

National Assembly for Wales Children and Young People Committee: Inquiry into School Sun Protection Policy

Undeb Cenedlaethol Athrawon Cymru (UCAC) welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation. UCAC represents 5,000 teachers, headteachers and lecturers in all education sectors in Wales.

1. Whether current sun protection policies and guidelines for schools are effective in providing sufficient sun protection for children, and if not, where improvements are required.

Usually, children will only be out in the sun for short periods of time, during break times. However, children in the Foundation Phase can now spend longer periods of time outside the school building. School trips and sports days are other occasions when there is a possibility that children will be in direct sunlight for extended periods.

One important element of sun protection policy for children is the need to educate children about the dangers and how to protect themselves. It is relatively simple to address this element, but guidance or direction to schools around the need to do so, and how to do it, would be useful.

Another important element is the ability of schools to ask parents to make appropriate provision for their children at times when they are outside the classroom for extended periods e.g. appropriate clothing such as hats, sunglasses, long-sleeved clothing and applying sunscreen before children arrive at school.

The two most sensitive elements are: (i) Who exactly will be responsible for what; and (ii) The responsibility for applying sunscreen to the children. We will address these issues below under question 3.

2. Whether there is sufficient awareness of the current sun protection policies and guidelines, and, if not, how best to raise awareness;

An increasing number of schools are adopting such a policy and a policy model is available. The Healthy Schools programme has been one way of raising awareness of the issue, and of the policy.

The best way to raise awareness further would be to circulate any guidance directly to:

- Headteachers (including through Local Authorities)
- Governing Bodies (including through Governors Wales)
- Teachers' unions

3. Whether there are any barriers to the use of sun protection in schools, including sunscreen, suitable clothing, hats or shade, by children and young people, for example in terms of cost or the application of sunscreen by teachers or childminders, and if so, how these could be addressed.

Many issues arise. Some areas are unclear and can cause concern and problems for teachers.

a) The school's level of responsibility regarding appropriate clothing

If the parents provide appropriate clothing, that is a good start; however, what is the extent of the school's responsibility in terms of ensuring/insisting that children wear these clothes? Who is responsible if a child has gone out without the appropriate clothing—intentionally or unintentionally?

If parents have not provided suitable clothing, what is the school's responsibility in trying to provide them?

b) The school's level of responsibility with regard to sunscreen

It is very helpful if parents have put sunscreen on their children before they get to school, but this is not likely to solve the problem completely because the lotion needs to be reapplied every few hours to remain effective.

Another question that arises is: who provides any additional lotion that is needed—does responsibility lie with the parents or the school?

However, the most profound and complex questions relate to the responsibility for applying sunscreen to the children. These are some considerations:

- Obviously, applying sunscreen involves touching children; increasingly, teachers are advised to have as little physical contact with children as possible, to avoid any allegations of abuse or inappropriate touching; child protection issues are extremely serious, and such accusations can put an end to a teacher's career – even if they are unfounded.
- Some parents object to the use of sunscreen, for various reasons
- Some children may be allergic to (certain types of) sunscreen.
- Hygiene must be considered when moving from one child to another, especially with regard to skin conditions.

Teachers would find it useful to have clarity on these issues. If it considers drawing up or recommending any new policy or guidelines, we urge the Committee to address these issues so that school staff know the extent of their responsibilities.