



Ein cyf/Our ref FM -/01679/20

Professor Sally Holland
Children's Commissioner for Wales

Ceirios.Williams@childcomwales.org.uk

12 November 2020

Dear Sally

I am writing in response to your letter of 14 October about the firebreak in Wales. As you are aware, the firebreak was a short, sharp series of nationwide measures, which ran from 23 October to 9 November.

As you acknowledge in your letter, events have been moving very quickly. In introducing the firebreak, we acted on the very clear advice of our medical and scientific advisers. The firebreak – a form of circuit breaker – was needed to help bring coronavirus under control; prevent the NHS from becoming overwhelmed and to ultimately save lives.

I share your concerns about the impact these restrictions will have on children and young people, particularly those groups of children who have been more adversely affected by the pandemic. Children's rights have been at the forefront of our thinking, informed by a Children's Rights Impact Assessment.

The results from the Coronavirus and Me survey, has been very helpful – as have the opportunities I have had to speak to children. These opportunities to hear from children and their experiences of the pandemic have informed the Children's Rights Impact Assessment process and decisions made about the firebreak arrangements.

In designing the firebreak, we tried to keep disruption to education to a minimum, while knowing that, to have maximum impact, the cumulative impact of the restrictions had to be as deep as possible.

To mitigate the disruption to education, primary schools and secondary schools to years seven and eight have reopened following half term. This decision was based on the year groups who were best able to engage with distance and self-directed learning.

Schools have learned lessons from the first lockdown and put arrangements in place in case of disrupted learning this term. The Welsh Government will continue to work with

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay
Caerdydd • Cardiff
CF99 1SN

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:
YP.PrifWeinidog@llyw.cymru • ps.firstminister@gov.wales

Irrelevant & Sensitive

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

schools, local authorities and unions to provide them with further guidance particularly around checking in with more vulnerable pupils.

The wellbeing of every child is important. Pupils in years nine and above have had a week of learning from home in the week after half-term. Those taking exams in November will be able to do so.

The Welsh Government has issued guidance for this period which includes minimum expectations for learning. This includes teachers delivering online lessons from the classroom. Learners with additional learning needs will continue to have their needs met as local authorities, health boards and schools have ongoing duties to meet the needs of these learners. Wales is the only country in the UK not to have modified these duties as a result of the current pandemic.

To support digitally excluded learners in maintained schools during lock down, the Welsh Government secured 10,848 MiFi devices and 9,717 software licences to support the needs identified by local authorities. Based on local authority feedback, through their own arrangements or via our nationally provided support, we understand that provision for digitally excluded learners is now in place. If a parent / carer hasn't accessed this provision, they need to contact their local school to access it.

To support children and young people's mental well-being, the Welsh Government has already made £466,000 available to extend the mental and emotional support to children younger than year six in schools and £1.25m to support school counselling for those in year 6 and above. Advice and information has been provided on line on how children and young people can maintain their emotional wellbeing.

Finally recognising how important being outside and play is for children and young people and for their physical and mental health, there have been no restrictions on exercise during this firebreak.

I would like to thank you for your offer to work with officials to analyse potential impacts on children and young people and I am aware that you are involved in ongoing discussions with officials.

Thank you for your continued support and your ongoing role as a critical friend.

Best wishes

A rectangular box with a dashed border containing the letters 'PD' in a large, bold, black font, representing the signature of Mark Drakeford.

MARK DRAKEFORD