

Kirsty Williams AS/MS
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Minister for Education



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref P-05-1087
Ein cyf/Our ref KW/06794/20
Janet Finch-Saunders MS
Chair, Petitions Committee

2 December 2020

Dear Janet,

Thank you for your correspondence in relation to P-05-1087, which refers to the detrimental effects on children who are required to isolate for 14 days due to Covid-19.

Please let me assure you that I understand the disruption that has been caused to education during the ongoing pandemic. Local authorities and schools are required to work closely to agree and implement measures to make our learning environments COVID-19 secure.

We know that the risk to children themselves of becoming severely ill from COVID-19 is very low. However, there remains some on-going uncertainty in transmissibility of the disease by children. Schools are therefore required to implement measures to reduce the risk of transmission, including the concept of 'bubbles', which are designed to ensure any disruption to learning is minimised to as small a group as possible. Our current guidance states any staff member or learner displaying symptoms of COVID-19 must stay at home and arrange a test. Should a learner test positive for coronavirus, the other learners within that bubble may be asked, as part of the Test, Trace and Protect procedure, to self-isolate for fourteen days to prevent wider transmission in the community.

The current medical and scientific advice confirms the self-isolation period is 14 days, this is because it can take up to 14 days for you to develop coronavirus symptoms after you catch the virus and in this time you can pass it on to others. Isolating will reduce the chance of the transmission of coronavirus in Wales and help prevent family, friends and the community from contracting coronavirus, as well as helping to protect the NHS in Wales.

We have been clear that the size of bubbles should be kept as small as possible and that social distancing, reducing the number of contacts and hand hygiene continue to be important measures in reducing transmission. However, every school is different and what works in one setting may not be appropriate in another. Schools should assess their

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

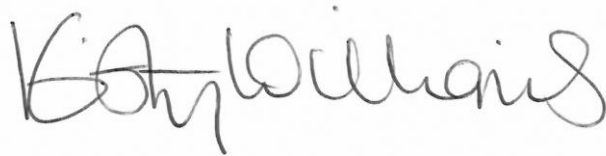
circumstances and if class-sized groups are not compatible with offering a full range of subjects or managing the practical logistics within and around school, they can look to implement a year group (or half-year group) sized contact groups. We are working with schools and local authorities to seek ways to implement the bubble approach as effectively as possible within the circumstances of each school setting. We have also provided schools with additional [resources](#) to help reduce disruption.

In response to the suggestions that are made within the correspondence regarding testing, I can confirm that we are currently working with HEIs across Wales on piloting the asymptomatic testing of students and staff using Lateral Flow Devices, and we are considering wider use for these devices across a range of areas including schools.

It is essential that, when it is safe to do so, we will keep schools open during the pandemic. That is why I am pleased that in the recent update to the testing priorities for Wales, education and childcare staff will be given priority in order to keep schools and settings open.

I appreciate this continues to be difficult time. We are continuously monitoring the situation closely and guidance will be kept current based on the latest medical and scientific advice available to us. Please be assured our overall aim is to keep learners in schools and learning safely and we do not want to disrupt their education unnecessarily whilst balancing the need to protect public health interests.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kirsty Williams', written in a cursive style.

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