

P-05-1147 Require all schools to provide daily live / recorded teaching to all pupils not returning to school, Correspondence – Petitioner to Committee, 06.03.21

Require all schools to provide daily live / recorded teaching to all pupils not returning to school: further comments.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my views on the lack of online teaching during the lockdown period.

Primary schools in Powys will have been closed for eleven weeks since September, by the time they reopen on March 15th. In that time, pupils attending my children's school and, I believe, several other English-medium schools in the area have not been offered a single taught live or recorded lesson. Those attending Welsh-medium and bilingual schools have benefitted from between two and four hours' live learning a day. Nationally, I am aware of primary schools offering full days of live teaching. The disparity amounts to discrimination in my opinion.

In defence of the decision not to teach online, I was told by my children's headteacher that it was planned with developing independent learners in mind, in line with the new Curriculum for Wales – a Curriculum which is not yet in place; and a disingenuous way of justifying what has become nearly three months without teaching. It is astonishing that children who missed a term of teaching in 2019-2020 would be expected to continue to learn independently from resources of variable quality for a further prolonged period.

Evidence from the Education Endowment Foundation shows that there is no need for all children to be taught live all day, but that daily live and recorded teaching is part of the blended model; a finding supported in Welsh Government's own definition of blended learning. I'm aware that live teaching all day, every day would be difficult for many families to facilitate, but there is no justification for offering none at all. Children's learning should not take second place to adults' lifestyles and it is reasonable to expect parents to facilitate some daily participation in online teaching. Of course, there is the simple solution of recording lessons so that they are available at families' convenience, but apart from face-to-face teaching, nothing can replace live lessons for enabling children to interact with their peers.

Kirsty Williams mentions that safeguarding may be consideration for some schools. In our experience, all work has been set via Teams (it doesn't correspond with the materials on Hwb). If safeguarding is a concern preventing live teaching, I fail to see how this is not also the case for any online remote learning, given that all discussion boards and private messaging facilities are visible to any member of a household with access to the device being used anyway.

I am concerned that the learning deficit due to Covid has been exacerbated for those attending schools refusing to teach online, compared with their peers both regionally and nationally who have benefited from regular live teaching. The majority of children who haven't been taught will not be in groups identified for intervention under the Learning Recovery Plan. Kirsty Williams touches on deprivation in her somewhat generic response but doesn't acknowledge that schools were able to make face-to-face provision for pupils without access to devices or internet as vulnerable learners. All pupils could and should have been taught online.

This has been a disappointing missed opportunity for schools to operate more safely in the interests of all stakeholders. Secondary school pupils will soon return to school on a rota basis but I'm afraid I no longer have faith in Welsh Government to guarantee them quality blended learning while they are at home. We are repeatedly warned that the pandemic is not over, and I am not confident that this will be the last closure.

The Minister must improve blended learning provision by requiring schools, by law, to deliver high quality daily online teaching in the event of further primary school closures, and immediately in the case of secondary pupils returning to school part time. This should not be at the discretion of headteachers and would bring Welsh schools into line with what has been on offer to pupils in England since October.