

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 181a  
Ymateb gan: Unigolyn

COV 181a  
Response from: Individual

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We are a family of 4, one child in year 6, one in year 4 and two working parents. We are lucky to have always both worked from home for part of each week (I run by own business) so we are set up to do so. We are also lucky to have good tech at home so all four of us have had access to laptops and a good internet connection throughout.

We have put many hours into working with our children to do a good chunk of the school work set for them (usually worksheet type activities posted on google classroom) but it has been challenging at times to motivate them and we don't feel their learning has advanced during this period. They haven't had any zoom, video lessons or telephone calls from school so we have had to effectively teach, motivate and support them through the work that has been set. Both have struggled to motivate themselves independently so almost always need us with them to complete the school work provided. This has been challenging for us as working parents, still needing to complete a full day's work so nerves have been fraught at times in our household!

The school have done some lovely initiatives like assemblies on their you tube channel, encouraging children to complete activities for a virtual sports day and musical extravaganza and then send in videos/photos which were put together on the you tube channel. Our two enjoyed watching the sports day videos in particular as they felt a bit more connected to their classmates and teachers.

Throughout the lockdown period our two children have really missed the interaction with their peers, the group work and discussions, etc that form part of a normal school day and of course the interaction with their teachers. My son in year 6 has also missed all the fun end of primary school activities which he was really looking forward to it.

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Please could somebody answer where my children are going to go when I have to go back to work ? There is no option for me to work from home . I have three children ranging from three to 11 and nobody is telling me what the plans are for September..I am sure as more parents go back to work and are no longer furloughed thousands of working parents across Wales will face the same dilemma. 30 free hour childcare scheme has been stopped pending review this will already mean our childcare is 300 pounds extra a month. Are working mums

being intentionally pushed from the workplace ? How can we plan for reasonable childcare when we have no idea what school will look like... even if we could will childcare providers be open....and who might I ask will be paying the additional childcare? We have all pulled together during the crisis but asking people to work from home while homeschooling is no longer sustainable. Our children's mental and physical health is suffering (as well as parents) . One of my children's school has written to me saying a blended learning approach will be in place for the next year. What do welsh govt know that had influenced this?.Many parents believe that school will be back to normal in September ... there will be a real problem when they realise that they could loose their houses and jobs as a result of children not being in school? I repeat this current situation is NOT sustainable for families across Wales. I haven't even gone into the social physical emotional effects on my own children as I am sure many others will cover this .

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I'm an operations manager in the a government department so fall under the category whereby my children could get keyworker childcare. My son falls under early years provision so this would mean me having to get them to separate places opposite sides of Cardiff and then get into work and do the same on the way home.

My job is extremely demanding anyway and this only increased during covid.

My husband was informed he must work from home as they were reducing footfall into the building but his job too requires he is online and working for 8-10 hours a day- again demand increased due to covid.

My decision not to send my children to hub schools for their mental wellbeing and also due to the issue I explain above - meant that they have been home with my husband but unfortunately not learning due to us both still working full time.

My eldest, a 6 year old girl, has quite evidently regressed- speaking more baby like and really struggling reading etc. I've had an overwhelming feeling of guilt not being able to provide her education- but either way I look at it, even if she'd gone to a hub full time, it was and still is, only Childcare - not education. My children are at a disadvantage having a keyworker/full time working parents either way I looked at it.

My youngest, 3 year old boy, is now able to attend his private Creche which has been highly beneficial for him but my daughter will only receive a day a week for 3 weeks before the holidays.

Not only are the children struggling but My mental health has been significantly affected by this by constantly worrying about them - it's so important for everyone's sake that children can go back full time as soon as possible!

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Just prior to the school closures our 6 year old son came home from

school and said "Daddy, if I forget to wash my hands like they tell me at school, will I kill somebody?" This made us realise just what impact the school's Coronavirus lessons were having on our son. At home we had told him the basics of the situation without making him fearful. And we had specifically shielded him from the news and our own conversation about the virus, as he is sensitive, thoughtful, and inquisitive. His hands were red and raw from the repeated hand washing that he'd been asked to do at school. In the following days he asked if his grandparents were going to die. Mentally, as time has gone on he has also struggled with not seeing and playing with his friends.

Our school has provided limited help with home schooling. There are no live lessons. At the start there was nothing, but now we get a weekly A4 "virtual learning menu" with some tasks, and some online MyMaths work. The learning menu is completely inadequate, so we have had to do our own thing. But we are two working parents, one a doctor, one a small business owner. This has meant the home schooling has fallen on one of us, and meant the business has had to take a backseat. But with a 2 year old at home as well, only so many hours a day can be given. We are fortunate that our son is on the whole fairly keen with homelearning.

But 1-day-a-week school with social distancing and not being able to play and touch friends, is just going to make our son more anxious and harm his mental health, so for the 3 days of non-lesson school-time, it's just not worth sending him. "Blended" learning is not feasible, schools must be open normally in September.

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Our family has really struggled during lockdown. I can honestly say it's been the most stressful time for us all. We have two children who are almost 5 and 2 Years old and expecting another baby next month. My husband is a hospital Consultant and like many other Health Professionals has been on a Covid ICU rota which means his days and night shifts have been constantly changing and at very short notice. I work part-time for a major bank but luckily I can work from home. Since I am not a key worker we were denied access to our local hub. So I've been home with the two children whilst trying to juggle working, homeschooling, looking after a toddler and being pregnant. My husband has had annual leave postponed during this time (so unable to help me) and spent many days trying to sleep pre and post night shifts, without success as we have all been at home and our children obviously don't understand the need to be quiet so daddy can sleep. So he's absolutely shattered, as we all are.

Our children are normally so happy, outgoing, active and polite (especially our four year old) and it's been heartbreaking seeing their personalities change during this time. They've become very agitated and angry..... and our stress and anxiety has clearly rubbed off on them. However, seeing their Nan and a couple of friends over the last couple of weeks has definitely helped.

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My daughter is in year 9 and is an only child. Her friends and social interactions are crucial to her ability to thrive. School provides the biggest opportunity for this to happen. Prior to the closure of schools, she was a typical happy teenager. She enjoyed seeing her friends in school, she was working hard and doing really well academically. Out of school she was busy with her passion for dance, which again provided great opportunities for social interactions and shared experiences. At home she was often in her room but not unsociable and not often moody. Never solitary.

Since schools closed on the 20th March, her life has effectively shut down. Schools closed so dance closed too. Overnight she lost access to all the crucial social connections that make her who she is. She was facing weeks and months stuck with 2 adults for company. Much as we love her and she us, we do not think on her wavelength and she needs the company of those who do.

School work became 2 to 3 hours a day on the laptop each morning. I have not seen her have ANY live online lessons. She has kept up as best she can but has not pushed herself as she would in school. I worry that she will have missed 65 school days out of a possible 67 school days by the end of this term, and right at the end of key stage 3. That's a mountain to climb in terms of catching up.

She has become a moody and solitary teenager who barely has the inclination for a conversation with me some days. She does some things but not much. Food has been a battle because whilst she is slim, she eats when she is bored. It's a struggle fighting with her over things like food because my heart bleeds for her and those like her, but I can't allow a physical consequence of lockdown as well as the mental and social ones she is already facing. She goes out for walks alone with our dog and then I fear for her safety when she walks 3 miles plus because she wants to get out of the house. Then ensues another battle over her safety.

She is surviving not thriving and the continuation of social distancing in schools is catastrophic to her wellbeing as well as her education. Part time schooling with online learning is damaging her life chances irreparably, especially as Welsh schools already lag behind the English schools in terms of achievement. The long term effects on her mental and social health are an enormous worry. I want my happy daughter back.

During all of this I have been working from home. I will, by September, be back in the office and I will need her back in school full time without social distancing at that point. How can I possibly do my job and leave my teenager at home to become even more solitary than she already has? The damage this is doing to her keeps me awake at night, all for a virus which targets children and young people the least. I feel our children are being prevented from having the education and social interactions they have a fundamental right to just to protect the elderly. It cannot be that this is allowed to continue.

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I live in Swansea and have three children, ages 7, 5 and 2. I work full time for Macmillan Cancer Support in a fundraising role and my husband in a hospital Doctor working in Swansea. The first six weeks of lockdown were a complete nightmare for us. My husband was pulled onto an emergency covid rota and so clearly could not provide any childcare. This meant I was working full time from home, whilst caring for and trying to home school my two eldest and caring for a toddler. It was so unbelievably stressful. The Local Education Authority in Swansea took the decision that both parents need to be key workers to get any emergency childcare so we couldn't get any help, despite the fact my husband was (and still is) on the front line in hospital. This is where the Government have just not been transparent. They've really let us down. Kirsty Williams gives interviews saying there's help for key worker families, that's just not always the case but she doesn't address this. Thankfully for us I was put on furlough in May however I am very aware that there are so many working families including single parent families in Wales who have not been so fortunate - I don't know how they are coping.

Since being on furlough it has been easier in the sense that I am not also trying to balance work however trying to teach my children is not easy. My 5 year old is very resistant to doing any work, I need to have a battle with him every day to get him to engage at all. And I can't say I really blame. He's 5, he's not used to being made to sit at a table and do school work sheets at home. We get a weekly upload of work once a week onto Google Classroom and some written comments back when the work is handed in however I would not call this blended learning. What is blended learning anyway? The Government haven't told us their expectations around this. I am deeply concerned around the lack of a plan for children to return to school full time in September.

I was incredibly disheartened last week to see Kirsty Williams say that blended learning will continue for 'some time'. This is not acceptable. Blended learning is not an option for the majority of families in Wales and it is entirely dependant on the child's and parent's ability to participate. Just two per cent of children in Wales have received four hours of daily online lessons, just over a quarter have received two to three hours and nearly three quarters have accessed just an hour or less ( Schoolwork in lockdown: new evidence of educational poverty, UCL Institute of Education). A blended learning approach is near impossible to implement effectively for even the most privileged families and this has highlighted the degree of educational poverty that exists in Wales.

The evidence now suggests that the risk to children from the virus is virtually negligible so the government now needs to justify why our children are still being denied their right to an education. They need to be held to account in their ongoing failure to do this. It is clear that in Scotland and England they have recognised that all children must be back in school from September and I am delighted for those children that it looks like they will not be required to socially distance. The healthy development of children depends on group interaction and play. The Welsh government urgently needs to issue its plan on how it will ensure all children return to school full time from September. By September my children

will have received three days of in-school learning in the space of five and a half months, and that's more than many children who are only receiving three half days - this is not something for the Welsh government to be proud of.

We are failing our children, the Government response is now completely disproportionate to the risk. Our children must go back to school full time from September with no social distancing.

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I am a mother to 3 children aged 10, 8 and 6. The children broke up a week early than most for lockdown in March because my eldest was sent home as she has asthma (although she was not ill when sent home).

My husband and I are separated and he lives in London (We're in Wales) so the children have been very cut off from him and any other family. We have been totally isolated and I've gone to bed each night hoping nothing happens because I'd have nobody to help. (I have a few heart problems and have been waiting for treatment and scans which are on hold). We've not seen any of the family or even chatted to anyone over the fence.

I quickly had to change my work schedule as I work from home as an ESL tutor to overseas students. I am lucky to have been able to keep working but I have a minimum number of hours I have to do before my contract is terminated.

The children adapted quite well at first and were doing their work every day but as the weeks went on and they started to get very disillusioned. Work was being sent via email and google classroom but there was absolutely no contact (online or by phone) from their teachers. Work was also not marked so I had to do this myself.

My kids have always had good reports from school and they work hard at school but this seems to have not been the case with homeschooling. They have no interest in doing their work and I have to constantly nag them to get a few bits done. Looking at it from a child's point of view, I can't blame them. Suddenly the people they spent 6 hours a day looking up to and working for have disappeared out of their lives with 'good old mum' stepping in. To them, it must feel like they have been abandoned suddenly by everyone who meant anything to them. They don't understand.

I feel constantly guilty about not living up to the expectations of a good parent who has home schooling sorted. Education for my children is one of the greatest things I could give them but I can't give it properly.

I often get up at 4am to work before they wake up and finish at 10pm so I can work either side of them being up and about. I'm exhausted and feel pretty

depressed and anxious. I don't have the energy to play or do much else with them.

I feel that this situation has impacted my eldest the most. She is not sleeping well and struggles to come out of her room. She is just about to enter her tweens and I can feel her stress. She gets angry easily now and shouts at her siblings. There are constant arguments between them.

The kids have 'coped' until now, but for how much longer will they cope with this situation, I don't know.

I know we are luckier than many (and I do tell them this) as we have a garden and internet access and I really do feel for those kids and parents who are worse off.