

Ymchwiliad i effaith argyfwng Covid-19
ar blant a phobl ifanc yng Nghymru

Inquiry into the impact of the Covid-19 outbreak on
children and young people in Wales

COV 82
Ymateb gan: Arolygiaeth Gofal Cymru

COV 82
Response from: Care Inspectorate Wales

1. Thank you for your invitation for Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) to contribute to the consultation linked to the inquiry into the impact of the Covid-19 outbreak on children and young people in Wales.
2. To inform the Committee's considerations, we have set out below the context in which CIW registers, regulates and inspects services in Wales.

The role of CIW

3. CIW is the independent regulator of social care and childcare in Wales. We register, inspect and take action to improve the quality and safety of services for the well-being of the people of Wales.
4. We carry out functions on behalf of Welsh Ministers to provide assurance on the quality and safety of services. Our independence is protected through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Chief Inspector and the relevant Welsh Ministers. A copy of this MOU is available on the CIW website: <https://careinspectorate.wales/memorandum-understanding-between-us-healthcare-inspectorate-wales-and-welsh-ministers>.
5. We decide who can provide services; inspect and drive improvement of regulated services and local authority social services; undertake national reviews of social care services; take action to ensure services meet legislative and regulatory requirements and respond to concerns raised about social care and childcare services.
6. We regulate the following services:
 - **adult services:** care homes for adults; domiciliary support services; adult placement schemes and residential family centre services
 - **children's services:** care homes for children; fostering services; adoption services; advocacy services and secure accommodation services
 - **childcare and play services:** child minders; crèches; full day care; sessional day care; out of school care and open access play provision
7. We also review the performance of local authorities in delivery of social services functions. We carry this out through a combination of inspection and performance evaluation activity. In addition, we inspect:
 - local authority fostering and adoption services
 - boarding schools
 - residential special schools (boarding arrangements under 295 days)
 - further education colleges accommodating students under 18

CIW's approach to the outbreak of COVID-19

8. Our key priority is to provide assurance to the public and Ministers regarding the safety of services. Our decisions are guided by the following three key principles:
 - we will focus our activity where it is needed most to ensure people receive safe care – this means concentrating on those areas where we see the risk to the quality of care is the highest and where we can make the biggest difference
 - we will support providers by looking at how we can act flexibly and proportionately
 - we will honour our duty of care to our colleagues in CIW
9. To achieve this, we have adapted our approach to provide independent scrutiny while ensuring CIW does not put people using services, staff or its own staff at unreasonable risk and works in line with national guidance. This enables us to:
 - fulfil CIW's statutory duties to report on the safety and well-being of people using social care and childcare and play services without adding unreasonable burdens to a system currently dealing with unprecedented challenges, and
 - promote transparency about the response to COVID-19 and ensure lessons can be learned quickly.
10. We have produced an overview of our approach to monitoring and assurance during the COVID-19 outbreak. A copy of this document is available on our website: <https://careinspectorate.wales/200513-how-we-ensure-quality-and-safety-services-during-covid-19-pandemic>.

Our approach to engagement

11. We continue to review our approach to engagement across the children's social care sector. We seek assurance using a range of engagement strategies, from weekly calls with local authority commissioners to contributing to cross sector meetings and specialist groups - including Welsh Government policy officials and representatives from heads of children's services.
12. CIW is in regular direct contact with children's care home and foster care providers and managers. We are providing advice, support and sharing other information to help inform their responses to COVID-19. The majority of providers and commissioners report sufficient capacity across Wales. There are, however, some local pressures, for example, where placements are needed for children with complex needs.

13. From our regular contact with children's care providers we are collating and sharing emerging themes with stakeholder groups to support and further mitigate issues in the system. We also share information each week with local authorities and all children's care home providers about notifications received by CIW relating to COVID-19.
14. We speak with local authorities a minimum of once every three weeks, increasing our engagement with them where we have concerns. In addition, we may attend local tactical planning meetings in response to a specific issue, concern or safeguarding issue.
15. At a national level, we attend a children's services issues and contingency meeting each week involving heads of children's services and the Welsh Government. Emerging themes, guidance and issues are discussed to support the system, forward plan and to encourage all partners to work together on solutions.
16. We are continuing to develop ways to engage effectively with regional safeguarding boards. We have also sought assurance from all local authorities about their response to safeguarding children. We will continue to seek assurance regarding safeguarding practices through our routine engagement.

The physical and mental health of children and young people

17. The Welsh Government's operational guidance for providers of children's social care services during COVID-19 has been helpful to providers and practitioners. It clearly sets out the expectations in place and how to continue to ensure children are appropriately safeguarded.
18. In general, providers report children have responded well to the situation and the restrictions imposed by the lockdown. We have been assured all services have some provision of education in place either via mainstream, independent school or, most commonly, through home tuition. We are also aware some school hubs are supporting care leavers.
19. Arranging contact between children looked after and their families is challenging for local authorities across Wales. Remote contact for children and families is being used whenever possible. For those families for whom contact arrangements are proving impossible to achieve there may be an impact on children's mental health.

Vulnerable and disadvantaged children (including pupils with special educational needs and disabilities, children in need, looked after children and children eligible for free school meals)

20. The number of vulnerable and disadvantaged children using education hubs varies. Numbers in North Wales are low. Some local authorities report up to 20% of vulnerable children attending whereas others have reported up to 80%. Some parents/carers have cited concerns about safety as a reason for not supporting attendance whilst others have cited stigma. We understand local authorities have been proactive in encouraging attendance and some are now starting to see an increase in attendance.
21. Fostering services, (local authority and independent fostering services) are continuing to support carers and report that placement stability is generally good. Not surprisingly, tensions in the more fragile placements can be exacerbated by the lockdown – particularly where children are now home schooled. Impending revisions to the process for medical assessments (as part of the fostering and adoption application) will further support placement sufficiency. Implementing these changes quickly will further ease pressure in the system.
22. There has been a number of foster carers who have reported COVID-19 or symptoms of COVID-19 and the appropriate Public Health Wales (PHW) guidance has been followed. A very small number of foster care children have had symptoms or been diagnosed with the virus.

Children's services, including social care and safeguarding

Residential care

23. Children living in care homes are generally coping well. They are benefiting from improved relationships with staff and their peers and the absence of external distractions have helped children settle in their placements. Far more activities are also taking place within the home environment.
24. The majority of children are home educated. We have found a reduction in incidents of children going missing from care. Some homes have experienced staffing issues due to staff diagnosed or suspected of COVID-19 but this has not affected service delivery. To date there has been minimal impact of COVID-19 on children living in residential care across Wales.

Children's services

25. Children's services in Wales are 'open for business' with staff absence managed well and all services functioning adequately. The workforce are well, motivated and approximately 90% of staff are at work. Many staff are working remotely, but most services have devised rota systems so that duty and emergency work is responded to in a timely manner.

26. In preparation for 'lockdown' local authorities across Wales had risk assessed and RAG (Red Amber Green) rated caseloads to ensure those children and families who are most vulnerable were prioritised to receive help.
27. When lockdown began, most local authorities saw a dip in referrals, including for child protection. Most are now reporting a steady, slow increase.
28. Local authorities have not reported any substantive change to the way in which they respond to safeguarding issues. Children and families are receiving face-to-face visits where necessary. The provision of PPE (personal protective equipment) has been adequate across children's services to support these home visits. Other innovative practices, such as seeing children through open windows (and the use of technology) have also been deployed to monitor safeguarding arrangements. We understand there has been a positive response from most children to the improved use of social media and technology by professionals.
29. Despite a reduction in referrals, there has been a slight increase in child protection registrations in some local authorities. Many fewer referrals are received from other professionals because many are not having direct contact with children and families. In some areas there are worries about access to child protection medicals and some concerns have been expressed about a general decline in multi-agency safeguarding work. However, child protection conferences are routinely being held.
30. There has been no significant change to the rate of children looked after in Wales although some local authorities have reported small increases in numbers mainly associated with obstacles to ending current arrangements. Access to court time can be challenging. In some jurisdictions remote hearings are held and reported to be positive. However, we understand many final hearings and contested cases are being deferred.
31. It is positive that statutory reviews of children looked after are going ahead, usually virtually, however this has limited the proportion of parents/carers and children that have been able to take part. This may impact on children's rights and the fact that their voices are not being heard.
32. The Welsh Government's operational guidance for providers of children's social care services during COVID-19 has been helpful to providers and local authorities. We have observed innovative methods and practices for engaging widely across regions. For example, in Flintshire the North Wales Safeguarding Board issues weekly newsletters signposting people to information, advice and helplines. It clearly sets out the expectations and how to continue to ensure that children are safeguarded.

Early childhood education and care, including impact on the childcare market and childhood development

33. It is important to stress the obvious point that children need to play, socialise and have physical contact in order to develop and thrive. We also know that good experiences in the early years are crucial to positive outcomes in later life. The focus of government on the provision of childcare for key workers and the repurposing of the childcare offer is understandable and necessary. There has been less attention, however, on the impact of the lockdown on the well-being of children. The consequences for child development will only become clear over time. Any comment at this stage is, therefore, provisional and speculative.
34. It is probable some children will have benefited from increased involvement with their family carers. Others, however, will suffer from the lack of social, intellectual and physical stimulation afforded by childcare and play services. While the impact on individual children cannot yet be determined, we do know the effect will be more marked on children living in poverty and those in lower socio-economic groups. Families in these communities are both more likely to have direct experience of the virus and have the most to lose from the indirect impact of the lockdown.
35. This suggests the approach to reviving childcare and play services needs to be planned carefully and be nuanced. In broad terms, the need to support keyworkers by offering childcare needs to be balanced by the needs of other children for good quality childcare and play if they are to develop and thrive.
36. Data collected by CIW shows that as at 21 May 2020, 1,791 childcare and play services had notified CIW of closure because of the pandemic. The majority of these are day care services (1,285) with childminders making up the remainder (506). Details on this data can be accessed at Annex A.
37. There are a further 10 services who have voluntarily suspended their registration and another 78 services who have voluntarily cancelled their registration. We are contacting services in the latter category to confirm that the provider has understood the consequences of cancelling their registration with us.
38. In the majority of local authorities, more than half of the maximum capacity of childcare is closed. The most common reason for closure is 'insufficient numbers of children attending the service'.
39. From 13 April, CIW inspectors began contacting all 'open' childcare and play providers for 'check-in' conversations. Our contact supports providers by listening to their concerns and offering advice and guidance where we can. Not surprisingly, most report a dramatic fall in the number of children attending and many have furloughed some staff. Most are positive about the support received from local authorities and from their representative organisations through Cwlwm. Concerns about finance and the sustainability

of the service are a noticeable feature of the feedback. CIW will continue to 'check-in' regularly with providers during the lockdown and beyond.

40. On 9 April, the Welsh Government announced a temporary relaxation of several aspects of the National Minimum Standards (NMS). This initiative was designed to help support the availability of essential services during the pandemic. Local authorities are required to inform CIW of their approval and the provider needs to use their 'CIW Online' account to notify us of the relaxation. To date only a small number of services (29) have notified CIW they have relaxed one or more elements of the NMS. Nevertheless, the extension of the temporary relaxation into the recovery phase may assist in supporting closed services to re-open.

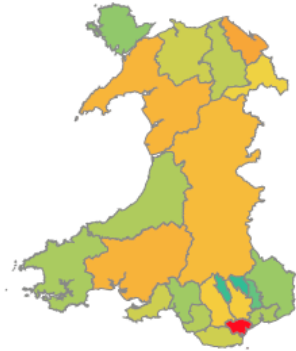


CCP Temporary Closures due to Covid - 19 (data as at: 21/05/2020)

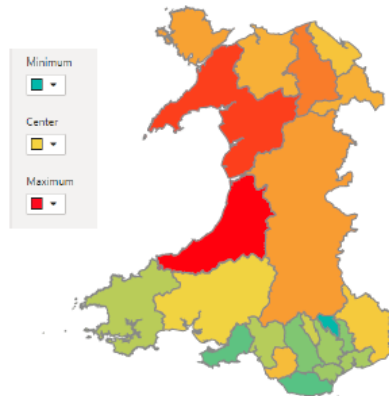
****CIW Use Only****

includes: Notifications submitted to CIW up to 21 May 2020 which had the type of CCP - Temporary closure due to COVID-19.

Number CCP Services Temporary Closures due to Covid-19 by LA Area



% (of LA total services) of CCP Temporary closures by Local Authority area



Count of CCP Temporary Closures due to Covid-19 by service type

Service Type	Creche	Full Day Care	None	Open Access Play Provision	Out of School Care	Sessional Day Care	Total
Child Minder			506				506
Childrens Day Care	3	628		10	266	378	1285
Total	3	628	506	10	266	378	1791

Count of CCP Temporary Closure due to Covid-19 by Local Authority Area

Local Authority	Number of services	maximum capacity Total	Temporary Closure Notifications due to Covid -19	% of closures by LA total	Closures - Max Capacity	% of maximum capacity closed	Number re-opened	Re-opened Max Capacity	Net services still open	Net Max Capacity Still Open	Net Services Closed	Net Max Capacity Closed
Cardiff	422	9848	191	45.3%	5991	60.8%	2	20	233	3877	189	5971
Swansea	192	4660	78	40.6%	2300	49.4%	4	338	118	2698	74	1962
Wrexham	167	4934	91	54.5%	3020	61.2%	9	381	85	2295	82	2639
Rhondda Cynon Taf	223	4468	96	43.0%	2326	52.1%	4	79	131	2221	92	2247
Flintshire	220	5422	116	52.7%	3361	62.0%	5	144	109	2205	111	3217
Carmarthenshire	219	4435	112	51.1%	2548	57.5%	5	181	112	2068	107	2367
Caerphilly	214	4044	97	45.3%	2215	54.8%	3	75	120	1904	94	2140
Vale of Glamorgan	202	3819	81	40.1%	2159	56.5%	3	194	124	1854	78	1965
Conwy	149	3793	81	54.4%	2153	56.8%	2	101	70	1741	79	2052
Newport	148	3753	68	45.9%	2317	61.7%	4	164	84	1600	64	2153
Powys	191	3595	107	56.0%	2026	56.4%	1	8	85	1577	106	2018
Denbighshire	126	3511	74	58.7%	2206	62.8%	2	58	54	1363	72	2148
Pembrokeshire	140	2837	66	47.1%	1564	55.1%	3	58	77	1331	63	1506
Torfaen	87	2106	38	43.7%	1195	56.7%	5	293	54	1204	33	902
Bridgend	133	3103	71	53.4%	1934	62.3%	2	28	64	1197	69	1906
Gwynedd	171	3478	109	63.7%	2521	72.5%	4	159	66	1116	105	2362
Monmouthshire	115	2484	60	52.2%	1582	63.7%	2	158	57	1060	58	1424
Neath Port Talbot	130	2328	61	46.9%	1353	58.1%	3	72	72	1047	58	1281
Isle of Anglesey	99	1953	55	55.6%	1310	67.1%	0	0	44	643	55	1310
Blaenau Gwent	56	1028	19	33.9%	440	42.8%	1	25	38	613	18	415
Merthyr Tydfil	43	844	21	48.8%	402	47.6%	0	0	22	442	21	402
Ceredigion	100	1699	69	69.0%	1336	78.6%	0	0	31	363	69	1336