

Senedd Cymru  
Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg

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

COV 189  
Ymateb gan: NAHT Cymru

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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 189  
Response from: NAHT Cymru

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Dear Minister,

I write to express the serious concerns of our members following the announcement today regarding the use of face coverings in schools.

We appreciate the ever-changing situation when it comes to medical advice relating to coronavirus and the need to respond to the latest information when it is received. We welcome the fact that the Welsh Government has reviewed their guidance given the updated information published by the WHO over the weekend.

However, I must convey in the strongest possible terms the impossible situation our members have been put in due to the announcement that decisions on face coverings will be made at school and Local Authority level.

School leaders are not medical experts, they are experts in education. They do not, nor should they be expected to, possess the skills required to make a decision of this magnitude.

NAHT has supported the Welsh Government's decision to allow school leaders the flexibility to make decisions relating to the practicalities of returning to school. We believe that was and remains the right thing to do when it comes to a host of practical implications in returning to school. However, this decision does not fall into that category.

It is unacceptable that school leaders are expected to shoulder the responsibility of deciding if face coverings are required in schools when they are not qualified to make that judgement.

We all want to see pupils back in class, with their teachers and their classmates. School leaders and their teams have worked hard over the summer playing their part to get schools ready for the start of the Autumn term.

Now we need the Welsh Government to demonstrate they are in control of this situation. There needs to be absolute clarity about who is required to wear face

coverings and when they need to be worn. This should include clear information in regards to pupils, teachers and parents.

If the decisions are left this to individual schools and Local Authorities to make, we will once again see a mixed economy across Wales, with different schools having different measures in place which will be unsettling and potentially unsafe for pupils, parents and staff alike. This will portray a message of confusion not confidence in returning to school.

If face coverings become mandatory in certain schools, then they will have to purchase many thousands of masks. This will undoubtedly come at an additional and unforeseen cost and may result in shortages as demand increases. There is a very real risk that given the time it will take to review risk assessments and the fact that headteachers are supposed to be on a summer break, there will simply not be enough time to make informed local decisions before schools are due to open next week.

I urge you to reconsider the guidance issued this afternoon and for the government to make the decision, one way or another, and take this burden from headteachers. If that decision is that face masks should be worn in schools, the government must guarantee that enough masks will be available to schools and that the costs of purchasing them are met in full.