

P-05-1024 For Environmental awareness to be made compulsory and a key module within Schools in Wales for all years (Primary and Secondary Education), Correspondence – Petitioner to Committee, 26.10.20

Submission to the Senedd in respect of Government Petition *“For Environmental awareness to be made compulsory and a key module within Schools in Wales for all years (Primary and Secondary Education)”*

Submission to the Committee

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This submission has been prepared to inform the National Assembly’s Committee in respect of the Petition submitted in March 2020.
- 1.2 This paper is submitted by myself, I live in Ynys Mon with my husband and three children. I have worked and lived in the UK most of my life and I am an advocate for environmental action. I currently work in the environmental sector and have worked on environmental projects in Wales since 2001. I have experience in community engagement, setting up and managing environmental projects, supporting youth projects and I have also been highly involved with schools at different levels. I have been a School Governor and I understand the many challenges we have in the public sector.
- 1.3 As an environmentalist, a citizen of this world and a mother, one is very aware of the climate emergency and the restricted time available to make a difference so we limit what we lose in this planet whilst taking this challenge as an opportunity to consider innovative and practical long terms solutions to restore nature.
- 1.4 Children and young people are our legacy. They are the next generations to live in this planet. They are who remain to pick up the pieces of our doings - or lack of these. It is therefore critical that children and young people are made aware of the natural world around them in a gradual and consistent manner. The more they understand the dynamics of their environment, the more they are encouraged to protect it. This Petition aims to deliver this message and propose for Wales to lead the way in engaging actively in school with young people, at an early age, so they are motivated to appreciate nature. This would have a significant positive effect on their wellbeing, learning and wellness.
- 1.5 The benefits of nature on health is well documented, such education is a la par with current developments in Wales such as the Future Generations Act 2015, Environment (Wales) Act 2016 as well as Welsh Government’s Sustainable Management of Natural Resources (SMNR) principles.

2. The impact of the application of a structured environmental education framework in Wales

- 2.1 School education is crucial on a child's life and having a set curriculum and structured consistent framework across Wales would be of benefit for each child and for our natural resources.
- 2.2 At present, we rely on individual schools to engage students on a voluntary basis to learn about the environment. Learning would be most effective if each week there was a set time for students of all ages and years to experience and understand the natural world whilst also gaining skills and a naturally positive attitude towards conservation and care for their environment. This would impact positively on students' knowledge, personal development, social skills, wellbeing and would assist students across Wales to have a consistent approach to learning and action in every day life.
- 2.3 The current model in schools in Wales embeds environmental themes within the existing educational curriculum but this is not consistent and great disparity is evident across schools nationally. This can be due to teachers' time or interests. It is true and pertinent to say that the educational sector are already under a great deal of pressure and this presents challenges on how the current model is delivered - therefore some schools are more successful than others on delivery.
- 2.4 Providing a set module focusing on Environmental matters in school (as opposed to embedding) this area within other subject areas only, can offer a wide range of perspectives and critical thinking not always found in other areas of the curriculum. It can ensure every child in Wales receives a basic level of learning consistently across the country.
- 2.5 A set module for all years nurturing young people at early years on their natural world, surroundings and environmental challenges, issues and opportunities is important not only for our children's wellness and knowledge as citizens of the world, but they can early on understand relationships between nature, humans, our environment; they can understand the dynamics of ecosystems, the link between their local nature reserves and heritage, so they offer nature-centred strategies.
- 2.6 Outdoor learning is a vital experience for students, especially at early years and primary. Senior years are more likely to engage in outdoor activities and learning if they were engaged earlier in life in such setting. Some activities such as conservations, environmental, wellbeing and art lessons can take place safely outdoors for a set amount of time per week to assist classroom learning.
- 2.7 Only on understanding the issues, their local environment, and heritage, can our children and young people begin to understand the need for transformation and innovation so to protect their world and future generations to come. As informed, educated and experienced citizens of this world they are able to be actively engaged on matters such as sustainability, and offer better solutions for the future world with an effective balance of environmental, socio and economic strategies.

3. Discussion

- 3.1 I welcome the opportunity to discuss these, or any other points relating to this submission, in person.

PD

[REDACTED]

October 2020