

Comisiynydd
Plant Cymru
Children's
Commissioner
for Wales

To: Kirsty Williams
Minister for Education
Via email only

06 July 2020

Dear Minister,

I am writing to you today to urge you to publish without delay your expectations of schools' provision in the autumn term to enable school leaders to plan their provision.

Those expectations should set out how to provide safe and welcoming provision in schools and colleges that avoids an overly risk-averse approach and in doing so balances children's well-being and socialisation needs with physical safety. It should set out expectations for supporting children who are likely to have experienced educational disadvantage because they have not been able to engage fully with learning over the last few months due to factors ranging from additional learning needs, to lack of resources and parental time or educational confidence at home. After just one week of the 'check in, catch up and prepare' period reports are emerging that children from more disadvantaged backgrounds are engaging less with school attendance than others.

While I sincerely hope that we will be able to *maximise* children's physical attendance at school and college premises in September, your expectations to schools and colleges should also acknowledge the real possibility that some children may not be able to attend school or college in the following circumstances:

- because they or their household are shielding or self-isolating
- because schools are still being required to offer blended learning at the start of term
- because there has been a necessity to impose a local or national lockdown

It must be made clear how *all* children and young people will receive their full right to an education and I would ask you to set out at least minimum expectations of how this will be achieved through active engagement on and offline, including synchronous and asynchronous videoed teaching.

As you and your officials are acutely aware, school transport remains a very challenging issue and I trust that plans are underway to set out further expectations in relation to this provision in order to enable families, local authorities, transport providers, schools and colleges to plan for September.



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Croesawn ohebiaeth yn y Gymraeg yn ogystal â'r Saesneg ac mewn amryw o fformatau
We welcome correspondence in the medium of Welsh and English as well as alternative formats

You may also be interested to know that I have also written to the teaching and school staff unions today urging them to work constructively with the government and enable their members to support children's ability to take up their education rights to the maximum possible extent.

I have also today written to the First Minister enquiring about the scientific interpretation of virus risks in Wales that has to date prevented an announcement of a full-time return to schools in the autumn, in contrast to the other 3 UK nations.

I have warmly welcomed the opportunity for children to have the option to attend school this month and am aware that this appears to have been generally a positive experience for all concerned, despite the limited nature of the provision. Nonetheless, unanswered questions remain about arrangements for the new term and your leadership this week in ensuring that crystal clear expectations of how children's educational rights will be fulfilled is essential.

I have much sympathy with the daily changes of circumstances that have faced the nation during the pandemic and the impact this has had on your officials and our public services. Nonetheless, I would have expected scenario-planning for the re-opening of schools to have been under active consideration since they closed in March and I now ask you to publish with urgency your expectations for the provision of children's education in September.

Yours sincerely,



Sally

Sally Holland
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