

Impact of COVID-19 on children and young people

8 July 2020

In March 2020 Wales entered lockdown in response to the COVID-19 public health emergency. As a Committee, we announced our intention to look closely at the impact of COVID-19, and the measures adopted to manage the outbreak, on children and young people in Wales. This interim report outlines our activity to date. Its aim is to inform the Senedd's debate on the impact of COVID-19 on children and young people on 15 July 2020.

1. While we recognise that children and young people currently appear to be less susceptible to the virus than adults, there is little doubt that the wider effects of Covid-19—and the measures taken to manage it—have impacted their lives significantly. Our aim in undertaking this scrutiny has been to explore these impacts and mitigate the risks associated with them as quickly and effectively as possible.

2. As a Committee, we are concerned to ensure that a children's rights approach is not lost in the process of managing this pandemic, nor in our scrutiny as a Senedd. In a recent Committee session, a leading paediatrician told us:

“What they (children and young people) have been affected by quite greatly is, if I could call it, collateral damage—their schools have been closed, their clubs have been shut, they can't socialise. All those things have affected children, and they're very anxious, because there's a lot of worry about coronavirus, which they're hearing about—their



grandparents might have died, or they're hearing that thousands of people have died.”

3. On this basis, and in light of our belief that managing the impact of COVID-19 on children and young people needs to be a clear priority for the Welsh Government and all its associated public bodies, we believe that all Members of the Senedd should have an opportunity to discuss these issues, before the summer recess. Approaching the next phase of managing the pandemic with children’s rights at the forefront of our minds is a key priority for us and one we are committed to pursuing.

Our approach

4. In order to ensure that our scrutiny has contributed in a timely and meaningful way to the Welsh Government’s response to the pandemic, we have engaged in regular correspondence with Welsh Ministers. We have published letters, as opposed to laying reports, to ensure that our work has been undertaken at pace and as effectively as possible. This correspondence is annexed to this report.

5. The time available to us in the Committee timetable has been restricted due to the public health measures in place. In addition to hearing from the Minister for Education (on [19 March](#), [28 April](#) and [7 July](#)) and the Minister and Deputy Minister for Health (on [5 May](#)), we prioritised the following areas for sessions with stakeholders:

- support for vulnerable children and young people ([18 May](#));
- support for the physical and mental health of children and young people ([9 June](#));
- support for the higher and further education sector ([23 June](#)).

6. Following the Plenary debate on 15 July we will consider the next steps for our scrutiny of the impact of COVID-19 on children and young people and publish our intentions in due course. Our next steps will also be informed by:

- responses to our [rolling call for views](#) (including our [child friendly call](#)), which will continue to be published and analysed;

- sessions we have conducted with representatives of **Voices from Care**¹ and **Race Council Cymru**;
- information gathered by our citizen engagement team about the impact of Covid-19 on **children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds**.²

Supporting annexes

- **Annex A** – Letter from the Committee to the Welsh Government following the scrutiny sessions on 28 April and 5 May with the Minister for Education and the Minister and Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services (sent 12 May 2020).
- **Annex B** – Response from the Minister for Education to the Committee’s letter of 12 May (received 4 June 2020).
- **Annex C** – Response from the Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services to the Committee’s letter of 12 May (received 8 June 2020).
- **Annex D** – Letter from the Committee to the Welsh Government following the scrutiny session on 18 May on the impact of Covid-19 on vulnerable children and young people (sent 27 May 2020).
- **Annex E** – Response from the Welsh Government to the Committee’s letter of 27 May (received 30 June 2020).
- **Annex F** – Letter from the Committee to the Welsh Government following the scrutiny session on 9 June on the impact of Covid-19 on the physical and mental health of children and young people (sent 3 July 2020).
- A response to Annex F is expected in due course from the Welsh Government.
- Key issues arising in the Committee’s session on further and higher education on 23 June were raised orally in the session with the Minister for Education on **7 July**.
- The Committee intends to write to the Welsh Government following the session on 7 July – this letter will also include points that arose during the session on 23 June on further and higher education.

¹ A note of this meeting will be published in due course on the [Committee’s COVID-19 inquiry page](#):

² Notes summarising the findings are available on the [Committee’s COVID-19 inquiry page](#):

Annex A – Letter from the Committee to the Welsh Government following the scrutiny sessions on 28 April and 5 May with the Minister for Education and the Minister and Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services (sent 12 May 2020)

Senedd Cymru
Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg

Welsh Parliament
Children, Young People and Education Committee

Kirsty Williams MS, Minister for Education

Vaughan Gething MS, Minister for Health and Social Services

Julie Morgan MS, Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services

Dyddiad | Date: 12 May 2020

Pwnc | Subject: **CYPE Committee scrutiny of the impact of Covid-19 on children and young people**

Dear Ministers,

Thank you for appearing before the Committee on 28 April and 5 May to answer our questions about the actions you have taken to date to manage the impact of Covid-19 on children and young people.

The Annex to this letter highlights the areas on which we request further detail and/or reassurance at this stage in the pandemic. It is not an exhaustive list of the issues we consider important; rather, our intention is to provide feedback to the Welsh Government, at pace, on the areas we believe require more attention. It is written based on information available in the public domain as at 11 May 2020.

Our work to scrutinise the actions being taken to manage the impact of Covid-19 on children and young people will continue over the weeks ahead. As only a limited number of public meetings are available to us at the moment, we have prioritised the following areas for sessions with stakeholders:

- support for vulnerable children (Monday 18 May);
- support for the physical and mental health of children and young people (Tuesday 9 June);
- support for the higher and further education sector (Tuesday 23 June).

We have also reserved one session (Tuesday 7 July) to explore any clear themes arising from our rolling call for views.



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

While we recognise that children and young people currently appear to be less susceptible to the virus than adults, there is little doubt that the wider effects of Covid-19—and the measures taken to manage it—have impacted their lives significantly. Our aim in undertaking this scrutiny is to explore these impacts and mitigate the risks associated with them as quickly and effectively as possible. We will share with you on a regular basis the findings and views we draw from the evidence we receive.

Kind regards,



Lynne Neagle MS

Chair

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

ANNEX

1. Vulnerable children

On 1 May the Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services issued a written statement detailing the steps taken to support children and young people and maintain their safety.

While we welcome the range of steps outlined in the statement to support children and young people, we remain particularly concerned about the visibility of—and support available for—our most vulnerable children. The relatively low number of children considered vulnerable attending hubs and schools currently restricts the education system’s ability to fulfil its normal role as a safeguarding safety net. As such, we welcome the Minister for Education’s reference to the cross-governmental approach adopted to date and believe this is essential if we are to avoid important (and potentially grave) issues being missed.¹

Responding to our concerns about maintaining contact with and supporting vulnerable children and their families, the Deputy Minister stated:

“...we’ve now got 890 vulnerable children attending school settings, and that’s the highest number that we’ve had at all since the opening of the scheme. But it’s still only a tiny drop in the ocean. But it’s very good, and it is progress that the numbers attending are now going up.

But, of course, there are a lot of children who are not attending school and the social services are not necessarily seeing. There has been a drop in safeguarding referrals to

¹ Record of Proceedings, para 39, 28 April 2020.



social services. Those numbers are now beginning to go up, but there certainly was a significant drop, which is a great deal of concern. One local authority, in fact, reported a drop of 27 per cent in terms of safeguarding referrals compared to this time last year.”²

We believe further details need to be provided publicly to demonstrate a robust approach to identifying and supporting our most vulnerable children and young people, particularly during any period in which schools and other education settings remain closed to the majority. This is particularly important in relation to those children who may be vulnerable but not engaged with statutory services. We have prioritised the issue of support for vulnerable children for our first public evidence session with stakeholders on 18 May and will write to you in due course with our findings.

We would also welcome an update on the wider, more flexible definition of vulnerable children the Deputy Minister indicated would follow after the session on 5 May.³

2. Special educational needs and education otherwise than at school

The challenges of maintaining provision for those with a statement of special educational needs (SEN) as part of widespread school closures was acknowledged by the Minister for Education.⁴ **We would welcome further detail of the specific arrangements being put in place for SEN pupils’ continuing learning given that:**

- **they may have a physical condition which, although they are vulnerable and should be entitled to attend school, means they cannot on medical grounds;**
- **they are likely to find distance learning more difficult than other pupils as they rely more on one-to-one and/or face-to-face teaching.**

The **Coronavirus Act 2020** gives the Welsh Ministers powers to relax statutory duties on local authorities and schools temporarily. **We would welcome:**

- **an outline of the Welsh Government’s view on whether it anticipates a need to use these powers in response to local authorities and schools being unable to continue delivering provision, particularly in relation to arrangements specified in SEN statements, in practice;**
- **if so, an outline of the checks and balances that would be put in place to ensure that any relaxation of duties to make provision is proportionate and does not detract from the importance of SEN pupils continuing their learning.**

² Record of Proceedings, [paras 78-79](#), 5 May 2020.

³ Record of Proceedings, [para 85](#), 5 May 2020.

⁴ Record of Proceedings, [paras 41-42](#), 28 April 2020.



Arrangements for the maintenance of provision for those who are educated otherwise than at school (EOTAS) were also mentioned briefly in our session on 28 April.⁵ **We would welcome an outline of the arrangements in place across Wales for EOTAS provision, and the steps in place to monitor and address any disparity of provision.**

3. Mental health and well-being

The mental health and well-being of our children and young people is a key priority for our committee work. While we have paused our follow-up work on our Mind over Matter report to enable public services to focus efforts on managing the impact of Covid-19, we believe that steps to support our children's mental health and well-being are more important now than ever.

To this end, we have prioritised the issue of support for the physical and mental health and well-being of our children and young people for our second public evidence session with stakeholders on 9 June and will write to you in due course with our findings.

4. Children's Rights Impact Assessments

Our Committee view about the importance of Children's Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) is well documented, and demonstrated by our recent inquiry into children's rights. While the publication of our report has been paused to enable public services to focus efforts on managing the impact of Covid-19, we believe that assessing the impact of current measures relating to the management of Covid-19 on children's rights is essential.

We recognise that the urgent pace at which emergency legislation was passed limited the ability of the Welsh Government to undertake a CRIA at the time it sought the then-Assembly's legislative consent. However, sufficient time has now passed to enable the Welsh Government to undertake an assessment of the impact on children of *all* measures—not just those decisions relating directly to children's services—taken to manage Covid-19. **We welcome officials' confirmation that a "full suite"⁶ of impact assessments is being prepared and urge the Welsh Government to make these assessments— including CRIAs—publicly available as soon as possible.**

5. Childcare

We welcome the steps taken by the Welsh Government to repurpose the childcare funding offer to support the coronavirus childcare assistance scheme, enabling critical workers and families with vulnerable children to have free access to childcare aged 0 to 5. Nevertheless, the currently complex funding situation for childcare providers, and the risks posed to the viability of the sector

⁵ Record of Proceedings, [para 46](#), 28 April 2020.

⁶ Record of Proceedings, [para 114](#), 5 May 2020.



by the Covid-19 outbreak and measures taken to manage it, were explored in our session on 5 May. We note the Deputy Minister's comment that the impact on the sector is "very worrying" and welcome her confirmation that steps are being taken to seek to resolve current challenges.⁷

We urge the Welsh Government to publish, as a matter of priority, details about how funding arrangements will be managed to avoid certain childcare providers being unable to access support.

6. Higher education

We note the Minister for Education's [written statement](#) and [press release](#) of 4 May providing more detail on the Welsh Government's policy in relation to higher education.

We would welcome further detail about:

- **student maintenance arrangements for the next academic year (2020/21) for those who have to learn remotely and who, under existing rules, would drop to the level of support provided for students "living with parents";**
- **any assessment the Welsh Government has made of the impact significant changes to teaching and accommodation made by universities and private accommodation providers has had on students' consumer and legal rights, and any steps take to support students in understanding their rights.**

We recognise the Minister's acknowledgment in her statement of 4 May that "the financial impact of the crisis on universities is substantial". We believe that this has the potential to have a severe and damaging long-term effect on this important sector. We anticipate that further support from government is very likely to be required, but recognise that devolved budgets will require wider support from HM Treasury. **We would welcome:**

- **an update on the work undertaken to date, and planned to be undertaken, both within the Welsh Government and between the Welsh and UK Governments, to identify options for financial support for the sector;**
- **an indication of when the Welsh Government anticipates being able to provide clarity about outcomes for post-16 education and HEFCW funding allocations for 2020-21.**

This information will be used to inform our third public evidence session with stakeholders on 23 June which we have set aside to give priority consideration to the impact of Covid-19 on higher and further education.

7. Continuity of learning

⁷ Record of Proceedings, [para 137](#), 5 May 2020.



We welcome the steps taken to date by schools to maintain continuity of learning for their pupils. Nevertheless, the challenges posed by the measures necessary to manage Covid-19 have inevitably impacted on our children and young people's learning. **We would be particularly grateful for an outline of the steps the Welsh Government has taken to monitor/address the following:**

- **the arrangements in place to support parents/guardians in undertaking home schooling, including steps taken to ensure that all separated parents are fully informed/supported;**
- **steps taken to ensure that children do not fall through the net in terms of engagement with education, and that schools are checking on their pupils;**
- **the arrangements in place to monitor any difficulties or inconsistencies emerging in how the key worker criteria is applied in accepting children into schools (including how many cases have there been where children have not been accepted despite parents wanting to send them to school);**
- **the extent to which support for home learning can be – and is being – tailored to account for learners' different needs, aptitudes and circumstances.**

7.1 Digital provision and inequalities

We recognise that digital exclusion poses a significant risk of exacerbating existing inequalities. As such, we welcome the Minister for Education's announcement on 29 April 2020 of funding to help local authorities to support digitally excluded learners during the current pandemic. **We would welcome an outline of the steps the Welsh Government is taking to:**

- **monitor and address any inconsistencies in approaches across local authorities to providing support for the digitally excluded;**
- **explore the other non-digital risks (for example housing, other resources, and parental capacity) that could exacerbate inequalities during this pandemic.**

7.2 Phased return to school and the five principles

We note the Minister for Education's clear statement on 7 May that schools will not return to normal provision on 1 June 2020, and that the five principles set out on 28 April will guide the Welsh Government's approach to a phased return. We believe that it is essential that messaging relating to the return of our children and young people to school is clear and that the sector itself is consulted in advance of any plans being published. **We request that the Committee is kept informed with regular updates on the Welsh Government's thinking and proposed approach to any phased return to school, and assessments undertaken against the five principles.**



We also believe that the availability of testing is key to plans for a safe phased return to school, and note the low number of teachers (15) who had been tested by 28 April 2020.⁸ **We would welcome an update on the Welsh Government’s approach to testing of school staff as part of any phased return to school.**

8. Vocational qualifications

Vocational qualifications were raised briefly in our session on 28 April.⁹

We recognise that the situation in relation to vocational qualifications is complex due to the fact that they are awarded by over 100 bodies working across the UK. We also note that Qualifications Wales has stated that, to ensure consistency for learners taking these qualifications, the same approach will be taken for learners in Wales as that set out by Ofqual for England.

We are aware that Ofqual’s consultation on arrangements for vocational qualifications has recently closed. **We would welcome an update from the Welsh Government on the approach for Wales once Ofqual has set out the common approach, and are keen to see a similar level of clarity for vocational learners as those sitting general education qualifications.**

⁸ Record of Proceedings, para 34, 28 April 2020.

⁹ Record of Proceedings, paras 84-86, 28 April 2020.



Annex B – Response from the Minister for Education to the Committee’s letter of 12 May (received 4 June 2020)

Kirsty Williams AS/MS
Y Gweinidog Addysg
Minister for Education

Ein cyf/Our ref: MA/KW/1709/20



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Lynne Neagle AM
Chair
Children, Young People and Education
Committee Senedd Cymru

4 June 2020

Dear Lynne,

Thank you for your letter of 12 May requesting further information on actions Welsh Government have taken to date to manage the impact of Covid-19 on children and young people. I note that the Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services is writing to you regarding matters within her portfolio, so I am addressing the education elements within my response although I understand that many areas are linked.

I am aware that the circumstances we find ourselves in are difficult for all, but I am concerned that it is especially challenging for our most vulnerable and disadvantaged learners. I am committed to doing everything possible to support learners, parents and carers during this difficult time.

The message during the early part of our response to this pandemic was to minimise the spread of the virus and if it was possible for children and young people to be at home, then they should be. As part of the response, education settings were asked to continue to provide care for a limited number of children and young people - those who are vulnerable (which may include those with a statement of special educational needs (SEN)), and those whose parents or carers are critical to the coronavirus response. It was, and remains, important to ensure all education settings are safe places for children and young people.

We continue to ask local authorities to consider the needs of all children and young people with a statement of SEN and to undertake a risk assessment which accounts for parents/carers views and, where appropriate, takes a multi-agency approach. The risk assessment should focus on determining whether children and young people with a statement of SEN will be able to have their needs met at home with support provided remotely, and whether they would be safer at home than at an education setting. We are developing guidance on risk assessments in consultation with key stakeholders and hope to publish this shortly.

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:
0300 0604400

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay
Caerdydd • Cardiff
CF99 1SN

Gohebiaeth.Kirsty.Williams@llyw.cymru
Correspondence.Kirsty.Williams@gov.wales

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

Safety is a primary concern in those schools and childcare settings that are open. However, some learners with additional learning needs (ALN) have a physical disability or underlying medical conditions which may mean the safest place for them is at home. Provision to support the health and social care needs of all learners, whether they are in school or at home, will continue to be based on assessment of need. Alternative ways of providing this support, such as virtual contacts, are being encouraged, and resources to support this are being developed across Wales.

With regards to the Coronavirus Act 2020, we have been considering which, if any, of the statutory provisions relating directly or indirectly to education and the responsibilities of local authorities, schools and governing bodies, might need to be temporarily modified in light of the impacts caused by the virus.

I am working to establish the most appropriate way of modifying these duties, particularly around statutory timescales set out under Part 4 of the Education Act 1996 and the Education (Special Education Needs) Regulations (Wales) Regulations 2002. These modifications will be made as soon as possible, either by way of notice, or through regulations to amend the current duties and/or timescales. Alongside the publication of notices we will issue guidance to accompany and explain the changes. This will outline what they mean for both local authorities and their partners; learners, their parents and the professionals who support them.

My officials have also been working with local authorities and education providers to understand the impact coronavirus is having on their ability to meet their statutory duties.

Providers are facing significant difficulties in meeting the needs of pupils with SEN, particularly in relation to arranging provision specified in a statement and a number of the statutory timescales, such as annual reviews. I am equally aware of the needs of this vulnerable group of learners and the importance of continued education and support.

As such, my officials are working with a targeted group of stakeholders. This includes children's rights organisations, the Children's Commissioner and relevant third sector organisations. Our purpose is to understand the impact of the existing changes, such as the repurposing of schools, and to assess the likely impact any potential future changes to the statutory duties relating to SEN may have on learners and their families.

We are working to find the right balance to account for the concerns of local authorities and their partners; whilst balancing these against the needs and rights of this vulnerable group of learners. We do not intend to disapply any of the duties relating to SEN; but are considering modifying some of the duties to one of 'reasonable endeavours' rather than an absolute duty. Any changes will be supported by guidance which will set out what Welsh Government expects of providers; and what learners and their families can expect.

The intention is that the modifications will provide more flexibility and allow other support or services to be provided, which may not be as set out in a statement, but may go some way to helping to continue to support learners with SEN.

The impact of any modifications we make will continue to be monitored, using the engagement with providers and the stakeholders mentioned above. The route for complaints and the ability to appeal to the Special Education Needs Tribunal for Wales will remain.

While schools remain open for the children of critical workers and vulnerable children, and continue to support the education and learning of pupils remotely, the day to day provision of education is now very different, and we need to recognise that. There are also a range of administrative matters which it is more challenging for local authorities and schools to undertake at this time.

Following discussions with local authorities we have identified some areas where we feel we will need to temporarily modify or disapply certain requirements and I have provided details of these with this letter (see Annex 1). We are also considering the arrangements that will be needed, including any further legislative changes, to support the increased operations of schools.

In the more medium term, I will also be exploring how a transition to the new curriculum might be facilitated by removing some of the more prescriptive or administrative requirements on schools and governing bodies, to provide space for practitioners to develop their new curriculum. The greater focus on health and well-being this will enable will be of particular importance in supporting learners and practitioners through this period of disruption.

I understand the Minister for Health and Social Services gave a commitment to keep the Senedd informed of all such notices issued under the Act, and we will make sure the Committee is informed as and when these powers are used.

During this period where educational settings are only open to a limited number of learners, our aim is to minimise the impact on learning, learners' progress and wellbeing. Our Continuity of Learning Plan, 'Stay Safe, Stay Learning' will support schools and teachers in guiding the ongoing learning for all children and young people, including those with additional learning needs (ALN). Ensuring all learners are "included" is one of four key cross-cutting priorities that apply to all aspects of our Continuity of Learning Plan and aims to ensure all deliverables within the plan have a clear focus on equity and inclusion.

To support all those children and young people learning at home, schools and colleges are making a considerable amount of educational resources available online. This includes resources for learners with ALN. There are a range of digital tools and approaches available across the education system to help ensure continuity of learning for children and young people. This includes resources available through Wales' learning platform, Hwb.

As part of 'Stay Safe, Stay Learning' we are mobilising support for digitally excluded learners in maintained schools. Where there is no current provision in place from their school or local authority we have established a technical solution which enables local authorities/schools to repurpose existing devices from within schools.

Where required, local authorities also have access to a centrally procured service to provide digitally excluded learners with mobile connectivity (MiFi). All costs associated with the licenses for the repurposed devices and the MiFi costs will be met for the duration of school closures from the local authorities' allocation of the Hwb EdTech Capital fund. As part of the Hwb EdTech funding, local authorities will also have the option of replacing these devices with new devices from their funding allocation.

I am also very aware that the phased return to full time, school-based learning will be crucial for our vulnerable and disadvantaged learners – first in terms of their wellbeing, then in terms of their learning. We are already working with our partners and with experts in the field to consider our approach during this phase.

By taking an inclusive and equitable approach across the deliverables of the Continuity of Learning Plan – whether in terms of tackling digital exclusion, learning resources, guidance for parents or guidance on health and wellbeing – I am aiming to ensure the best possible support is available for all learners, both in the immediate term and when we move into the phased return to full time school-based learning.

With regards to provision for those who are educated otherwise than at school (EOTAS), I can confirm that EOTAS learners have been identified as a particular group for consideration within our Continuity of Learning Plan.

We will soon be publishing a guide for parents of EOTAS pupils and pupils with ALN to provide information designed to help parents of these pupils to Stay Safe, Stay Learning. The guide will provide links to resources and to organisations which can support EOTAS pupils, pupils with ALN and their parents.

As part of Stay Safe, Stay Learning, arrangements are being made for local authorities to undertake a survey relating to the continuity of learning and wellbeing of vulnerable and disadvantaged children and young people – including EOTAS pupils. The survey will provide information about vulnerable and disadvantaged pupils, including arrangements that are being put in place to support their learning and their wellbeing. The information we get back will inform our next steps in ensuring continuity of learning, both during this distance learning phase and when educational settings begin to increase their operation.

All education providers should have put arrangements in place to ensure pupils can continue to learn and generally, these arrangements will include online learning or packs of work being delivered to pupils.

I have received assurances from local authorities that they have risk assessed all children supported by a social worker to identify children who will most benefit from having a safe space. I have also said to local authorities they can offer places to pupils who they think are vulnerable because their education provider or family support officer has let them know about this.

Many EOTAS children may be vulnerable and can face risks. The safety and well-being of all our learners is of paramount importance during these challenging times, wherever their learning takes place. We have developed the definition of vulnerable children which is published on the Welsh Government website, and our view is that children living with most risk would benefit from time away from their home environment in a safe place.

This includes a safe place for pupils who are supported by a social worker, and pupils who have a statement of special educational needs.

With regard to support for higher education, Welsh Government provides the most generous student support package in the UK. We have maintained this support, in upfront grants and loans, during this period. Welsh Ministers are under a legal duty to determine the location of full-time undergraduate students and support is paid according to location, as this reflects the expected cost of living.

Full-time undergraduate students who are 'living at home' are entitled to less maintenance support than those 'living away from home, studying elsewhere' or 'living away from home, studying in London'. The amount of grant a student is entitled to increases as household income decreases. There is no proposal to change this policy. Welsh Government

recognises that students will wish to be certain about their location for the coming academic year, so avoiding unnecessary accommodation contracts, and will look to universities in Wales to provide that clarity.

Support for part-time undergraduate students and for postgraduate students does not vary by location.

Universities in Wales responded rapidly to the emerging threat of Covid-19 by moving provision online, and many students returned home. Regulated institutions are responsible for ensuring that provision is of an acceptable quality. Students have recourse to their University and the Office of the Independent Adjudicator if they are not satisfied.

Accommodation contracts are made between accommodation provider and student, and Welsh Government has issued guidance for private sector tenants in light of Covid-19. We have not undertaken analysis of any impact on students' legal rights.

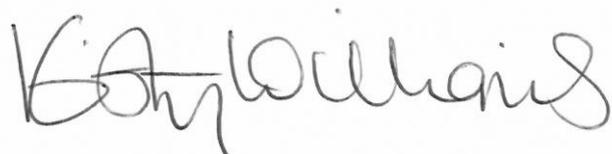
We are currently working closely with HEFCW to explore options for any possible additional financial support that Welsh Government may be able to provide to help stabilise the sector ahead of the next academic year. However, it is clear that scale of the financial support required to maintain stability in the university sector goes beyond what is available within devolved government budgets, and we remain committed to working with all governments of the UK and HM Treasury on a more comprehensive settlement.

I am also working with Ministers from the four nations on a Research and Innovation task force to address the impact of Covid-19 on the research base.

You will be aware that discussions on resource commitments for the 2020-21 financial year are still ongoing. I have provided an indicative annual grant to HEFCW of almost £172m which is an increase on last year's allocation. As my funding letter makes clear, with the need to focus efforts and the Government's limited resources on our response to the outbreak, I have been unable to issue my usual remit letter at this time.

My priority during this period has always been the safety and wellbeing of all our learners, and staff in educational settings. This will continue to be the case as we look to the future. I am grateful for the support of our partners, and the Committee during this very challenging time.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kirsty Williams'.

Kirsty Williams AS/MS
Y Gweinidog Addysg
Minister for Education

Coronavirus Act 2020 – Potential areas for Notices under Schedule 17

Area	Proposed Alteration
Definition of pupil - Section 3 of the Education Act 1996	Modify definition so that: <i>'A person is not for the purposes of the Education Act 1996 to be treated as a pupil at a school merely because any education is provided for that person at the school on a temporary basis for reasons relating to the incidence or transmission of coronavirus.'</i>
Section 108 of the Education Act 2002 – specifically The Education (National Curriculum) (Assessment Arrangements for Reading & Numeracy) (Wales) Order 2013 and The Education (National Curriculum) (Assessment Arrangements for Reading and Numeracy) (Wales) (Amendment) Order 2018	Modification to a reasonable endeavours basis. To note we are currently working through broader implications of requirements imposed under section 101 and 108 of the Act.
School Standards and Framework Act 1998 Section 70 (requirements relating to collective worship)	Modification to a reasonable endeavours basis.
The Government of Maintained Schools (Wales) Regulations 2005 – provision 45	Modification to a reasonable endeavours basis.
Headteachers' reports to parents and adult pupils (Wales) Regulations 2011	Modification to a reasonable endeavours basis. With the exception of regulation 5 which needs to remain as an absolute duty so that learners are not disadvantaged,
The School Information (Wales) Regulations 2011	Modification to a reasonable endeavours basis.
The School Performance Information (Wales) Regulations 2011	Disapplication
The School Performance and Absence targets (Wales) Regulations 2011	Disapply for the 2019-20 academic year, we believe regulations may be more appropriate to temporarily suspend these requirements for the 2020-21 academic year as we do not wish targets to be set on the basis of estimated grades
The School Governors' Annual Reports (Wales) Regulations 2011	Modification to a reasonable endeavours basis.

School Organisation Code made under section 38 of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013	Disapplication being considered
The Welsh in Education Strategic Plans (Wales) Regulations 2019	Amendment to extend the date by which a LA Plan must be submitted to WM
School Funding (Wales) Regulations 2010	Modification to reasonable endeavours basis to the requirement for Local authorities to provide schools with their individual school budget for the forthcoming financial year
Education (Induction Arrangements for School Teachers) (Wales) 2015	Amendment to the requirements around induction periods to reflect school closures may prevent NQTs from meeting these
The Education notification of school term dates (Wales) Regulations Act 2014	Make a one-off amendment to temporarily extend the deadline of 31 August 2020 in which LAs must notify WM of term dates they propose to set for 2022/23 to end Dec.
The Education (Admission Appeals Arrangements) (Wales) Regulations 2005	Amendments to disapply certain requirements and modify others

Annex C – Response from the Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services to the Committee’s letter of 12 May (received 8 June 2020)

Julie Morgan AS/MS
Y Dirprwy Weinidog Iechyd a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol
Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

MA/JM/1782/20

Lynne Neagle
Chair
Children, Young People and Education
Committee Welsh Parliament
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1SN

8 June 2020

Dear Lynne

Thank you for your letter of 12 May to the Minister for Education and I following our recent attendance at sessions at the Children, Young People and Education Committee. I am aware that the Minister for Education is also providing you with a response so I shall address the issues which fall under my portfolio, accepting that there may be some cross-over between the two.

Before turning to the points raised in your letter, I am conscious there were some actions that the Minister for Health and Social Services and I agreed to undertake immediately following the meeting. I have addressed the points, for which I have responsibility, in the note annexed to this letter. The Minister will provide a separate response to the Committee on the report on unexpected deaths once we have considered the information we receive from the NHS Delivery Unit.

The Welsh Government is in regular contact with Heads of Children’s Services, Third Sector Partners and with the regional Safeguarding Boards who are working in innovative ways to support children and young people and to safeguard children at risk during this time. We have been assured that Children’s Social Services are in contact with all the children and young people they support. The nature and frequency of the contact they have with families is informed by regularly reviewed risk assessment, with face-to-face visits and/or virtual contact as appropriate on a case-by-case basis. Overall, authorities have reported a steady state in relation to the majority of their services and workforce stability.

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:
0300 0604400

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay
Caerdydd • Cardiff
CF99 1SN

Gohebiaeth.Julie.Morgan@llyw.cymru
Correspondence.Julie.Morgan@gov.wales

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

To support local authority social services departments and their partners we published Operational Guidance for Children's Social Services on 21 April. We set out in this guidance that where it is felt that physical sight of a child is necessary because of the level of risk for the child, these should happen following Public Health Wales guidance on social distancing or PPE as appropriate. The guidance also sets out that statutory safeguarding visits to see children on the Child Protection Register should continue to be carried out at least every 10 working days. If following a risk assessment a decision is taken that this requirement can be met through remote/virtual contact for some children on the Child Protection Register, this decision must be agreed by a manager and the rationale for it must be recorded. We have been clear that all cases should be subject to a review of risks on a frequent basis and at least once per week. The intention of this advice is that face-to-face contact with children at risk should be maintained wherever possible with remote contact as an exception subject to risk assessment.

There was a marked reduction in safeguarding referrals relating to children at risk during the start of the lockdown period. We have published a webpage on reporting concerns and a Written Statement and two press releases have also been issued to encourage that everyone reports concerns. At the same time, the Safeguarding Boards and local authorities have issued messages to practitioners and public facing communications to encourage the reporting of concerns. The Welsh Government also continues to provide funding to the NSPCC Childline and to fund the MEIC helpline so that children can talk to someone if they are being harmed. Information from Heads of Children's Services and the Safeguarding Boards assures us that the rate of safeguarding referrals in relation to children at risk is steadily increasing.

In England the UK Government have made temporary changes to ten sets of children's social care regulations to allow greater flexibility for local authorities and providers during COVID-19, via Statutory Instrument 445. We are concerned about the impact of such changes on safeguarding and on children's rights, so we have no plans to amend regulations in Wales. Local authorities have not been calling for Welsh Government to make amendments to regulations, indeed from feedback so far, local authorities are keen to manage services within the flexibilities they have and as per Welsh Government guidance.

On 14 May we published our refined definition of 'vulnerable children' for the purposes of attending an educational or childcare setting (<https://gov.wales/vulnerable-children-and-young-people-coronavirus#section-40031>). We have set out the expectation for children and young people with a social worker, the expectation of children with a statement of SEN and the additional flexibility for other vulnerable children on the edge of receiving care and support if they are known to be vulnerable by the school or family support services. This discretion should be determined on a case by case basis by the school and local authority.

Since 11 May we have published the statistics for attendance at educational settings on a weekly basis (<https://gov.wales/attendance-local-authority-settings-during-coronavirus-covid-19-pandemic-11-15-may-2020-html>). There has been a sustained increase in vulnerable children and young people attending provision in schools. However, we continue to work with local authorities to increase the attendance at hubs for vulnerable children and ensure they are supported through the most appropriate means for their needs.

In addition we have started collecting data from local authorities on a weekly basis in relation to children's social services during lockdown. These are answered either by a traffic light response or if it is an increase, decrease or static in comparison to the week or the year before. Local authorities are asked to provide a snapshot of their services on the day they complete the return.

As we move forward to increased operation in schools the provision for vulnerable children will remain a priority and these considerations are at the forefront of our work.

Early intervention and support services, for example Flying Start and Families First moved swiftly to a new operating model following lockdown. While some face to face support is available, this is rightly limited by the requirements of social distancing; with support provided through a range of means including online, social media, group chat facilities, video and phone calls. Services have been innovative in their approach to ensuring that families receive support during this time.

I agree that steps to support our children's mental health and well-being remain key for all of us and welcome the Committee's continued focus on support for both the physical and mental health and well-being of our children and young people.

I note the Committee intends to hold a session for key stakeholders to discuss physical and mental wellbeing on 9 June and I await further correspondence on your findings

I want to reassure the Committee that the Rights of Children and Young People as set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) continue to be at the heart of decision making within the Welsh Government especially during these unprecedented times.

In respect of the Coronavirus Bill, it is correct that a Children's Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) was not undertaken as part of the preparation of this Bill, given that the Bill was produced by the UK Government and passed through the UK Parliament. As such, UK Government impact assessments were relied upon, one of which was the family test. A summary of impacts document was also prepared in respect of the Bill which has been published on the UK Parliament's website (<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/58-01/0122/Coronavirus%20Bill%20Impact%20Assessment%20final%203.pdf>).

We, along with the UK Parliament, have had to move very quickly to reduce the transmission of the Covid-19 virus in Wales. Article 6 of the UNCRC, the right of life, has been at the forefront of our actions during this public health emergency.

The most important safeguard for the rights of children was the commitment made, and put into law, that the regulations would be reviewed every three weeks, meaning in practice they are subject to continual review. This has allowed any disproportionate impacts identified to be addressed at speed.

As we move forward and through this pandemic, Welsh Government officials are making sure that work being undertaken following the initial Coronavirus Act 2020 assesses the impact on children's rights as set out in the UNCRC. We expect any Regulations or Directions for Wales made under the Coronavirus 2020 Act will, so far as possible, be subject to the full range of impact assessments required in Wales.

We also need to recognise that one size does not fit all, impact assessments around Covid-19 decisions have had to be flexible with officials applying a common-sense approach and exercising judgement on whether decisions are relevant to children and young people and the likely extent of the effect on them. As a result slightly different practices have been undertaken.

For example, one approach in the Education Directorate was to develop an overarching Covid-19 Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) based on all decisions originating from the decision to bring forward the Easter holidays. A small IIA group was convened consisting of the decision makers and a template developed to interview each of the decision makers. The content of these templates forms part of the evidence base of the IIA. The Childcare team have had one official lead on the IIA but taking a similar overarching IIA approach based on the decision to suspend the childcare offer prioritising provision of childcare for the children of critical workers and vulnerable children. Education and Childcare have been working together so their IIAs are broadly similar in style.

I am also mindful of our current difficulties in engaging with children and young people on decisions which have affected them due to the pandemic. Decisions have needed to be taken at speed to keep children and young people safe and, therefore, Article 12 has not been engaged.

To help address this I asked for a survey to take place to actively seek the views and opinions of children and young people on Covid-19 and the changes that have arisen because of the pandemic.

‘Coronavirus and Me’, was developed in partnership with the Children’s Commissioner for Wales, Children in Wales, the Youth Parliament/ Senedd Ieuenctid and with strong input from children and young people themselves. It is already providing rich data on what is important to children and young people. It has received more than 23,700 responses.

We are the first of the UK Governments to actively seek the opinions of children and young people. Through this online survey, we are hearing and listening to the views and opinions of children and young people in relation to this pandemic. Responses to each survey question (all related to specific Articles within the UNCRC), will be a rich source of information for specific policy teams within Welsh Government and will help inform ongoing Covid-19 decision making.

This crisis has undoubtedly impacted on children and young people, and we have needed to take some tough decisions about balancing keeping children safe against the impact of lockdown restrictions. Despite these difficulties I have been reassured how high children’s rights has sat on the agenda. Protecting children’s rights and supporting children during this time have been a driving force in the Welsh Government, which is why I look forward to the Committee’s publication of its inquiry into children’s rights in Wales report in due course.

As a part of our response to the virus we have made a range of support available to businesses across Wales, including childcare providers. There are a range of schemes, tailored at different parts of the economy, and we do appreciate that navigating them can be confusing. We provided guidance on what support is available to childcare providers on our website to help with this (<https://gov.wales/support-childcare-providers-coronavirus-covid-19>)

Given the range of operating models across the sector not every setting will be able to access every scheme. We have been speaking with the sector umbrella bodies about their concerns, and are taking those into consideration in our thinking about how and when to enable the sector to restart. While decisions around that will be driven by the data and evidence regarding the virus and its transmission, we recognise that the financial sustainability of individual settings will be key to both when and how they can begin to increase their operations.

Future arrangements for the Childcare Offer and the Coronavirus Childcare Assistance Scheme are also intrinsically linked to decisions around restarting the sector, and we are mindful that settings will need clarity on this as soon as possible.

The UK Government's decision to extend the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme is also a factor in our thinking and we are pressing for more details on how this will work as services start to recover. The childcare sector in particular needs a flexible approach to the ability to furlough staff.

I hope the committee finds this information helpful.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Julie', is positioned below the text 'Yours sincerely'.

Julie Morgan AS/MS

Y Dirprwy Weinidog Iechyd a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol
Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services

Children, Young People and Education Committee: 5 May 2020

Action points recorded by the Clerk:

The Minister for Health and Social Services agreed to write to the Committee once the report on unexpected deaths during the start of the Covid-19 pandemic in Wales was available and the Welsh Government had had an opportunity to consider the report.

- The Minister for Health and Social Services to respond separately.

The Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services agreed to provide information on how much of the support provided by the Welsh Government through the Third Sector COVID-19 Response Fund and the Third Sector Resilience Fund administered by WCVA is being targeted to children and young people. The Deputy Minister also agreed to clarify what funds available for third sector services were continuity of existing work and what is additional funding.

- Our new £24m Third Sector COVID-19 Response Fund provides support based on the needs of Third Sector organisations. Officials are working with WCVA to ensure that the funds can be accessed by all organisations across Wales providing vital services.
- As at 22 May we had supported a number of organisations identifying as supporting either children & families or youth:
 - Voluntary services Emergency Fund – 10 organisations have applied for £425k of support, of these 4 have been paid totalling £3238k
 - Third Sector Resilience Fund – 5 organisations have applied for £214k

The Deputy Minister agreed to provide the reporting timescales for the recently announced task and finish group with carers' representatives which is considering the specific needs of a broad range of carers during and following the Covid-19 pandemic.

- With regard to the reporting timescales we have set up a small group, whose work is time limited, with membership agreed with the Wales Carers Alliance. Its purpose is to share the concerns of carers, including young carers and young adult carers during the current coronavirus situation. Three national carers' organisations, including Carers Trust Wales which leads on representing young carers, are working with officials to agree relevant / appropriate actions. There are no formal reporting timescales as the group meets weekly to consider progress on agreed activity, discuss evidence of new concerns emerging from carers' feedback, and will assist with planning of future agenda items for the Carers' Ministerial Advisory Group.
- The primary mechanism for consideration of and discussion of issues affecting all ages of carer is the Carers' Ministerial Advisory Group (MAG) created in mid-2018. It brings together representation from across statutory bodies, the independent Commissioners, local health boards, national carers' organisations, academia, Social Care Wales and others, including Welsh Government officials. The Chair of the group is Mr Arwel Ellis Owen, appointed in January 2020. The group most recently met on 23rd April and I

intend to hold another meeting in the next couple of months, which will include looking into how we can work with the membership to further help and support young carers.

- The Engagement group, which will work alongside the Carers MAG, held an initial introductory meeting of a majority of its new members in mid-January. The Terms of Reference of this group have been drafted but have not yet been formally reviewed and agreed by members. Young carers are key members of this group, with representatives drawn from the Young Carers Network, plus Carers Trust Wales' Youth Council. Officials are in discussions with Carers Trust Wales about planning for the next meeting of this group.
- Following a competitive bidding exercise in 2019 funding totalling £8.2m has been awarded to support 32 projects through the first year of the three year Social Services Third Sector Grant 2020-23. Grants have been awarded on an indicative basis for 2021-22 and 2022-23 and will be confirmed when Welsh Government budgets for those years are agreed. Of the 32 projects being supported, nine with a grant value of 30% of the available funding, identified in their application that their project would benefit Children and Young People. A further six projects will support Children and Young People as part of a wider client group for their projects. This means that over 50% of the grant funding will support projects that benefit Children and Young People either wholly or in part.
- The Welsh Government continues to provide funding of £550,000 in 2020-21 to fund the "Active Offer" element of the National Approach to Statutory Advocacy for Children and Young People (NASA) to enable local authorities to provide a national consistent approach to advocacy support.
- The ChildLine service provides a free, confidential 24 hour service to young people until the age of 19 in the UK. The Welsh Government has provided a contribution of £90,000 in 2020-21 to support the NSPCC to deliver the ChildLine project, which supports the Welsh Government's strategic agenda for social services.
- MEIC is a Welsh Government funded confidential, anonymous, and free bilingual helpline service for children and young people up to the age of 25 in Wales providing information, useful advice and support need and are open 8am - midnight, 7 days a week, by phone, SMS text and instant messaging. The Welsh Government has provided funding of £535,989 to continue the service to March 2021.
- Welsh Government are currently in discussions with Pro-Mo Cymru who deliver MEIC to establish if anything is needed to ensure that the MEIC service is able to fully meet the needs of young people in Wales for the immediate response to Covid-19.

Annex D – Letter from the Committee to the Welsh Government following the scrutiny session on 18 May on the impact of Covid-19 on vulnerable children and young people (sent 27 May 2020)

Senedd Cymru
Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg

—
Welsh Parliament
Children, Young People and Education Committee

Julie Morgan MS, Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services

Dyddiad | Date: 27 May 2020

Pwnc | Subject: **Impact of Covid-19 on vulnerable children**

Dear Julie,

You will be aware from our [letter to the Welsh Government dated 12 May](#) that the impact of Covid-19 on vulnerable children is a priority area of scrutiny for us.

On 18 May we took evidence from representatives of the NSPCC, Barnardo's, the Heads of Children's Services in Wales and the National Independent Safeguarding Board. During the meeting, the Chair of the All Wales Heads of Children's Services Group (AWHOCS) explained that local authorities have been collecting and submitting data to the Welsh Government to "summarise the situation within the local authorities". The AWHOCS Chair went on to explain that the data:

"looks at our ability to operate within the current arrangements, the number of referrals, the number of safeguarding referrals, the number of looked-after children, the number of children on the child protection register, the number of placements affected because of COVID-19, and then there are also questions about the cohort after care, and how many of those young people have difficult experiences financially or experiences that lead to homelessness."

CYPE Committee, [Record of Proceedings \[para 230\]](#), 18 May 2020



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

The Committee requests ongoing access to this data to inform its scrutiny of the measures being taken to manage the impact of Covid-19 on our most vulnerable children.

During the meeting, witnesses also referred to the importance of considering the impact of Covid-19 on children not previously considered vulnerable but who may have become vulnerable (or will become vulnerable) due to the current pandemic. This has also been a concern raised consistently by the Committee. **As such, the Committee would be particularly grateful if your response to our letter of 12 May could give specific details on the steps you are taking ensure that children who may not be known to services but are vulnerable/could become vulnerable are provided with information on how to access support.**

I have copied this letter to the Minister for Education given the impact that steps to care for vulnerable children has on the work underway to support our children and young people's education and wellbeing.

Kind regards,



Lynne Neagle MS
Chair

Cc. Kirsty Williams MS, Minister for Education

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



Annex E – Response from the Welsh Government to the Committee’s letter of 27 May (received 30 June 2020)

Julie Morgan AS/MS
Y Dirprwy Weinidog Iechyd a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol
Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services

Lynne Neagle
Chair
Children, Young People and Education Committee
Welsh Parliament
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

30 June 2020

Dear Lynne

Thank you for your letter of 27 May in which the Committee asks for specific details on the steps Welsh Government is taking to ensure that children who may not be known to services but are vulnerable, or could become vulnerable, are provided with information on how to access support.

I am encouraged that the number of vulnerable children attending school has increased since lockdown. During the week of 15 June to 19 June just over 1,500 vulnerable children attended, representing 6.3% of all vulnerable children within the current definition. Local authorities have assured us they are prioritising support for vulnerable children whether that be in a hub or at home during this time.

Officials are working with the Children’s Commissioner for Wales and the National Independent Safeguarding Board, in consultation with external stakeholders, to develop a range of information and resources to support the identification of hidden harm or abuse, to promote the reporting of concerns and support disclosure by children and young people as lockdown is eased. This will include a public facing campaign, advice to practitioners across agencies and information and advice for children and young people themselves. Further details are set out below: -

- On 6th July the “Together We Can Keep People Safe” campaign will launch. The campaign will encourage people to contact their local social services or call 101 if they are concerned that a family member, friend or neighbour is at risk of abuse, neglect or harm. The campaign will run until 16th August and use social media, radio advertising, and digital advertising to spread the message. Comedian Rhod Gilbert is lending his support to the campaign by voicing the radio ads and filming himself talking about the importance of making a call to social services if you have a concern about child, young person or adult.

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:
0300 0604400

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay
Caerdydd • Cardiff
CF99 1SN

Gohebiaeth.Julie.Morgan@llyw.cymru
Correspondence.Julie.Morgan@gov.wales

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

- A multi-agency practice guide has been developed to support practitioners in identifying harm, abuse and neglect; report safeguarding concerns and manage disclosures by children and young people. The guide links directly to the national Wales Safeguarding Procedures, which promote evidence based and consistent safeguarding practice. This guide is due for publication on 6 July subject to Ministerial approval and will be widely promoted by the regional Safeguarding Boards and through sector specific networks. As we move into recovery we will respond to evidence in relation to the need for any further support for safeguarding practice as new ways of working are agreed.
- In addition we aim to produce information for children and young people to let them know that it is 'safe to tell', what will happen if they disclose harm, abuse or neglect and to assure them that they and their families will get help and support. This information will be age appropriate, with information designed to engage children and young people of different ages. This work is being developed directly with the office of the Children's Commissioner for Wales, the National Independent Safeguarding Board and with Cardiff University. We have engaged a range of external stakeholders to inform this work. We are identifying opportunities to directly involve children and young people in the production of materials and decisions about how best to communicate messages. We are working to complete these resources for issue on 7 September. A communications plan will be agreed with partners to ensure that this information reaches as many children and young people as possible.

With regards to your request for ongoing access to data; the document 'COVID-19 -Social Care Checkpoint - Children and Families Checkpoint 8- 24th June 2020' is attached at annex 1. I will ensure that the Committee is added to the circulation list for the checkpoint data document. The conditions related to the Welsh Government request for this data means that the information is shared for the purpose of the Committee scrutiny of measures being taken to manage the impact of Covid-19 on vulnerable children only. The data should not be used for any other purpose without prior permission from the data owner. This means that the data must not be shared, or published in any way without prior permission. If additional people need access to the data, please email Welsh Government to obtain consent. For all enquiries and consents to use the data outside of the original stated purpose, please contact owen.davies005@gov.wales.

I trust you have found this further information helpful.

Yours sincerely



Julie Morgan AS/MS

Y Dirprwy Weinidog Iechyd a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol
Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services

COVID-19
Weekly Social Care Checkpoint - Children and Families
Checkpoint 8 - 24th June 2020

Total Number of Respondents - 22

1. As of today, how would you class your ability to operate:		
GREEN	We have some staff absence, but are managing to provide cover for most services.	100%
AMBER	We have staff absent and some services are being moderately affected, but we are still able to provide cover.	0%
RED	We have significant numbers of staff absent and are only able to cover critical services.	0%
2. How many contacts have you received in children's services in the last 7 days?		3,791 ↑
Is this an increase, about the same, or a decrease in what you would usually expect at this time of year?		36% reported an increase 50% reported a decrease 14% reported no change 0% unable to answer
How many of the above related to a safeguarding issue?		887 ↑
Is this an increase, about the same, or a decrease in what you would usually expect at this time of year?		27% reported an increase 41% reported a decrease 23% reported no change 9% unable to answer
3. As of today, how many children looked after are there in your local authority?		7,264 ↔
Has this increased, stayed the same, or decreased in the last 7 days?		45% reported an increase 41% reported a decrease 14% reported no change
4. As of today, how many children are there in your local authority placed on the child protection register?		3,100 ↔
Has this increased, stayed the same, or decreased in the last 7 days?		59% reported an increase 36% reported a decrease 5% reported no change

5. How many placements for children looked after have broken down due to suspected or confirmed Covid-19 in the last 7 days?	0↓
How many of these were in a foster placement?	0
How many of these were in a residential placement?	0
How many of these were with family or friends?	0

6. Are you able to continue to make contact with those children requiring care and support at this time?		
GREEN	Yes, we have arrangements to contact all children who require care and support, either in person or through the use of technology.	86%
AMBER	We are not meeting any children face to face unless absolutely necessary and conduct all of our business electronically where possible. Because of this, some things have been affected.	14%
RED	We have made arrangements to contact only the most vulnerable children and families at this time.	0

7. Are your social workers and personal advisers able to continue to make contact to care experienced children and young people at this time?		
GREEN	Yes, we have arrangements to contact all care experienced children and young people, either in person or through the use of technology.	91%
AMBER	We are not meeting any young people face to face unless absolutely necessary and conduct all of our business electronically where possible. Because of this, some things have been affected.	9%
RED	We have made arrangements to contact only the most vulnerable young people at this time.	0

8. How many care experienced young people have reported financial hardship over the last 7 days?	32 ↓
Has this increased, stayed the same, or decreased in the last 7 days?	23% reported an increase 36% reported a decrease 41% reported no change

9. How many care experienced young people have reported issues with housing or accommodation over the last 7 days?	15 ↓
Has this increased, stayed the same, or decreased in the last 7 days?	14% reported an increase 27% reported a decrease 59% reported no change

Annex F - Letter from the Committee to the Welsh Government following the scrutiny session on 9 June on the impact of Covid-19 on the physical and mental health of children and young people (sent 3 July 2020)

Senedd Cymru
Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg

—
Welsh Parliament
Children, Young People and Education Committee

Vaughan Gething MS, Minister for Health and Social Services
Julie Morgan MS, Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services
Kirsty Williams MS, Minister for Education

Dyddiad | Date: 3 July 2020

Pwnc | Subject: **Impact of Covid-19 on the physical and mental health of children and young people**

Dear Ministers,

The impact of Covid-19 on children and young people’s physical and mental health has been a priority area of scrutiny for us during the current public health emergency. While we recognise that children and young people appear to be less susceptible to the virus than adults, there is little doubt that the wider effects of Covid-19—and the measures taken to manage it—have impacted their lives significantly.

On 9 June we took evidence from Royal College, third sector, and clinical psychology representatives on the **physical and mental health impacts of Covid-19 on children and young people**. In accordance with our approach to our scrutiny of Covid-19, the annex to this letter highlights the areas on which we request further detail and/or reassurance at this stage in the pandemic. It is not an exhaustive list of the issues we consider important; rather, our intention is to provide feedback to the Welsh Government, at pace, on the areas we believe require more attention, and to provide effective and timely oversight of the issues that are emerging.

Dr David Tuthill, representing the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, summarised the impact of Covid-19 on children and young people’s physical and mental health as follows:



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

“Children are probably unlikely to be directly affected by the virus with physical illness—that’s uncommon in terms of severe illness, but as an inflammatory condition, which we see, but it’s very uncommon. What they have been affected by quite greatly is, if I could call it, collateral damage—their schools have been closed, their clubs have been shut, they can’t socialise. All those things have affected children, and they’re very anxious, because there’s a lot of worry about coronavirus, which they’re hearing about—their grandparents might have died, or they’re hearing that thousands of people have died.” (*Record of Proceedings, para 7, 9 June 2020*)

We are concerned to ensure that a children’s rights approach is not lost in the process of managing this pandemic, nor in our scrutiny as a Senedd. As such, we have requested a debate on the impact of Covid-19 on children and young people. If that request is agreed, this letter, and previous correspondence between us, will form the basis of that debate, as we believe that all Members of the Senedd should have an opportunity to discuss these issues, before the summer recess, as a matter of priority.

Kind regards,



Lynne Neagle MS
Chair

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



ANNEX

1. School closures

While it was acknowledged that school closures had been a necessary part of managing the pandemic, there was a clear consensus among witnesses at our meeting on 9 June that the impact on many children's well-being of being away from school was substantial. The negative impact on children's wellbeing, educational attainment and the entrenchment of disadvantage has been widely covered in recent academic work and media coverage. The negative impact of the pandemic on a child's right to education has also been highlighted by the Children's Commissioner for Wales. A child's right to education is listed in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and, in turn, the Welsh Government is obliged by the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011 to have due regard to the UNCRC.

In light of this we believe that we must prioritise maximising safe, face to face contact with children and young people this summer. It is a matter of regret to us that the Welsh Government's preferred option of taking an earlier school summer holiday and returning in August could not be agreed with trade unions. We are also very disappointed that — despite the hard work of many school leaders, teachers and staff — the fourth week proposed for schools to check in, catch up and prepare children for the autumn term has not come to fruition in many parts of Wales.

Recognising the very real possibility of a second wave of coronavirus in the autumn term, it is crucial that lessons are learned from the recent challenges faced when trying to agree arrangements for our children's return to school. Children's well-being must be at the centre of decisions relating to schools, and we urge the Welsh Government and the sector to work together to be adaptable, bold and innovative in the face of this global pandemic. We believe that, from September, children across Wales must have consistently high quality contact with their teachers, and that opportunities to progress their education must be maximised for all children in Wales. This will also enable schools to play their vital part in the whole-system approach to supporting the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people.

Our Mind over Matter report emphasised the crucial role of schools in the emotional and mental health of children and young people. This is true now more than ever. Prior to the onset of this pandemic, the guidance we had called for on a whole-school approach to emotional and mental health was being prepared. **We believe that this guidance should be published for consultation as a matter of priority, to ensure that support for our children's emotional and mental health can be a central feature of their education.**

2. Recognising diversity of well-being and mental health issues

It is clear from the evidence we have received that many of the feelings young people have been experiencing, such as anxiety, stress and loneliness, are a natural response to the risks and challenges posed by the pandemic and the measures taken to manage it. Samaritans Cymru emphasised:



“What we don't want to do is to medicalise a perfectly reasonable, natural response to the challenges that young people are experiencing, including the loneliness that we know is quite a significant part of it, and they're going to be impacted by the situation of their parents and their wider family, of course. So, I think it's a very important message, and I don't think it's clear enough, really, that actually the measure of the distress people are feeling shouldn't just be measured through how many young people tip into mental health problems that are defined as such—important though that is to be aware of that danger. But it's also responding to distress in the wider population of young people, and I think it just really underscores this point about building emotional resilience for every child and every school, skilling up every teacher in every school, around a compassionate response to the distress in the young people they might encounter.”¹

On the other end of the spectrum of severity, Samaritans Cymru emphasised that it is too early for data to show what impact the pandemic is having on suicide rates. They warned, however, that factors which contribute to suicide rates and suicide risk – such as significant economic shocks, loneliness, and isolation – need to be monitored closely.

It is clear from the evidence we have received that an important balance needs to be struck between recognising and supporting mental health problems and not medicalising natural responses to a frightening pandemic. The importance of children and young people knowing where they can go for help is clear, and is even more significant when familiar places, such as schools and doctors surgeries, feel less accessible. In our view, this demonstrates further the importance of our Mind over Matter recommendations relating to provision of emotional resilience and early intervention support, and addressing the gaps in service for those children and young people who find themselves ineligible for CAMHS services but unable to find suitable therapeutic or “lower level” support – the so-called “missing middle”. The Welsh Government must continue to prioritise implementation of our Mind over Matter recommendations, and we plan return to our follow-up work on that inquiry at the earliest available opportunity.

3. Data

We recognise that the unprecedented circumstances presented by the Covid-19 pandemic has necessitated a change to routine performance reporting in to reduce the burden on health boards. We also note that the Welsh Government has established the Mental Health Incident Group to maintain oversight of mental health services during the pandemic, with health boards reporting on a weekly basis on the capacity and capability of mental health services. Nevertheless, Mind Cymru told us:

“...ensuring that the data collection around access to services, referrals, where they're coming from, and having that broken down by protected characteristics as well, in terms of ethnicity and things like that [...] is really important, so that we get an idea of

¹ Record of Proceedings, [para 142](#), 9 June 2020.



where the pressures are on the system, as well as how those pressures are being coped with at any given time [...] the data around what's happening is probably not in the best possible position for us to be able to say exactly what's going to happen in the coming months.”²

We are concerned to ensure that a clear and transparent picture of the number of children and young people accessing services to support both their physical and mental health is available publicly. The Welsh Government must make this data available in a timely and accessible way, to ensure that the impact of the pandemic and measures to manage it can be scrutinised fully.

4. Digital infrastructure

The importance of using technology to enable our population, young and old, to manage during this pandemic has been documented clearly. In the case of children and young people, we welcome the investment made by the Welsh Government in enabling access to equipment and broadband. **We are unclear, however, about the steps the Welsh Government is taking to monitor how many children are currently without access to the digital infrastructure necessary to access their education, health and support services. We would welcome further detail on these monitoring arrangements, and the steps being taken to measure how many children are benefitting from the investment made.**

While we recognise the significant and beneficial contribution remote digital access to services and support has made during this pandemic, we would caution against an over-reliance on it. **In many circumstances, particularly in relation to mental health, face to face interaction remains a vital component of support. Service design must have children and young people at the centre, and must recognise that individuals’ needs and preferences vary – one size does not fit all. We request reassurance that plans are in place for a safe return to face to face services where they are the most appropriate option, and that clear principles are in place to assess where a continuation of remote, digital support may be beneficial.**

5. The capacity of health professionals to support children and young people

During our session on 9 June a number of health professionals commented that NHS staff had been redeployed from children and young people’s services in order to provide the emergency response to Covid-19. Advocating for resources to be retained for mental health during a pandemic was described as “a real struggle”:

“...there was that period at the beginning when working in health meant that you were directed towards COVID unless it was considered life or limb, and that was really hard.”³

² Record of Proceedings, [para 158](#), 9 June 2020.

³ Record of Proceedings, [para 306](#), 9 June 2020.



We recognise that, in the face of a rapidly developing pandemic, public services faced unprecedented circumstances in which to plan and deploy resources. We commend the response across services to respond to the crisis, and to prioritise those most in need. **We are concerned, however, that while the physical health needs of the population were necessarily a priority in the early stages of this pandemic, services to support children’s mental health and well-being were exposed to the risk of de-prioritisation.**

We are aware that, in April 2020, Dr Andrew Goodall wrote to health boards setting out the Welsh Government’s expectation that mental health services should continue to provide “safe and sustainable responses” to individuals who need access to mental health support during this period. The Health Minister also confirmed to this Committee on **5 May 2020** that mental health services, including those for children and young people, are essential services and are not to be scaled down during the pandemic. However, this does not necessarily reflect the evidence we have heard from frontline practitioners about the redeployment of staff working in children and young people’s services. **Recognising the very real possibility of a second wave of coronavirus, the Welsh Government needs to set out the clear steps it will take to ensure that children’s mental health services are protected to avoid the long-term consequences that would follow from a lack of specialist support.**

We welcome the flexibility with which many services – both within the health service and third sector – have adapted to meet the needs of children, young people and their families. **We were particularly interested to learn of steps taken in some areas to enable parents to refer to single point of access facilities for CAMHS. We would welcome further details from the Welsh Government about where these models are in place, and believe they should be evaluated and considered for use all health board areas.**

Witnesses highlighted the difficulty young people can face in accessing age-appropriate crisis care services. Mind Cymru suggested that work is needed to identify what this model of care should look like:

“If any young person is attending a service, desperate for help, that service should be there. There's nothing in any guidance or any legislation that has suggested that those services shouldn't be there, but I think it just shows (...) the gap between services being there and sometimes the reality of trying to access those services, and trying to access them in a way that helps the young person.”⁴

The British Psychological Society told us that while there was a significant drop in referrals for self-harm earlier in the pandemic, crisis teams and A&E services are now seeing an increase in presentations and also that self-harming behaviour is becoming riskier:

“Actually, they've noticed more boys than usual presenting with self-harm and the crisis team, and they definitely feel it's getting busier, and also that it's getting riskier. So, maybe that children and young people who are struggling with those thoughts and

⁴ Record of Proceedings, [para 183](#), 9 June 2020.



feelings, perhaps because they're at home and under the spotlight of their parents, are maybe then using more extreme measures or extreme methods to act out on some of those thoughts and feelings.”⁵

We request further details from the Welsh Government about:

- **the steps it has taken to monitor the crisis care support that has been available for children and young people during the period since lockdown;**
- **the arrangements it has in place to ensure that crisis care support for children and young people is available to all those children and young people who need it as the pandemic unfolds.**

6. Impact on specific groups of children and young people

While the pandemic and the steps taken to manage it have affected all children and young people, it is clear that specific groups of children are more exposed to these impacts. During our session on 9 June, we were warned:

“There are going to be young people whose experience of lockdown is going to be quite traumatic and difficult, in terms of those from **black and ethnic minority populations**, with the increased level of fear, potentially, in those communities of what the virus will do and how it will impact on them. That needs to be recognised [...] Some **children of front-line staff** will have had really quite a worrying time period where maybe they're not seeing a parent as often [...] there may well be groups, during this period, that are really impacted, and are impacted in a different way. There needs to be some thought about how those groups of young people are supported appropriately so that they can feel that they are moving forward at the same rate as their peers, but may need extra support.”⁶

The impact on **shielding children** was also raised, with the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health stating:

“...the shielding advice that's been given out is predominately adult-based, and for many, many children, it's been completely inappropriate.”⁷

In response to a question submitted to the Committee by a young person about the closure of parks, the Royal College of GPs responded that **disadvantaged children** were likely to become even more disadvantaged as a consequence of steps to manage the lockdown. For example, they may not have access to a garden, and with playgrounds being closed they will have more limited opportunities for outdoor play and exercise. (Record of Proceedings, [para 57](#), 9 June 2020). As indicated above, we have concerns about the ability of all children and young people to access

⁵ Record of Proceedings, [para 291](#), 9 June 2020.

⁶ Record of Proceedings, [para 240](#), 9 June 2020.

⁷ Record of Proceedings, [para 55](#), 9 June 2020.



digital technology. This may not only impact on their health outcomes with more services being delivered remotely, but we are also concerned about the gap in educational attainment widening further if children from more deprived backgrounds are unable to engage in online learning.

We recognise that coronavirus has affected all children and young people, however we are particularly concerned about its impact on specific groups, including black and ethnic minority, shielding and disadvantaged children. Our previous letters have also referred to the impact of the pandemic on children with additional learning needs, and those in education otherwise than at school. We would welcome further assurances from the Welsh Government about how these particular groups – and any others considered particularly vulnerable as a consequence of measures to manage the pandemic – are being specifically identified and supported in terms of their physical and mental health. We would also welcome a response to the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health’s view that there is no reason for a child who is not under the care of a hospital consultant to be shielded.

7. Funding

On 27 May 2020, the Welsh Government published its first supplementary budget of 2020-21. This sets out that, of the £114 million of funding that has been repurposed within health and social services in order to directly support actions for the response to the pandemic, £7 million has been repurposed from the Mental Health Services Improvement Fund. In response to questions about this funding in the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee on [4 June 2020](#), the Minister’s official explained:

“The £7 million that you’re referring to was funding that we’d allocated for this financial year in support of our mental health delivery plan. So there’s a set of priorities articulated in that plan, which was published back in January, and that £7 million was to help health boards make progress on those areas set out. That included things like perinatal mental health, children and adolescent mental health services, neurodevelopmental services and the like.

With the advent of Covid, while we absolutely still want to see improvements in our mental health services around those priority areas, we recognise that that funding would be needed to maintain and enhance the mental health response to Covid, so that £7 million is still within the mental health budget, but has been, if you like, repurposed to support mental health services more generally in their response to Covid.”⁸

The Mental Health Services Improvement Fund is a vital component of the financial support available for child and adolescent mental health services. Further to our Mind over Matter report, the Welsh Government made the mental health and well-being of children and young people a stated national priority. While we recognise the need for some activity and funding to be repurposed during the pandemic, children and young people must not lose out as a

⁸ Health, Social Care and Sport Committee, Record of Proceedings, [paras 14-15](#), 4 June 2020.



consequence of adjustments to budgets. We request evidence from the Welsh Government that sufficient funding is available to prioritise the service transformation required in children's mental health in Wales alongside the response to this pandemic.

