

To: Rt. Hon Mark
Drakeford MS

First Minister for Wales

Via email only

06 July 2020

Dear First Minister,

Children and measures to ease restrictions due to Covid-19

As part of your legal duty to consider children's rights under the UNCRC when making policy decisions, I urge you to consider children's access to rights including mental health and well-being, physical activity, play, education and socialisation with friends, as you make the difficult decisions on what areas to lift restrictions in the next period of review. I am particularly mindful, as I'm sure you are too, of the unequal opportunities that children will have had to exercise those rights over the last few months, according to access to a garden and green spaces, parental confidence, time and material resources to support education and family factors including having siblings to play with or living in households with multiple stressors.

Due to the emerging knowledge about the lowered risk of transmission by children of COVID-19, and the knowledge about lowered risks outdoors and in milder temperatures, I would expect that as a nation we are in a position to take clear steps forward to enabling children to socialise and take up their other rights. I have been encouraged by the steps taken in Scotland last week, for example, to re-open playgrounds and remove limitations for outdoor socialisation between children under the age of 12.

While it is for your scientific and medical advisors, rather than me as Children's Commissioner, to state what levels of risk are acceptable in terms of social distancing, I would urge you to closely consider whether the scientific advice can support a decision to:

Over the summer holiday period

- Allow children to freely play and socialise outside – with limits on group size if necessary
- Open outdoor playgrounds in parks – again there may need to be rules regarding numbers and adult social distancing
- Resume outdoor sports and play sessions.



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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

From September

- Enable as many children to return to nursery, school and college settings as near to full time as is possible by reducing social distancing guidelines for children and young people to the *maximum* you feel the scientific advice warrants. Any reduction in social distancing guidelines that the government is able to issue will allow more children to attend each day, school transport to run more effectively and the school experience to be more fulfilling for children as they are enabled to interact more naturally with their peers.
- I am mindful that the other UK nations have published proposals to resume full-time schooling from the start of the autumn term and wish to enquire whether it is differing interpretations of scientific advice, or differing patterns of the virus spread that has held Wales back from pursuing a similar ambition?

I acknowledge your approach to cautiously and gradually move the nation out of lockdown by resuming social and economic activities one step at a time. In such extraordinary circumstances the loudest voices can sometimes serve to drown out others. We must not forget the importance of a daily trip to the swings for a toddler's wellbeing and the importance of play and socialisation with peers for children of all ages. While I accept the economic difficulties our hospitality industry faces, decisions to open pubs and restaurants before play equipment in parks, and before the government's minimum expectations of the education that children will receive in September are published, may give the impression that adult needs are being prioritised over children's.

As I have been doing over the entire pandemic crisis, I am very happy to discuss these matters further with officials and lend my team's expertise to developing safe and child-friendly guidance on any steps such as those outlined above, and I have reiterated this in a separate letter to the Education Minister today.

Yours sincerely,



Sally

Sally Holland
Comisiynydd Plant Cymru Children's Commissioner for Wales

cc. Julie Morgan, Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services
Kirsty Williams, Minister for Education