

Senedd Cymru
Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg
Absenoldeb Disgyblion

Welsh Parliament
Children, Young People and Education Committee
Pupil absence

Ymateb gan Parentkind

Evidence from Parentkind

As a national charity, Parentkind gives those with a parenting role a voice in education. It invests substantial resources in representing parent views on their child's learning to local, regional and national governments and agencies, because evidence tells us that parental participation in education benefits all children in all schools and society as a whole. Parentkind is home to a network of PTA fundraisers in Wales, Northern Ireland and England. The charity brings specialist fundraising support and advice to parent volunteers so that every school can benefit from a successful PTA. Our 13,000 PTA members raise over £120 million per year, placing Parentkind alongside some of the largest charities in the UK.

Parentkind is sending this letter in response to the Children, Young People and Education Committee's inquiry into Pupil Absence. When we refer to 'parents' in this this letter, we mean it as a shorthand to encompass anyone with a parenting role, inclusive of foster parents, guardians and carers. Parentkind will always welcome policymakers' consultations being mindful to include this group and hear its views. In order to respond effectively to any consultation, Parentkind polls parents for their views. However, on this occasion Parentkind has used various polls conducted in the past to inform its response.

Pupil Absence

Overall, Parentkind recognises the importance of children attending school regularly. Pupil absence undoubtedly comes with short and longer-term risks and consequences for learners. While the law states that all children of compulsory school age must receive a full-time education, children and their opportunities are harmed by consistent absence. Lost learning is hard to catch up on, and this becomes worse as a backlog of content builds up. What's more, when persistent, absence can be treated as a legal problem with fines being issued. This switch, from a school being solely a place of learning, to being a body where fines are issued, can cause serious breakdown in the home and school relationship.

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Parents views on pupil absence

Research from Parentkind has tended to show that parents have voiced concerns that could help explain why pupil absence occurs, for example:

- In 2018, research from Parentkind's Annual Parent Survey found that just 24% of parents had been consulted on their child's school's absence policy and had taken the opportunity to respond.
- In 2020 Parentkind's Annual Survey found that three in five parents were worried about their child's emotional wellbeing and mental health at school. It also showed that two in five children had experienced stress related to homework and exams.
- In 2022, Parentkind polling on school attendance found that there was strong opposition to parents being fined for unauthorised absence, with 73% of parents disagreeing with the action. This figure was notably higher among parents who have children living with SEND (91%).
- Moreover, 48% of parents generally support the idea of schools having the same penalties for unauthorised absence, but only 20% of parents of children with SEND agree, with 69% disagreeing.
- Furthermore, 85% of parents of children with SEND believed that their child had barriers to attending school regularly, compared to 24% of parents of children without SEND.

Parentkind's surveys consistently show that parents want more of a say in their child's education as what happens in school can also impact family life. Parents are extremely important stakeholders in education and it is particularly important that parent voice is heard at all levels.

The fact that absenteeism is more prevalent among particular groups, like children who live with SEND, shows the importance of parent voice being present at all levels. Children and young people living with SEND face unique challenges that can prevent them attending school. Parentkind research in 2022 showed that parents whose children have experienced barriers to attending school felt unsupported. Around 50% of parents in general felt that the school was supportive of their situation but this figure dropped to 28% amongst the parents of children living with SEND. Clearly, absence policies, their consultation and how involved parents feel have sticking points. However, these sticking points tend to negatively impact SEND parents and children more. It is important that parents of this group are listened to at all levels because parents of children with SEND may require different support and a more flexible approach to enable their child to attend school regularly. It also suggests that current attendance policies may have an outsized negative impact on parents and children with SEND.

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Parentkind urges the Welsh Government to consider suggestions like adopting Parentkind's Blueprint for Parent-Friendly Schools and the inclusion of parents' views in any decision making. This will ensure that when significant changes or policies are made that may impact a particular group, parent voice is present. Parentkind's Blueprint for Parent-Friendly Schools is a framework that provides best practice for schools to implement great parental participation. One essential component is effective two-way communication. Parentkind's research shows the significance of this, as it ensures that both parents and schools work together to support the child. This is especially needed among groups who face different challenges.

Parentkind's policy solutions

When forming new policies, Parentkind would draw attention to its three policy solutions. Parentkind worked with the Centre for Education and Youth (CfEY) to develop three policy solutions that will bridge the gap between home and school and seek to improve outcomes for young people. The solutions are:

1. **Parent participation in schools, alongside Parentkind's Blueprint for Parent-Friendly Schools.**

The framework gives school leaders a powerful, easy-to-use tool to help facilitate long-lasting improvements in parental participation that includes robust self-evaluation. The blueprint uses five key drivers: leadership, ethos and resource, effective two-way communication, supporting learning at home, involvement in school life and community engagement. Driver two, effective two-way communication, stipulates that building a relationship of trust between school and community, parents and teachers is imperative. Solutions for policy-makers include :

- **Sending parents surveys and feedback forms periodically that will gather a snapshot of their views**
- **Increasing the use of technology; some schools are using communication tools like direct emails to ensure more parents can take part.**

2. **Parent consultation in schools**

Schools' approaches to parent consultation can be inconsistent, and parents can feel that whilst they want to have a say in their children's education, they may not be heard. Parent consultation and communication is important as it enables parents to support schools more effectively.

Strategies for parent consultation can include:

- **Consultation evenings**
- **surveys and questionnaires**
- **parent councils and**

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- **involvement in school governance.**

Parentkind's research has shown that parents' feedback is vital in shaping policies that meet families and communities' needs.

3. Parent Consultation at the local, regional and national level

Too often, parents are not consulted at a local, regional and national level about their children's education, despite parents actively wanting to engage in these conversations.

I hope that the panel will consider Parentkind's comments, and I look forward to reading the committee's report in due course. Please don't hesitate to contact me if you would like to discuss further any of the points made within Parentkind's response.