

Senedd Cymru
Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg

Welsh Parliament
Children, Young People and Education Committee

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

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

COV 179
Ymateb gan: Unigolyn

COV 179
Response from: Individual

I would like to express my concerns and strong opposition for the potential plan for continued 'blended learning' and only a part-time return to school for our children here in Wales in September.

I have completely supported the Welsh Governments decision to close schools in March due to the Covid-19 outbreak. This was a difficult time for everyone. I am a key worker and have been working in the hospitals throughout including being redeployed to the Principality Stadium for several weeks. My husband is Chief Executive of a Governing Body and has had to perform this role full-time, in extremely stressful circumstances from home while caring for our 1 and 4 year old when schools and nurseries closed.

Since March my elder son who is in Reception has been sent work to do online daily. He requires supervision to do this due to his age and this has been almost impossible for my husband to do with him while working full time as well as having a 1 year old at home. We have tried to make up for this on weekends where we can but this has meant little or no family time.

We are not primary school teachers and we are trying our best but my son has become increasingly disengaged with school work and I worry about his progress. This is an important time learning his phonics, letter and number formation. There is a reason England wanted Reception age children back in school first, because they are laying down their foundation skills. My son is missing this.

I have not felt that our school have supported us enough at times. I asked for occasional 1:1 video calls with his teacher to hear him read or do his tricky words and have contact with his teacher. However, this did not happen. No work or books were sent out to us, we had to purchase a printer in order to complete the worksheets and buy reading books online. This is something we appreciated we had to accept, like many families across the country.

HOWEVER, I worry deeply about my son's education and the quality of our family life if this continues into the next academic year. I become even more concerned to know that his peers in England and Scotland will be in school learning next year and our children will potentially be in school part-time with the expectation that we as parents can 'fill the gaps'.

There is already a gap in educational performance between England and Wales, how large will that gap become? What will the long-term effect be on our children's future job prospects competing with children who have not missed months on end of quality education? The elephant in the room seems to be, how can parents work and be expected to educate their children? This could have an even bigger effect on an already battered economy for this country if parents are forced to reduce hours.

There is also the hugely concerning effect on children's well-being and mental health from not being in school. I have noticed a huge change in my son's behaviour and anxiety levels during this time and I feel a large part of this is due to the loss of his usual routine and structure as well as the loss of social interaction. There is a body of evidence now highlighting the increase in childhood anxiety and even child suicide during the Lockdown period. Then we have the huge risks to vulnerable children, out of sight from their usual support networks facing increased risks of abuse and neglect (reports suggesting less than 5% of vulnerable children have been attending 'Hub' schools during Lockdown). What about children with complex physical and learning needs unable to attend Specialist Schools and the vital professional input and support they provide?

All this damage and for what cause? The risk of children contracting Covid-19 is low and evidence shows that they are also a low risk of onward transmission of the virus (see attached article below). I am concerned the push for part-time school/reduced numbers/social distancing in schools is being driven by Teachers and/or their Unions, based on flawed evidence. Who is representing our children and their futures?

I have concerns that there has been little/no consultation with parents'/care givers on the potential plans for 'blended learning' or on how schools have performed during the last 3 months. Instead choosing to source most/all information from schools themselves (potential bias there maybe??).

I would strongly oppose the potential for part-time school/'blended learning' and feel the risk to our children's health and future would be extremely detrimental. As quoted in the Children's Commissioner article attached below:

" the epidemiological benefit of keeping schools closed is unlikely to grow over time, especially if the number of infections or R is falling. Yet the wider social costs will accumulate with each day that passes. Therefore, one can argue that at some point the costs must overtake the benefits".

<https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/publication/we-dont-need-no-education/>

Novel Coronavirus 2019 Transmission Risk in Educational Settings

<https://academic.oup.com/cid/article/doi/10.1093/cid/ciaa794/5862649>