

Senedd Cymru
Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg

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

COV 163
Ymateb gan: Unigolyn

Welsh Parliament
Children, Young People and Education Committee

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

COV 163
Response from: Individual

I have been wondering the last few days if I have slipped into some alternative universe as I can't believe I live in a 21st century first world democracy and I am having to fight for the right for my children to have an education. The right to an education and equality are enshrined in the Human Rights Act (1998), articles 1 and 26, and yet Wales is denying its children educational equality between its own children and those of the rest of the UK. We all, accepted the need to close the schools in March at the height of the pandemic. We weren't happy about it and we knew our education would suffer and that vulnerable children were being exposed to danger, but we accepted the need to do it to help slow the spread of infection, and also because, at the time, we knew very little about covid-19, and there was obviously the assumption, that like flu and the common cold etc, children would act as super spreaders of the disease. However, the situation is very different now and will be in September. We now know that children are not super spreaders of this disease, in fact children are now known to be involved in less than 5% of transmissions of covid-19. The WHO have announced that it is 'very rare for asymptomatic' people to transmit the disease'. As children are most often asymptomatic, keeping them off school will make no difference to the spread of covid-19. We are also in a very different place in terms of the amount of disease in the community. The peak of deaths in the UK was 8th-10th April, meaning that, given the time it takes for infection, showing symptoms, hospitalisation and death to occur, the people dying at this time would have been infected prior to lockdown. Clearly at that time infection of covid-19 was rife in the community. This is not the case now. Yesterday there were 26 new cases in the whole of Wales, with a population of over 3.1 million. This figure is fairly representative of the daily figure now, and given that the R rate in Wales is well below 1, the natural assumption is that this figure will reduce further by September, to very, very low levels. What this translates to at a local level is zero, one or two new cases in each local authority. The county I live in, Monmouthshire has seen zero cases for many days recently, in fact, for weeks now, the most new cases I've seen here is 2 on any given day. Levels of covid-19 in the community are simply not high enough for not fully

reopening schools to make any difference to the transmission of the disease. How, given all the above evidence can you justify not allowing children to fully return to school in September. As parents we are frustrated, anxious and angry and we have seen no evidence to justify your decision. Please explain how, when there are only one or two active cases in a county, keeping children off school is going to reduce transmission any further? There are simply not enough infected people in the community for reopening schools in school to pose any risk. You claim to be guided by science, but how can your science be different to the science in France, Germany, Italy, Austria, England, Scotland, NI, Spain, Denmark, the Netherlands etc, who have all either let their children fully return to school already or will have done by September? If you continue to follow the ridiculous policy of 'blended learning' and cause all the damage it will inevitably cause, opening up social and educational inequality and damaging the life chances of tens of thousands of children and leaving Welsh children less able to compete in the workforce against children from the rest of the UK in years to come, the very least you can do is present us with robust, up to date evidence and data to support the need to make your decision when levels of the virus are so very low in Wales and the rest of the UK are sending their children back to school full time. Where is your scientific evidence? Show it to us. All the evidence and studies I have seen recently increasingly point to schools being safe to return in full, without social distancing, at least for primary age children and that any risk of sending children back to school is far outweighed by the risk and harm being done by stopping them returning to school. I will provide links to this evidence at the bottom of this email.

Now to the title of this email and how this affects me personally. I found out this week that me and my husband will be returning to teaching our full timetables in September, because we teach just over the border in England, at XXXXXXX XXXXXX, a Gloucestershire school only just out of XXXXXXXX. Firstly, I would like to take this opportunity to say that neither of us is at all worried about our safety with returning to teaching our classes. Neither are most of the staff in our school, and neither are the vast majority of teachers I know. The teaching unions have not accurately represented our views. Just like the BMA back in May, they stated the views of their members before consulting their members, which is appalling. Most of us, unlike you it seems, have had the good sense to study the data and realise that as a proportion of the population, teachers are no more at risk than the rest of the population. We have plenty to base this on as we were still working in the week prior to lockdown when infection was rife and yet as a proportion of the population less children have died of covid-19 than other professions. This is unsurprising given the recent evidence that T-cell immunity gained

from common colds. So, please don't say you are pursuing a policy of 'blended learning' for teachers safety because most teachers actually care about educational equality for children, which is something you are denying them. It just seems to me that you are beholden to the will of union leaders. So, when we found out we would be returning to work we were pleased as we want to get back to doing our job fully, to give the children we teach the best education we can offer, delivered by trained professionals, and feel a sense of self worth. It hugely worries me that you think parents are able to deliver the same quality of education via internet links and downloadable worksheets as teachers who have undergone 4 years of training followed by many more years of developing their craft. It greatly concerns me that you seem to think teachers are expendable and the future of education is children isolated, hunched over a computer screen 'learning' online with no social interaction, no physical education, no female role models because their mothers are stuck at home unable to pursue a career because they are having to stay at home with children denied full time schooling. How can you even bring yourself to short change our children like this a moment more than is necessary?! My son is looking forward to his one short day at school so much, he has been looking forward to it for days. It shouldn't be just 5 hours per week! Anyway, sp now we are faced with me working 4 days a week, my husband 5. As it stands, my 2 sons, one of which will be in Y4 in September, the other starting in Reception, will spend one day in their classes and the rest in the keyworker hub. It is well known that children are not getting educated in the hub, they are getting babysat. So, all the home learning that is required under your system would have to be done at home. How? When? Do you have any idea the pressure this would put on our family life? My husband has already struggled with his mental health and this would tip him over the edge. Teachers are usually out of the house from at least 8-5 and then have to work evenings and often part of the weekend. When would we fit in our children's home learning? How would we have any quality time as a family, do the housework, the weekly shop etc? It simply isn't possible, so my sons would fall further behind, which would deeply upset my eldest who is a high attainer and loves school and places a huge emphasis on doing his best with his school work. How can you place this burden on us? We would spend all our time educating other people's children while our own children don't receive an education because the UK government clearly values children's welfare and education more than the Welsh government. How could you open up these inequalities between English and Welsh children and between children who have a stay at home parent and those whose parents work? How, when the leader of this government is a member of the Labour party who should by definition believe in social equality, could this be allowed to happen. Mr Drakeford should have to resign from the party if he allows this to happen as he goes against all they are supposed to stand for.

My youngest is due to start Reception in September and yet he will be dumped in the Hub without a recognisable class teacher, without continuity of care, without his friends, without familiarity. What sort of a start is this to his time in school? What will he think of education? The damage this will do to his well being makes me cery thinking about it. This should be a special time for him and for me and you have robbed him of the start to education he should have been entitled to, like you don't value it at all. Have you any idea how much it will pain me to leave him with a load of older children he doesn't know, without his teacher on that first day, just so I can go to work and do the job for other people's children that someone else should be doing for him but they are not because of your pessimistic and unworkable policies. How dare you do this to families! Also, please explain how it has been 'safe' for his him to go back to nursery with different children each day with no social distancing, but suddenly over 6 weeks it becomes unsafe for him to do this exact same thing in a schoo?! It could be even worse if things stay as they are. As children at our school are only getting 5 hours on their 'contact day' it is not long enough for a working day as we have no before and after school clubs operating. We have been told that they can only attend their class if they don't attend the hub on the same day, but no one's working day is 9.30-2.30 so how are our children supposed to be able to attend class at all? We would be forced to put them in the hub for long enough hours to go to work and then they would get no proper education AT ALL. This is beyond appalling. What does it matter if children are in their class and then in the hub? They would be in the hub the next day anyway and they day before seeing their class again, so it can't make a difference. Yet, some people are even worse off. Many will have to do to work who are not key workers. What are they supposed to do with their children when they are at work and it is not a contact day? You surely are not expecting them to pay for childcare in the school day when you should be providing school for them? Yet, I have seen evidence of a letter from a school in another local authority suggesting just that. This will ultimately lead to parents having to leave the workforce which will inevitably fall mainly on women, so undoing years of improving women's equality, again going against everything the Liberal Democrats and Labour should stand for.

Given that children at primary schools could be kept in class 'bubbles' it would be easy enough to send a class home if a child tested positive to avoid closing the school. Given that rates of transmission are so low at present, even if a school did have to temporarily close, that would only impact on a few hundred children for a 2 weeks or so. Surely that is better

than denying a whole nation access to a full education indefinitely? Even if you had local outbreaks, as has happened recently due to the food processing plants at Merthyr and Anglesey, schools in the immediate area could be closed if necessary, for a short period, with remote learning filling the gap for a week or 2, but the rest of the nation would remain unaffected. Teachers having put systems in place for 'blended learning' would allow remote learning to take place in an emergency situation, but you seem to be a very pessimistic, negative and uncreative government to just imagine we all need to keep our children home in September. How can you do all this harm to all of Wales' children because a handful of people across the entire country have covid-19? Life is never without risk, children are at risk of catching all sorts of infections that are far more likely to harm them than covid-19 when they go to school. They are at more risk of dying in a RTA on the way to school, or even of being struck by lightning, than they are from dying of covid-19. While you continue with this policy you continue to instil fear and paranoia amongst the Welsh population, this is damaging to mental health. You don't have to go as far as fines for those who don't attend school, you could allow those who are scared of their children returning, possibly because they live with medically vulnerable family members, to choose whether or not to send their children in in the short term, to allow confidence that it is safe to increase.

Some additional evidence to support the reopening of schools:

Data from Clinical Research Fellow of Paediatric Infectious diseases Alasdair Munro:

<https://twitter.com/apsmunro/status/1272612343726440449?s=21&fbclid=IwAR0I2qkCHtWaKCKk2LTS2PgV-DIQCadezeDIJtyn9SuyWvbVKmRZ5SClwqY>

Alasdair Munro on Twitter

"It's time for another quick update on paediatric #COVID19 evidence! Most new information is about transmission so we'll focus on that for now. It's pretty interesting! Lets take a look... #FOAMed #tweetorial 1/9"

twitter.com

<https://www.rivm.nl/en/novel-coronavirus-covid-19/children-and-covid-19> - please look at the Netherlands for proof that it is safe to send children back to school fully.

Children and COVID-19 | RIVM

Worldwide, relatively few children have been reported with COVID-19, the disease caused by the novel coronavirus. Data from the Netherlands also confirms the current understanding: that children play a minor role in the spread of the novel coronavirus. The virus is mainly spread between adults and from adult family members to children. The spread of COVID-19 among children or from children to ...

www.rivm.nl

Overwhelming evidence of the huge damage to mental health and well being not being able to attend school fully is doing to children:

<https://www.barnardos.org.uk/news/generation-lockdown-third-children-and-young-people-experience-increased-mental-health>

A third of children experience increased mental health difficulties during lockdown

Children's charity Barnardo's warns that lockdown could affect the mental health and wellbeing of a generation as at least a third of children and young people report they have experienced increased difficulties.

www.barnardos.org.uk

https://ieureka.blogs.bristol.ac.uk/2020/07/01/are-schools-in-the-covid-19-era-safe/?fbclid=IwAR2D7f9cWpiRyCgSJloZFX9HnAxzEOrF6jdYEr2HblzCe-z4g7R262tKI_Y

Despite schools staying open the whole time, Sweden have only had one death among children from COVID19 and 26 deaths in under 40s. The population of Sweden is 10 million people around 5million under 40s. So around 1 person per 200,000 have died in this age group. Many more die from traffic accidents. As most teachers would fall into this age bracket we can assume that children are not spreading it to teachers.

<https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/uk-news/children-greater-risk-lightning-strike-18393474> - zero risk will never happen but it's as close as possible.

Please, please give all children in Wales the chance for a full time education in September, or you risk devaluing education for them for life and causing great chasms in society, and destroying family life.