

Senedd Cymru  
Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg

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

COV 164  
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 164  
Response from: Individual

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I'm writing to express my deep concern at the current press reports suggesting Wales is considering a blended learning approach to schools reopening in September, and not a full time reopening.

As a parent of two primary school children (currently years one and three), I have watched in dismay over the last four months as they have had to cope with not being in school, and the impact that has had to their mental health and to their education.

I consider myself and my husband to be very engaged and committed parents, and we have tried our hardest to ensure neither child has suffered unnecessarily during the lockdown period. Although my husband and I both work, we have juggled our hours and split our time to ensure that we deliver the home schooling provision that has been provided by their school as best we can. However neither of us are teachers, and with the best will in the world we cannot replicate the skills of teaching professionals who have had years of training and experience. We also cannot replicate the other learning children receive in school - interaction with peers and the learning that results from that, learning the skills of social interaction and just the sheer joy children have from being around other children the same age.

Both my children returned to school for one day this week. They were both beyond excited to return, and came out of school the happiest I have seen them since March 20th. Both wanted to return the very next day and we have all been on countdown ever since to the next day they will attend. No matter how hard my husband and I try, we will never be able to replicate what they get from being in school.

I totally understand the reasons for schools having been closed initially, and the provisions that have been put in place so far. I think the Welsh government handled the initial return to school well, and it is a credit to them that all pupils have been given the chance to attend school before the academic year finishes. However as this pandemic has continued, as more and more data becomes available, and as we can see what happens as other countries open up ahead of us, the evidence is very clear that the risk to children is extremely small, and that the risks to their carers (both to teachers and to family at home) is the same as for any other working group. Children are more at risk getting to and from school than from covid-19. All evidence to date from key worker groups and countries where schools have reopened more

fully show no significant increase in the transmission of covid-19 from children to the adults with whom they come into contact.

In addition, as a working parent, I do not understand how a blended learning approach is meant to work when children do not have one parent or carer at home and available full time. My husband and I are lucky to have employers who have been very understanding of our need to balance work hours with looking after our children and home schooling, but we do not know how long that will continue. We are also lucky that I work part time. I know many households where this is not the case, and parent(s) have to work full time. I do not understand how that can be successfully balanced with the home learning portion of blended learning. As the majority of people need their incomes to live, or even simply survive, sadly the people to be impacted by this will be the children, when parents are unable, despite their best efforts, to successfully support home learning.

Given all of this, I strongly believe the correct course of action is to plan to open schools fully in September, consistent with the other home nations. This virus is going to be around for a long time to come, and no-one knows when, or even if, a vaccine will be developed. To continue to deny our children a full and proper education when the evidence to date does not support it will only serve to disadvantage Welsh children even further than they have already experienced since 20th March, both academically and in mental health.

As I see it, blended learning from September can only negatively impact the majority of Welsh children. I know this isn't the wish of the Welsh government and I urge you to listen to the views of so many parents, teachers and health care professionals and plan to open schools fully from September.