

Senedd Cymru  
Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg

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

COV 139  
Ymateb gan: Unigolyn

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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 139  
Response from: Individual

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I am writing to you to share my deep concerns around the governments continued plans for blended learning, to be taken into consideration in your CYP & Education Committee Consultation.

I was dismayed last week to see Kirsty Williams say that blended learning will continue for 'some time'. This is not acceptable or realistic and it will harm children. Using my own experience as an example, my husband is a Doctor in Swansea and I work full time for Macmillan Cancer Support in a fundraising role. We have three children, ages 7, 5 and 2. In Swansea, the LEA took the decision that only families where two parents are key workers are eligible for emergency hub childcare so we are not entitled to any help. My husband is quite rightly working in hospital so the childcare and teaching has fallen to me whilst trying to continue to work full time from home. I truly just don't understand how I am supposed to cope with all this. How am I supposed to teach my two older children, whilst caring for a two year old and working full time? The impact that this is having on my family just from a stress and mental health perspective is devastating. And for the key worker families who are entitled to emergency childcare, what is the plan for their continued learning? We are told that the purpose of the emergency childcare provision is childcare, not education. So who is educating this group of children?

My children are missing an enormous amount of education because I just don't have the time to dedicate to it and when we do sit down to try to do some work my 5 year old in particular is incredibly difficult to engage. He doesn't want to do school work at home. This is not normal for him, it's not what makes him feel safe and secure. His entire routine has been tipped on its head and I'm there worrying about getting him to learn his 3 x tables. Not to mention just from a purely practical perspective the constant interruptions from my 2 year old. The governments failure to address how working families are to make this blended learning approach work is astonishing. We are at a loss as to what to do. Do I need to give up a job that I love? We can't financially afford for me to do that. Does my husband request to reduce his hours at work at a time when the NHS needs him

more than ever? The stress of this is taking a huge toll and this situation will be replicated in varying forms up and down the country, in every community. And ultimately, my children are not receiving their right to an education. They are doing an hour of school work per day, max. Some days nothing. What's blended about this? A blended learning approach is entirely dependant upon both the child and the adult having the ability and resources to engage. For a variety of reasons the vast majority of families in Wales are finding this completely unrealistic with around 75% of children doing an hour or less per day (UCL Institute of Education). It is clear that this approach is failing our children, highlighting the degree of educational poverty that exists in Wales and is set to get even greater.

The evidence now suggests that the physical 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. 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. I am extremely concerned about the welfare of my children in this respect should they be made to attempt social distancing during the time they spend in school. I believe that this will harm our children far more than the physical threat of the virus and there is mounting evidence to support this. 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 and in violation of their right to an education. I believe that our children must go back to school full time from September with no social distancing.