

Senedd Cymru
Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg

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

COV 80a

Ymateb gan: Y Gymdeithas
Genedlaethol i Blant Byddar Cymru

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 80a

Response from: National Deaf Children's Society
Cymru

I have seen this news article today on Wales Online (<https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/education/announcement-schools-made-next-week-18330951>), which states that the Minister is considering use of PPE within schools.

As I highlighted when we met just before half term, face coverings present significant communication barriers for deaf children and young people. Communication for virtually all deaf people, including those who use sign language, relies in part on being able to see someone's face clearly – whether this is for lip-reading, understanding facial expressions or for understanding non-verbal communication more widely (e.g. seeing whether someone is smiling or looks upset). An obstruction to the mouth makes it extremely difficult, if not impossible, for a deaf person to understand what is being said. Face masks also have the effect of obscuring and muffling speech, making it harder for deaf people to make use of any residual hearing that they have.

The barriers that deaf children could face in this regard at school could have huge implications for both their learning and emotional wellbeing. This is also likely to present difficulties for the many children experiencing a temporary hearing loss (80% before the age of ten).

In light of this, I wanted to get in touch with you to highlight the following:

- The news article highlights that the Minister is potentially considering guidance on use of face masks in schools, in accordance with advice from the Chief Medical Officer. We understand that face masks have not been recommended for use in education settings in England, but of course appreciate that the Welsh Government and its own Chief Medical Officer will assess and determine the situation for Wales. We would strongly urge that if this is pursued, the guidance should contain clear information around the impact of facemasks for deaf children and those with a temporary loss, as well as guidance for facilitating communication for these learners. I know that the Deputy

Chief Medical Advisor recently issued a letter on communication with deaf patients and facemasks for health professionals.

- We are mindful of the difficulties in accessing PPE at this time, but would strongly urge that if the Welsh Government does recommend use of face coverings in the education context, it considers the availability of transparent coverings/face visors, which would be more accessible for deaf learners. While the need to test for certain standards applies to the commissioning of facemasks for use in health settings, if advising education settings to use masks, it could be worth considering what level of mask would be required in education settings as this would have a bearing on the speed at which transparent coverings could be accessed.
- It is possible that, for some deaf children, the use of face coverings may mean that attending school is not possible. In these instances, we would seek assurance on how children would be supported.
- We would stress the importance of Teachers of the Deaf being involved on a case by case basis of how any planned use of face coverings might affect individual deaf learners.
- I also thought it would be helpful to share our communication tips for the general public around face masks. These are available at <https://www.facebook.com/112180125505122/videos/3087775494640238> and <https://www.ndcs.org.uk/blog/the-impact-of-face-masks-on-deaf-children/>

I hope this information is helpful. Please do feel free to discuss this further with us and keep us in the loop. We do appreciate the need to follow safety measures at this time, but we also know that accessibility around face coverings in general is a matter causing many of our members concern at this time.