

## PA40 Royal College of General Practitioners Wales

Senedd Cymru

Welsh Parliament

Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg

Children, Young People and Education Committee

Absenoldeb Disgyblion

Pupil absence

Ymateb gan Coleg Brenhinol yr Ymarferwyr  
Cyffredinol Cymru

Evidence from Royal College of GPs Cymru  
Wales

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Record your views against the inquiry's terms of reference, which have been grouped into 5 themes.

### 1. Reasons

N/A

### 2. Risks and consequences

N/A

### 3. Impact

N/A

### 4. Effectiveness of policies

N/A

### 5. Other

The closure of schools due to COVID-19 has had a detrimental effect on not only pupils' educational performance but also pupils' wellbeing, health, social skills, as well as impacting the important role schools play in the safeguarding of vulnerable children.

In its annual report of 2021, Estyn noted that, following the return of all pupils to school in the summer term of that year, school attendance did not increase above 88%. This contrasts with average attendance of 94% in the last full school year before the pandemic.

Dr Mair Hopkin, former joint chair of RCGP Cymru Wales, spoke before the Children, Young People and Education Committee on 9th June 2020 and discussed the implications of school closures for children's health and wellbeing:

"We worry about health inequalities, because some pupils who are in deprived backgrounds will not have the opportunities and will find that they're slipping further and further back in terms of catching up with their peers educationally. We worry about children being hidden at home; that they have little contact with adults, and so, we may well be missing the effects of child abuse, and we may well be missing neglect, poor nutrition, and anxiety in children."

These same concerns apply to children who remain absent while schools are open. RCGP President Dame Clare Gerada and our Chair in Wales, Dr Rowena Christmas represent the college at the

Attendance Action Alliance, a group of UK sector leaders from education, social care and health who have pledged to work together to tackle the underlying causes of school absence.

In Wales, Estyn reports that instances of absence are higher in children from a disadvantaged background. In addition, pupils who did not engage well with school before the pandemic report greater levels absence since lockdowns ended. Anecdotal reports suggest some pupils increased absence is related to anxiety, poor mental health and behavioural disorders exacerbated by the pandemic.

RCGP recognises the detrimental effect of school absence and would urge schools to work with children and parents to discuss what is needed to support them to learn in school. Estyn notes that most school leaders have received additional training including trauma-informed practice and attachment disorder . The child's GP can be involved in this if needed. The College encourages parents and carers to speak to communicate any worries with their child's school directly.