



Eich cyf/Your ref Petition P-05-1015  
Ein cyf/Our ref KW/04527/20  
Janet Finch-Saunders MS  
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21 August 2020

Dear Janet,

Thank you for your recent correspondence regarding a petition against possible schools closures following a new outbreak of COVID-19.

Since the decision was taken to have a national lockdown so much work has been done to build upon the learning that has resulted from that time. Many strategies have now been put in place and we know so much more about the prevalence of COVID-19 that it is not envisaged another national lockdown would necessarily be required. The Disease Outbreak Plan for Wales (2020) Public Health Wales has provided specific advice regarding the investigation and management of clusters and incidents of COVID-19 in educational settings; this, together with our latest Operational Guidance published on 11 August provides a process for schools to follow in the event of an outbreak in a school which will be key to managing confirmed cases of COVID-19 among the school community. The First Minister has also been clear on his priority to keep schools open where possible.

We recognise the possibility of future disruption to schooling at a local level from the impact of the pandemic. We are clear that schools and Local Authorities need to ensure plans are in place for responding to disruption based on local scenarios, and that these should include impact on individuals and groups, the closure of a school for a period or the closure of a group of schools such as a local cluster or all the secondary schools serving a community.

As we go into September, we will clearly state our expectation that schools do all they can to ensure continuity of learning under future conditions of disruption. Schools will be expected to set out in their plans pupils' entitlement to contact and support, the frequency and duration of teaching and learning sessions, and the amount of time pupils are expected to spend in independent study.

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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.

We are aware that the regional consortia have undertaken considerable work to make guidance and Professional Learning available to schools in support of their approach to blended and remote learning, and that the HWB now contains significant resources for use by schools in developing their plans.

I am not convinced that mandating special schools to remain open during any lockdown would necessarily be sensible or practical, but I believe that there is merit in the development of contingency plans to improve the ability of schools to react to any national or local lockdown.

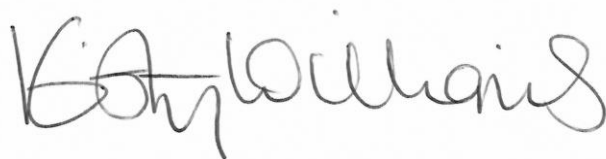
On 17 August, 'Guidance for supporting vulnerable and disadvantaged learners' was published. This guidance supplements the Operational 'Guidance for Schools and Settings from the Autumn Term' and the 'Guidance on Learning in Schools and Settings from the Autumn Term' and provides specific advice for vulnerable and disadvantaged learners, including those learners receiving Education Other Than At School (EOTAS).

The guidance deals with a range of scenarios and sets out expectations for local authorities, schools and settings. As well as expectations around the planning for re-engaging vulnerable and disadvantaged learners in their education from September, the guidance is clear that contingency plans should be made to prepare for potential further disruption to education in the event of future waves of the virus. This will be particularly important for learners who are engaged in vocational learning, which may not be easily adapted to distance or blended learning models.

The guidance is clear that planning and support should be based on the needs of individual learners, taking into account the impact the closure of schools and settings has had on the well-being and wider learning of learners. It also provides information on increased anxiety, mental health issues and challenging behaviour, which may be particularly relevant in the context of supporting learners to re-integrate and re-engage with their learning.

I hope this offers assurance that considerable work is being undertaken to ensure as little disruption as possible to learners should there be further outbreaks of COVID-19 that would result in school closures or a reduction in their operation.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kirsty Williams', written in a cursive style.

**Kirsty Williams AS/MS**

Y Gweinidog Addysg  
Minister for Education