

Consider re-doing this current academic year for students across Wales.

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 16 Gorffennaf 2021
Petitions Committee | 16 July 2021

Reference: RS21/0189-11

Petition Number: P-06-1168

Petition title: Consider re-doing this current academic year for students across Wales.

Text of petition: I implore the government to consider re-doing this academic year, should school closures become part of the “fire break” restrictions. It isn’t fair to expect the children to catch up with last years missed education, whilst having a stop/start academic year this year. Our children should not be prevented from achieving their full potential, and nor should we as parents be accepting that they just - get by. Not all children have the same luxuries of parents at home to help/access to resources

1. Summary

- There is a general recognition that the COVID-19 pandemic has adversely affected children and young people’s education due to the



disruption to schooling and the loss of several months of face to face teaching during periods of school closures.

- Rather than pupils repeating the academic years affected, the Welsh Government has provided funding for additional staff in schools to support their recovery from the disruption wrought by the pandemic.
- The new Minister for Education and the Welsh Language, Jeremy Miles, has recently published an education COVID-19 recovery plan, building on the interventions by his predecessor, Kirsty Williams.

2. Disruption to education from the pandemic

There have been two prolonged periods whereby schools have closed to pupils other than vulnerable pupils and children of key workers for whom there was no safe alternative:

- From 23 March 2020 until the start of academic year 2020/21 in September (other than for several 'check in, catch up and prepare' days in July).
- Between the final week of the term before Christmas 2020 and Easter 2021 (infant pupils returned in late February, junior pupils in mid March while secondary pupils not in exam year groups did not return at all until after Easter).

[Note that secondary schools closed for an additional week following the October 2020 half term during the autumn 'firebreak'. There have also been instances where pupils have experienced disruption to face to face learning whilst schools have generally being open, due to 'bubbles' or whole year groups having to learn from home for a certain time due to positive cases amongst peers.]

During such periods of school closures, there was remote educational provision via the online platform, Hwb. However, there are many concerns about the impact on many learners, including those who are already disadvantaged, and the variation in the remote provision by schools. The schools inspectorate, Estyn, has published [reports on experiences in schools](#) in autumn term 2020 and spring term 2021 respectively.

A [Children's Commissioner survey in January 2021](#) of 20,000 children found that 35% did not feel confident about their learning, compared to 25% in May 2020. 63% of 12-18 year olds were worried about falling behind.

3. The Welsh Government's response

The Welsh Government has allocated funding to a '**Recruit, Recover and Raise Standards' programme**, which includes 1,800 additional teaching staff, to address the negative impact of the pandemic on pupils' education.

However, in doing so, it has sought to avoid an "unhelpful 'catch up' narrative" about lost learning, which **The British Psychological Society** says places "unnecessary psychological pressure" on children and young people. This was confirmed by the new Minister for Education and the Welsh Language in his first **Plenary statement on 26 May 2021**.

On 16 June 2021, the Welsh Government published its "**Renew and reform**" education COVID-19 recovery plan, which focuses on supporting learners' wellbeing and progression. The Minister's accompanying **statement** said the plan builds on the interventions already made over the past year, including recruiting and retaining more than 1,800 full-time equivalent staff.

There is a particular emphasis on early years, post-16 and learners making transitions, exam year groups and vulnerable and disadvantaged learners (including Looked After Children and pupils with Additional Learning Needs).

In order to ensure schools are fully focused on educational recovery from COVID-19 and in recognition of the exceptional circumstances of the last year to eighteen months, the Welsh Government has also **suspended performance measures and Estyn inspections**. (Another reason Estyn has paused routine inspections is to work with schools in preparing for the introduction of the new Curriculum for Wales in September 2022.)

The Welsh Government has allocated over £150 million in 2021-22, in addition to over £220 million in 2020-21 for the education sector's response to COVID-19. As in other parts of the UK, this level of funding is less than what some experts warn is needed. For example, the **Education Policy Institute (EPI) estimate** the Welsh Government needs to spend £600-£900 million.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

