this weekend showed that 76% agreed schools should have remained open for the fourth week.

We therefore ask for Local Authorities and Education Unions to work cohesively with Welsh Government and align themselves to the adaptations that have been made in other sectors during this crisis.

We ask Local Authorities to bring learners and their families to heart of their decisions so that the needs of their learners are met first and foremost. We ask for you to consider including Parents Voices in Wales on your Council Committees across Wales so we can support you in the whole school approach going forward.

We ask for Welsh Government to communicate early to Local Authorities so that they can agree provision and both share their ideas/enterprise in the

delivery across Wales. To ensure there is a uniform approach across all schools to reduce the risk of post code lottery in provision.

We ask Unions particularly to be in touch with the needs of children and young people and to hear the voices of parents and educators who may have different views from their own. To consider that the actions of Unions may have a detrimental effect on the teaching profession who need the trust and respect of their communities. To consider the consequences of those working on the ground and the impact on learners. You should feel a duty to your communities as much as you do to your members.

We ask for collaboration of all so that going forward our CYP do not miss out on quality education, do not feel an anxiety over the loss of control over education (more notably in the GCSEs and A level years), that learners don't continue to disengage and regress.

The damage (and further potential damage) to our CYPs mental health and education from this pandemic is startling and after this length of time we need education in all its forms to rebuild and go forward, together.

Parents Voices in Wales

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