

Senedd Cymru

Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg

Absenoldeb Disgyblion

Ymateb gan NSPCC

Welsh Parliament

Children, Young People and Education
Committee

Pupil absence

Evidence from NSPCC

Record your views against the inquiry's terms of reference, which have been grouped into 5 themes.

1. Reasons

In this response, NSPCC Cymru will focus its remarks on elective home education.

Figures from the Welsh Government educated other than at home census show that there has been a significant increase in the number of children who are home educated in Wales. In 2021, the recognised number of children educated at home was 4,022, which represents a 47% increase compared to the last full pre-pandemic academic year in 2018/19¹. There were significant increases in numbers of children who are home educated across all local authorities in Wales.

COVID-19 clearly played a key role in the increase in the numbers of home educated children. Although health concerns will be an obvious cause, there are other factors to take into account. In its 2018 Right Way Education survey, the Children's Commissioner for Wales found that only 46% of secondary school respondents felt that all young people feel welcome in their place of education. It is important to explore and understand the reasons behind this increase in numbers of children educated at home, so that families can receive appropriate support. This is especially important since figures show that just under 9 out of 10 pupils educated other than at school in Wales had a special educational need².

We know that it can be challenging for local authorities to assess whether families who choose to home educate are in need of further support. Not all children who are home educated were met by a local authority professional before the pandemic, and this sharp rise in numbers is likely to put further strain on resources.

2. Risks and consequences

Under the UNCRC, children have a right to education that develops the child's personality, talents and abilities to their fullest potential. They also have the right to express their views in all matters affecting them and be protected from all forms of physical or mental violence, abuse and neglect.

It is our view that being home educated does not in itself pose any additional safeguarding risks to children, but it does mean that a child is less likely to be seen, heard and known to the Local Authority and this reduces the opportunities that professionals have to support them and take action to safeguard them if needed. The National Independent Safeguarding Board (2017) concluded that

¹ [Pupils educated other than at school: September 2020 to August 2021 | GOV.WALES](#)

² *ibid*



some home educated children are abused and neglected, but that ‘we have no reason for believing this is any more – or less – common than in the general population’³.

NISB (2017) analysed 11 Child Practice Reviews/ Serious Case Reviews where home education was a factor and concluded that in seven of the cases, home education was part of the strategy used by parents to limit professional contact with the children and in the other four, home education was part of the withdrawal from services following professional concerns⁴. They concluded that to better support and protect children who are home educated there should be enhanced support services, assessment of the well-being and education of children educated at home, to include a register, similar to the register for those educated in school, and there must be an improved response to children where actual or suspected harm is identified and the child is or becomes home educated⁵.

3. Impact

4. Effectiveness of policies

We know that the decision of most parents to home educate their child is made in their best interests but are concerned that some children who are home educated may not in all cases have their rights under the UNCRC realised. We support registration of children who are educated at home as it gives visibility to these children so that authorities have greater opportunity to ensure these children are able to be supported and safeguarded if needed.

Recommendation 1 of the Dylan Seabridge 2017 child practice review was for the safeguarding board to “[w]rite to the Welsh Government, asking for changes to the legislation and statutory guidance on elective home educated children, to incorporate a requirement that parents and guardians annually register all such children with the Local Authority. In addition to this, that all such children should have to be seen and spoken to and their views and wishes are recorded annually. The legislation should state that the information held is also to be shared with the family GP and other relevant professionals.”⁶

We concur with the previous Children Commissioner for Wales who concluded in 2021 that neither the legislation nor the statutory guidance has been substantively amended following the tragic death of Dylan Seabridge and the NISB report into the risks to children educated at home⁷. We understand that the proposals on which Welsh Government are working focus on education and will strengthen and clarify the framework in relation to a local authority’s duties under section 436a of the Education Act 1996. Welsh Government have also provided additional funding to LAs to support elected home education. They expect the proposals to be implemented in April 2023.

We welcome the forthcoming strengthening of guidance and additional funding for support services. However to enable Welsh children who are not in school to realise their rights under the UNCRC and be provided with the best protection possible, we support the Children’s Commissioner for Wales’ recommendations, that Welsh Government:

³ [2017-11-14-Home-Education-Report-Final-13.10.17.pdf \(safeguardingboard.wales\)](#)

⁴ *ibid*

⁵ *ibid*

⁶ [ReviewofWG_FINAL_ENG.pdf \(childcomwales.org.uk\)](#)

⁷ *ibid*



- introduce primary legislation that places a duty on parents to register any children of school age who are not in school together with a requirement that children not in school must be seen in person and have an opportunity to express their views on their education arrangements
- develops, as secondary legislation, new database and information sharing regulations, as already proposed by the Welsh Government⁸.

In England there are plans under the Schools Bill to introduce the 'Children not in school register' which we welcome. We understand that there will be a duty on English local authorities to maintain a register and provide support, as well as a duty on parents to provide information on children educated at home. We recommend that LAs have sufficient resource and funding to deliver enhanced support services and carry out registration duties and as yet we do not know whether the additional funding is sufficient. LAs will need time and resource to find those children who may be more difficult to find such as those who have never been on a school roll.

5. Other

⁸ *ibid*

