

**P-05-988 Give key worker children equal access to their schools and teachers,
Correspondence – Petitioner to Committee, 09.07.20**



9th July 2020

Janet Finch-Saunders (Chair)
Senedd Petitions Committee
Welsh Parliament
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff CF99 1SN

Dear Ms Finch-Saunders

In March this year, key workers in Wales were asked only to use childcare hubs if absolutely necessary. Like many families, I was working from home apart from my own key worker session (I am a teacher in England) and my husband was furloughed until mid-May. As schools over the border increased operations in June, my husband began to use annual leave to be at home with our children while I went out to work. We did all we could to avoid using overstretched key worker childcare.

We were all relieved at the prospect of children returning to school after the announcement made by Kirsty Williams in early June, and planned to use a blend of childcare and ‘check in, catch up, prepare sessions’ to facilitate our own work and to enable our children to access the social and academic provision they sorely needed. Less than a week before this was due to start, however, we were told that they could not access both and wouldn’t be allowed to socialise with friends. Key worker childcare in my children’s school was restricted to supervision by a TA to complete online learning. This news in itself was very damaging to my children’s emotional well-being.

On the evening of Wednesday 24th June, Powys County Council wrote to parents, informing us that key worker provision would, in fact, be provided in a local leisure centre and the school advised us that we could access this provision or ‘check in’ but not both. No information was provided about measures to promote key worker children’s health, well-being or education; unlike children attending check in, who were made aware of what to expect. It later transpired that these sessions would be run by CIW-registered childcare workers, not teachers. Key worker children in Powys were, therefore, excluded from their schools, peer groups and teaching and learning. A caveat was later added, that children of school staff could be looked after at school but still not attend check in sessions.

As a family, we decided to put our children’s well-being first, and my husband has used the remainder of his annual leave to look after them at home, so they can go to school one day a week. My own employer has also been accommodating thus far. There will be no more annual leave in September and my own school will be fully open. We also have the additional problem of an extra

week's half term in October to cover with unpaid parental leave at a time of increased risk of redundancy. There is no benefit to our family of adding a week's school in July as we are unable to use it due to long-standing prior commitments.

I have talked to numerous parents, teachers and Local Authorities while my petition has been running, and have realised that this situation affects a minority of families. I understand that key worker children can, in fact, attend childcare most of the week and also go to their check in session, but this is at the discretion of individual schools (I believe Powys may have issued a county-wide directive requiring schools not to mix groups at all, but have yet to see this). Welsh Government and indeed Powys's own guidance on the reopening of schools advocates for the inclusion and entitlement of key worker children to check in sessions (see attached commentary) but this is not happening in practice.

I believe that schools should be required, as a minimum, to provide classroom-based teaching for all pupils on roll; distributed equally. Scientific evidence published in the BMJ (attached) states that children are unlikely to be super-spreaders and all should be allowed back to school' – a position that I support as a teacher. There is no need to separate key worker children from their peers – please see also my comments (point 6) on Welsh Government's guidance on the reopening of schools (attached).

At present, I believe some schools are looking at what can't be done as opposed to what can and should. My children's school is operating at about 22% capacity; yet key worker children weren't included in their catch up planning. I understand that this process has been rushed and logistically challenging, but it concerns me that inclusive practice has not been the starting point for reopening schools.

I believe that a statutory requirement needs to be put in place for schools to include all learners in classroom-based teaching equally, with no segregation of pupils whose parents are key workers.

Yours sincerely

Catherine Evans