

CYPE(5)-06-21 - Paper to note 3

Senedd Cymru

Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg

—
Welsh Parliament

Children, Young People and Education Committee

Kirsty Williams MS, Minister for Education

Dyddiad | Date: 3 February 2021

Pwnc | Subject: **The impact of COVID-19 on children and young people – return to education**

Dear Kirsty,

Thank you for attending Committee on 21 January 2021 to answer our questions on the impact of COVID-19 on the education of children and young people.

As you are aware, in response to the most recent restrictions on face-to-face learning (in place in Wales since December 2020), we have undertaken a series of urgent public evidence sessions with trade unions and local government representatives, the Children’s Commissioner for Wales, and you as the Minister for Education. The purpose of these sessions has been to hear from key stakeholders to help us identify constructive, practical, and realistic options to plan a safe return to face-to-face learning as soon as possible for our children and young people.

We commend the hard work and innovation demonstrated by many schools and colleges, and their staff, to deliver remote learning during these difficult times. However, in circumstances where most children and young people must remain at home, we are clear that further work is needed to achieve a minimum education offer for them.

Furthermore, we believe that blended learning must be a short term option that is adopted only where absolutely necessary. Concerns about the negative impact of these arrangements on children’s well-being and education are well-documented, particularly for our most disadvantaged children. As such, they should be in place for the minimum amount of time possible.

We have been clear throughout this pandemic that providing face-to-face learning must be a priority, and we re-iterate this message following our latest evidence sessions. As soon as transmission rates allow, children’s right to an education, and their physical and mental well-being, must be put first.

On that basis, we welcome the Welsh Government’s statement on Friday 29 January 2021 that, if rates of the virus continue to fall, the opening up of education is its top priority, and will be undertaken on a phased basis, beginning with our youngest learners, from 22 February 2021.



Senedd Cymru

Bae Caerdydd, Caerdydd, CF99 1SN

 SeneddPPIA@senedd.cymru

 0300 200 6565

Welsh Parliament

Cardiff Bay, Cardiff, CF99 1SN

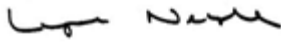
 SeneddCYPE@senedd.wales

 0300 200 6565

No stone should be left unturned in relation to getting our children and young people back in to school or college. To achieve this, it is essential that all key stakeholders work together to consider the benefits and feasibility of all available options. These options include (but are not restricted to) consideration of revising term dates, rotas for learners' attendance and phased returns, the potential use of other public buildings, and testing children, young people and staff.

We agree that the advice of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI), as the relevant UK-wide independent statutory body, should be used as the basis for prioritising the vaccine's allocation. When the most clinically vulnerable to serious disease and death have been vaccinated in the first phase of the vaccine programme, it is our view that consideration should be given to how key workers can be prioritised, including those staff who are vital to delivering our children and young people's education.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lynne Neagle'.

Lynne Neagle MS
Chair

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg | We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.