

Senedd Cymru
Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg

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

COV 131b
Ymateb gan: Parents Voices in Wales

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 131b
Response from: Parents Voices in Wales

We write to you today to highlight our concerns about the return to school in September for Neurodiverse learners.

Use of Masks

As you know we believe that the national crisis of COVID requires a national directive from Welsh Government to all public services. We are delighted to hear today that Cardiff Council has made a decision that all learners must wear a mask. We believe this is a sensible move as secondary schools will struggle with capacity to socially distance learners.

We agree with Sally Holland, Children's Commissioner for Wales position that masks may have a negative impact on some vulnerable learners ie those experiencing deafness, speech and language, additional needs and new year 7 pupils.

We therefore request that the use of masks be made flexible for learners who are living with conditions that will make face coverings difficult and are hopeful that schools will cater for these learners as per the Welsh Government guidance that decisions on face masks needs to include the whole school community, young people, teachers and families.

We will be emailing all secondary schools in Wales on the need for flexibility whilst encouraging prevention of transmission as far as possible. It really needs to be a priority that all schools and colleges remain open for the education, safeguarding and mental health/wellbeing of our children and young people. In view of the report yesterday that Wales has the poorest levels of wellbeing out of 35 countries - this is indeed crucial.

Neurodiversity & Mental Health

We are concerned that many more children and young people (particularly Neurodiverse learners) will struggle with anxiety on returning to school after having 6 months at home. We know that many have seen a reduction in their anxiety levels during this period but this conversely makes the return even more difficult.

There will be need for a great deal of preparation for transition by families and support from schools for these learners, along with those who have struggled with their mental health during lockdown. We have worked hard to provide resources to families and schools since March on Neurodiversity and school transitions but this is not enough.

We envisage that many young people's mental health will be affected by the return to school, for a number of reasons, and it is why we now call on Welsh Government to support families holistically and immediately so that we manage and maintain school attendance, manage the levels in mental health referrals and provide early help :

- o further to our letters to Vaughan Gething MS, could Welsh Government please now confirm how the £7m monies for health transformation fund money is being used and can Welsh Government ensure that a whole systems approach can be fully implemented using this money;
- o will Welsh Government now continue with the implementation of a whole school approach across Wales, so that families and schools can work with PMH/CAMHS inreach services/school nurses/youth workers as soon as possible;
- o we request that all health, social and education professionals and staff receive Neurodiversity digital training (currently available from validated providers) so that all have the skills and knowledge to support Neurodiverse/trauma children and families in dealing with this return, the angst of dealing with the new normal, potential second wave and prevention of further mental health issues;
- o we request that Welsh Government abolish the use of local authority fines on families whose children struggle to attend school because of their transition anxiety and/or Neurodiversity and instead focus on supporting schools to be engaged in a whole systems approach so that families receive the help that they need at any given point in time.

We know that 'early help' is the best prevention. We know that multidisciplinary working is the gold standard. We know that a national crisis requires a strong national leadership from our Government. We ask you now to act early, use the research and evidence, along with the Governments socially centred policies, to the heart of the action plans and make the transformation of Wales a reality now.

We call on Welsh Government, it's Ministers and First Minister to step up and protect and support the families of Wales.