

CCfW matters arising to 26.6.20

Education continues to be the key theme for contacts to the office from children, parents and professionals. The ongoing media coverage over return to schools issues and our promotion of the #AskKirsty Q&A session have inevitably contributed to this.

We have sent all of the questions received for #AskKirsty through to relevant officials for these to be answered by themes or groups. We would be happy to publish these responses on our Information Hub and promote these on social media. We are pleased to have been able to work in partnership on this session with education communications staff and were also pleased at the number of questions the Minister was able to respond to.

We will send another update next week before the meeting on 3rd July, but we have considered the ongoing issues being raised and set out the urgent issues by themes below.

Overall, while we are aware this is a rapidly changing policy area due to emerging scientific advice, we would like to see Government setting out national expectations so that children, their parents and school staff know what support for education should look like now, and in the range of possible scenarios for school re-opening in September. This should include what a home learning offer should look like (perhaps a minimum expectation), recognising that even if Wales reaches a point where we can re-open schools fully in September or soon after, some children will stay at home due to health concerns.

- **Focus on education:** much of the casework contact we've had has reiterated concerns that schools are sometimes only offering a one off session to each pupil; sometimes this is only an hour or two. The focus on well-being in the operational guidance is welcome but we are concerned that academic 'catch up' sessions will be minimal or non-existent for many pupils. Discussions around the 3 or 4 week summer term are affecting schools' ability to plan and ensure a supportive return for their learners, as well as impacting on other plans like Year 6 transition days which in some cases will no longer go ahead. We're still hearing from families whose children have had very little set work to date and very little feedback and remain concerned about falling behind.
- **Support for children who will be unable to return:** we have highlighted this previously, but the guidance is currently lacking in detail on how learners who are unable to return to the classroom will continue to be supported. This includes those who are or have family members shielding, those with additional learning needs who aren't being offered support to return, those with ongoing anxiety or worries, and those who simply cannot return due to practical arrangements such as restrictions on school transport.
- **Support for additional learning needs:** we've had a number of contacts concerned at the lack of support with home learning and/or with returning to school premises.
- **Plans for September:** with other UK nations returning to more or less full operation in September, we've had concerns raised about Welsh children being left behind. This is on top of the volume of contacts we're having about lack of online (live or recorded) lessons and support sessions, and lack of set work or contact from schools generally.

Whilst the 'Coronavirus and Me' survey showed most children were receiving some contact from their schools, this hasn't been everyone's experience and some are reporting a one off email from the school each week with detailed written instructions only. It should be noted that we have also had contact from some families who are concerned that the return to school is too rushed, but this is outweighed by those who would like a fuller return, more quickly.

- **Technical guidance:** the current WG guidance Stay Safe Stay Learning on livestreaming lessons says that staff should not be directed to undertake livestreamed sessions and that there should be no livestreamed one to one lessons with learners. It is unclear whether 'livestreamed' in this context means broadcast or simply taking place in real time; if it is the former we can understand the associated safeguarding concerns but at present this is preventing many schools and practitioners from making any one to one contact with their vulnerable learners including those with additional needs who would have had one to one support at school. This also affects the plans for next term if blended learning is set to continue; we've heard little about how children at home could link up with their classmates in the school premises using live lessons for example.
- **Planning for different scenarios:** the Minister said in the televised Q&A on 24th June that it is important to be planning for different scenarios. At present we have not seen evidence of this; we'd expect school to be planning for both partial and full return to classrooms in the autumn term, as well as considering how learning will be continued if the potential for a second wave spike in cases could mean closing schools again. The closure in March was unprecedented and urgent, and efforts to maintain learning with 3 days' notice should be commended, but any future return to 'full lockdown' should not be considered an unplanned for surprise now. This will need to include advice to schools on how to support children who are unlikely to return in July or September due to health concerns, whatever the school arrangements in September.
- **Childcare and hubs:** concerns relate to 'mixing' children from hubs with their classes (some are worried about this, others are worried for children who aren't allowed to rejoin their classmates). Emergency critical worker childcare is also dominating discussions about how schools can make the education offer to all their pupils when the majority of their one-third of places will be made up of childcare places. How is this being managed, how else could childcare be provided, what other premises could be being used?

We have had contact from a family this week of two social worker parents of foundation phase aged children who have had almost no hub provision and real pressure from their small school and village community not to request it, plus very little home learning support. We have advised them on how to complain. They have also written to the Minister.

- **Summer provision:** – linked to the point above, we believe that wider discussions across LAs and WG should be taking place on how to involve the youth work and play sectors in supporting childcare and other provision for children, particularly over the

summer to re-engage children who may not have been accessing much education to date. This is not necessarily those considered 'vulnerable' in accordance with the current guidance.

- **Risk assessments:** we remain concerned at the focus on risk assessments and the potential that this risk averse messaging will impact on children's return to schools. We've already heard about families having to complete a daily risk assessment health declaration and children who aren't allowed to bring water bottles in to school for fears of contamination.
- **School transport:** is heavily affected by social distancing measures. There will be disproportionate impact on learners attending Welsh medium schools and faith schools, as well as those affected by poverty.
- **Workforce:** if return to education is seen as a national priority, to support and re-engage children, then perhaps there could be consideration of broadening out the workforce, including use of professionals from other sectors to offer support and lesson content, and consideration of widening out the Register for the teaching profession, as was done for health and social care at the outset of the pandemic. This could include asking those who have retired or changed roles to consider re-registering for a specified period in order to make this support available to all.