

I am writing regarding proposals for blended learning for school children in September 2021. I would like to understand how you are capturing parents and pupils thoughts and views on the proposals for schooling and teaching in the new academic year?

I felt compelled to write to share the impact of the current COVID 19 and education provision on my 8 year old son and our family. As a quick context, we are a family of 3, both parents working full time, 5 days a week, one in a senior management position in a public sector organisation and the other a company director in a national consultancy. Our son is 8 years old, a happy, loving, confident child who does well at school both socially and academically. We have no history of mental health issues, health issues and are sociable, sporty and community focused in our day to day lives.

The closure of our sons school 14 weeks ago was, of course, necessary. He attends XXXXXXXX XXXXXXXX in Penarth. We all embraced the challenge of juggling home working for both parents and the new approach to learning through worksheets issued via google classroom. This worked ok for the first few weeks but as time went on we have seen a steady and gradual decline in a number of areas.

- the online 'teaching' is very remote with little to no interaction with professional teaching. Albeit, work submitted is marked. For this reason, our son has become increasingly disengaged with this style of learning, he does not enjoy being 'taught' by his parents and every piece of work is a battle to complete often ending in his frustration through tears or anger.

- he has received one 5 minute phone call from his class teacher during the 14 period. This is the only direct interaction he has had with someone from the school.

- there are no virtual lessons or opportunities for him to see his peers in classes or to watch lessons or be taught online. We feel this is not satisfactory and does not embrace the technology available to schools.
- as a family, due to both parents trying to juggle work calls, endless virtual meetings and report deadlines to ensure we keep our jobs our son has to spend his time split between each parent and the demands of the respective jobs on each day. This is upsetting for him and challenging for everyone as we try to engage him in school work at the same.
- he is struggling to understand why we cannot spend all day playing, doing fun things as a family because we are all together at home. This further amplifies his disengagement in learning.
- in order to fulfil our job roles we regularly have to work late into the evening to catch up. This has been ongoing for 14 weeks now and is having a detrimental impact on our health and mental health as there is little to no time to wind down or do anything other than work or try and complete school work. It is becoming unsustainable to both work in full time positions, despite sympathetic employers and colleagues.
- our son is an only child and for 12 weeks in lockdown he did not see or play with another child in person, this had a severe impact on his mental health and well-being and as a result he has developed anxiety around a wide range of things. Including but not limited to separation from us, loneliness, sadness and anger around how his life has changed so quickly.
- his mental health and anxiety has led to terrible problems sleeping and for 2 weeks he was only sleeping around 5 hours a night which led to days and nights of over tiredness, further anxiety and sadness for him and us.
- more recently we have met his friends to enable him to play but his anxiety and fears are still prevalent and have impacted on how he interacts with his friends. This is sad to see, especially as he has always been such a happy and care free child.

I appreciate this information is very detailed but I wanted to demonstrate the impact of the current situation on him and our family. Whilst I accept that some of these concerns relate to the lockdown we have all experienced. However a significant reason for our concerns is that they are a direct result of him no longer attending school, being taught in person by a teacher and the most important element in our mind, his interaction with other children.

The proposal for blended learning (is there a definition of this?), are in our view, not a satisfactory way for our son to have access to education, interaction with peers, professionals and freedom to thrive away from the confines of a family home where 2 parents are working full time to keep their jobs.

The current impact of home learning is causing anxiety, upset and challenges that our family have never faced. At a national level, we feel that the impact of closing play areas, schools and support for families is being underestimated and there is a need for a frank and honest dialogue with parents about how we move forward in September. Life is full of risks and in all cases there is a need to balance the impact of decisions against the risks.

We feel that the risk to our sons education, development and mental health outweighs the risk of COVID 19, with the correct procedures in place to protect him and teachers.

Please can you explain how such conversations with parents can be facilitated and important information about the impact of current learning methods are being objectively captured to feed into future planning for education?

One last thing to note, our son attended is once a week 4 hour session at school today and he came home in a much more positive place, happy and feeling safe back in school. This further reinforces to us the importance of children being allowed to return to school full time in September.

I would be most grateful for a response to the questions we have posed.

Kind regards

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