



Ethnic Minorities
& Youth Support
Team Wales

Tim Cymorth
Lleiafrifoedd Ethnig
& Ieuenctid Cymru

All Wales BAME Engagement Programme
Covid 19 Topical Forums
Schools, Your Child, & You: What's Best Next?
15th July 10:30-11:30 via Zoom link

Attendees: 51 people attended the forum with representatives from communities and organisations across Wales.

Speaker panel: Sally Holland – Children’s Commissioner, Dr. Heather Payne – Co-Chair First Minister’s BAME Covid19 Advisory Group, Tana Wigfall – Welsh Government Education Department, Sonny Singh – Welsh Government Education Department

Chair: Rocio Cifuentes, EYST CEO

Opening by Rocio Cifuentes: Rocio introduces the purpose of these forums which EYST runs as part of All Wales BAME Engagement Programme. The aim is to hear about the impact of Covid 19 on BAME people and families in Wales as well as their concerns as we come out of lockdown. Today’s topic is about you and your children, considering returning to schools. We have a panel with four speakers today, including the Sally Holland the Children’s Commissioner for Wales, the co-Chair of the First Ministers Covid 19 advisory group Dr Heather Payne as well as Sonny Singh and Tanya Wigfall from the Welsh Government Education Department. The aim is for you to get information about the planning process in returning to school regarding keeping pupils safe but also regarding continuity of learning and addressing any gaps in learning. Another aim is that officials address your questions and hear your experiences of learning during lockdown and concerns about the return to school. We will begin with five-minute opening remarks from each speaker before moving on to discussion.

Sally Holland, Children’s Commissioner for Wales - Notes she is delighted for the chance to be here and especially to listen today. Kath and Sophie from her team will help to note issues and follow up with people. She is appointed by Government but independent of Government. Her role is to support rights of children and young people. With Covid 19 crisis, she has four areas of work. One, children and families are fully informed throughout the crisis. They began an online bilingual info hub 24 hours after lock down, which is still going. It provides safe reliable information for children about the virus, their rights, and

services and how services have changed. Priority 2 - Listening, primarily through a survey. She is pleased that more than 1/20 children in Wales took part in that survey. They were feeding results to Government even before the survey closed. That did influence the Welsh Government (WG) decision to reopen schools. They have 24,000 sets of free text comments which they are still analysing and will be publishing more findings from that. The survey had a good response rate from BAME young people. They will be publishing some briefings from this analysis and this will include a briefing on the views and experiences of BAME children in Wales. Her office is also listening to experiences from individuals and contacts from professionals, carers and parents. A lot of people contact her office about schools – They tend to hear negative experiences in those cases rather than positive. Although there were some positives from young people in the survey. Priority 3- Monitor and make sure children are safe and looked after where they are. Make sure vulnerable children get support they need. Priority 4 – Make sure Government gets right measures out ASAP. Ensure they do impact assessment in interests of children. Make sure Government addresses consensus we have heard from BME YP about additional health concerns they have that is thought about by Government and in guidance it provides. Dr. Payne will be able to talk about as well.

Dr. Heather Payne, Co-Chair BAME Covid 19 Advisory Group - Sally explained how important it is that children and young people must be in focus in this crisis. Dr. Payne wants to emphasise the work of the First Minister's BAME Covid 19 Advisory group in trying to address impact of Covid on BAME ethnic groups and the work done there to improve outcomes and reduce inequalities. It was in response to Covid itself and to the obvious problem there seems to be much greater adverse effect on BAME populations. They did a rapid piece of work and ended up with a fantastic group of people. The First Minister's advisory group is chaired by Judge Ray Singh with Dr. Payne as co-chair. The Risk Assessment subgroup produced a risk assessment tool for healthcare workplaces. The other subgroup chaired by Professor Emmanuel Ogbonna looked at socioeconomic factors, causes of causes of ill health. We know there is imbalance of outcomes such as life expectancy. But educational achievement is a precursor for health in later life. Working in a co-productive way, Dr. Payne personally listened to 400 different voices from BAME groups around the country. The upshot - huge workstreams and reports which aim to protect people, promote health and wellbeing, address structural inequality and more importantly, improve data around health and ethnicity. Data we have is poor quality and we need to find better ways to collect to improve outcomes and make sure people are protected in workplace. We know the different effect for people in different occupations - taxi drivers, factory workers, farm workers, meat packing – they have more propensity for spreading in that context, so they need more protection. The socioeconomic subgroup report has made large recommendations that are being considered by WG right now. They are also working in NHS to take these messages back for consideration. There is also still a lot of racism in the NHS, etc. It's very difficult to think about that as no one wants to think they are racist. We need high level cultural competency skills to make sure services are equitable. Also, we need systems not just to reduce inequalities but to measure them. This gathering is part of an ongoing process to make structural and procedural change in way we do things, to respect everybody's needs and culture.

Socio-economic subgroup report: <https://gov.wales/black-asian-and-minority-ethnic-bame-covid-19-socioeconomic-subgroup-report>

Tanya Wigfall, Welsh Government Education Head of Professional Learning – Tanya has been working on the Welsh Government continuity of learning programme “Stay safe, stay learning,” guidance and policy to mitigate the impact of learners not being physically present in schools. Its core priority is safety and welfare of children and the educational workforce. Welsh Government was well placed in terms of supporting schools with the online distance element via Hwb, a national digital platform. Education practitioners can create and share their own resources and assignments and it provides everyone with Google education and MS Office. But the continuity of learning programme is necessary to support that system. She must stress the systemic nature of support for continuity of learning. It is not just Welsh Government, but also entails working with partners across the “middle tier” – local authorities, the regional education consortia, the educational leadership academy, the inspectorate – have all been involved in developing the continuity of learning programme. There are key cross cutting themes to “Stay Safe, Stay Learning”: inclusion, Welsh language and focus on those whose home language will not be English or Welsh and also connectivity to devices. There is a whole range of guidance produced for leaders and teachers but also for parents on how to support learners. And for leaders and practitioners as they try to make sense of learning in this new environment. They help digitally excluded learners with repurposed devices. Schools and local authorities have put 10,000 digital learning devices out to the system. Schools have reopened and we are gearing up with announcement that all learners will return to school in September. The Education Minister had announced £29 million in extra support for the return to school, the equivalent of 600 extra teachers and 300 extra learning assistants.

Sonny Singh, Welsh Government Education, Curriculum & Assessment Policy Professional Advisor – Precovid and in future, looking at curriculum reform, Wales is going through a monumental change in education – looking at developing four purposes purpose in each individual learner. The curriculum itself has six Areas of Learning Experience (AOLEs). Health and wellbeing in particular is a new AOLE and will be done all the way through primary. This past January, Welsh Government published educational guidance on the New Curriculum and schools have until January 2022 to implement it. In February and March, things moved very quickly. He currently has two bits of guidance in remit. One, how schools start opening and keep everyone safe. The other is learning guidance – what happens to learners when they go back to schools, promoting health and wellbeing, understanding some learners won’t be healthy and well and ready to learn. Have connected with 29m programme – how to best equip learners who have needs. Along with curriculum reform changes, assessment reform is shifting focus to learner progression along a continuum of learning which is a massive change. Leading up to Sept 2022 and curriculum reform, the New Curriculum guidance that has gone out is high level – how schools can develop curriculum for their communities. Welsh Government is developing more resources to support the implementation. Support for Welsh Language. It also has a BAME working group to develop gaps and to develop training for BAME communities to consider

their prominence in the curriculum. They are developing STEM resources. There is also further support around humanities looking at Welsh culture and identity. In a nutshell, schools closing and re-opening accounted for a large proportion of work over the last two months. A large amount of planning had gone into developing the new curriculum. That will be a major focus in the next 2 years - looking to develop more guidance and resources for staff and development for learners.

Supporting learners and continuity of learning

- Attendees expressed concerns about support for pupils whose first languages are not English or Welsh and for parents who find communication with schools challenging:
 - What about support for children who may have reverted to native language during lockdown? Not being able to see and speak with friends will have made the impact of missing school for English learners more profound.
 - Comment from chat: More needs to be done to reach the families with limited proficiency in English at all levels including more communications from WG, etc in a range of languages.
 - In the Children's Commissioner survey, they heard from young people who raised concerns about parents with limited English proficiency. One survey respondent reported they were helping all their younger siblings with learning with access to only one device. "That quote really brought home some of the issues."
 - The Commissioner also noted that whatever their home language, a lot of families have struggled with home education and struggled on keeping up with long detailed messages from schools. There is also a similar concern for children in Welsh medium schools who live in English-speaking households. It is imperative that "all children who need additional support to achieve full potential are identified and that we make sure learning plans in place for them."
 - Tanya from Welsh Government Education Department informs that impact on English learners and speakers of languages other than English or Welsh is a factor they are actively considering. There has been a lot of work for children from English speaking homes who attend Welsh speaking schools, but she also recognises it is not just about Welsh/English bilingualism. It is on their radar and they are actively considering.

- Attendees also expressed concerns about pupils in transition years and high stakes exam years:
 - High school kids who have missed school are worried about upcoming exams
 - Those transitioning to high school in September have have missed this vital time to link up, to say goodbye to old schools and build relationships and links with new ones.
 - Transition to high school issue came up really strongly Children’s Commissioners. Her office pushed strongly on this issue and that is why WG have they agreed to bring all children back to school for the final few weeks of the term. A lot of schools have done a lot of work with virtual videos.
 - Tanya from Welsh Government Education notes that they are currently considering methodologies, formula and priorities for distributing the additional 29 mill pounds to support learning. Exams years are one to be considered a priority, but transition year may be one other as well.

Digital and device access

- The vast consensus by people in this forum is that people welcomed the announcement for a funding stream to invest in tech devices and Wi-Fi for pupils who had no or little access, but the response was very slow and confusing with many families waiting months or not receiving any support.
- There were several references to a frustrating lack of access in the chat. Following are some excerpts:
 - “Children from families experiencing poverty will fall behind even more because of a lack of access to digital learning. Many families have really suffered because of difficulties accessing these devices.”
 - “Those who cannot speak up for themselves get stuck in each stage. they were not briefed properly or too shy or scared to ask for help. We have already passed the first wave and already talks about second. Hope these will be taken into consideration.”
 - “I think the money was quickly used up and did not cover as many learners as initially hoped.”

- Asylum seeking families particularly have been left out and the implications have been profound as Wifi is not provided in asylum accommodation and these families will not be able to purchase devices.
- The Children’s Commissioner is also hearing on the ground that devices are not getting out to people or are slow in getting out. The Commissioner notes that local authorities are saying it has been a complex task and they are working on it. Sally can raise individual cases with local authorities, so please let her office know of any families that are still lacking digital access.
- In many cases, voluntary organisations have filled the gap in providing devices and connectivity to pupils and families. For instance, City of Sanctuary in Flintshire resourced second-hand devices and recycled them to fill the gap, while waiting for new ones via the local authority.
- Tanya from Welsh Government Education notes that the responsibility to provide devices lied with local authorities but took place mainly at school level. It has been a very complex picture. They have gotten a lot of devices and connectivity out there, but where we have examples where that reach needs to go further, please feed that back into her.
- Several attendees had examples of pupils who have been asked to return laptops back to schools or warned they will be expected back in September.
- The Children’s Commissioner notes that this is a long-term issue, as pupils have homework all year pandemic or no pandemic. She will probably not be able to stop schools from reclaiming devices back in September but “will keep pressing the point that the digital divide is not going to go away.” Some schools are not expecting the devices back as they were funded with the additional money, but some may need them back when all pupils return in September. There needs to be clarity around the longer-term plan for ensuring that all pupils are equipped with the digital devices and connectivity they need for learning. “This is a deep-seated long-term issue.”

Access to school uniform grant for asylum seekers

- A Welsh Refugee Council team member is concerned that asylum seeking families will not be able to access to school uniform grants in local authorities that are only making the grant available through parent pay. Asylum seekers cannot open a bank account, and thus cannot use parent pay. She is in support of using the Aspen Card to make this grant available but is concerned about the amount of time it may take to make the transition in Cardiff Council. There is worry solutions will not be put in place in time for families to access and use to purchase uniforms.

- In Swansea, the school uniform grant will be made available via Aspen Cards, same way that Swansea Council is making FSM payments to asylum seeking families.
- The Red Cross is helping Syrian families to access school uniform grants.
- The Children's Commissioner is aware of Aspen Card as a solution for FSM payments and she welcomes Welsh Refugee Council to take up the issue of School Uniform grant payments with her. "There clearly is a solution" and the Children's Commissioner can contact leaders in local authorities that are dragging their heels.
- Tanya pledged to investigate this question with relevant people in her department

How will decision making take place on how to spend the £29 million?

- Comment from chat: "It's good news to have extra investment in teaching staff and assistants for learners. How will this extra investment be concerted? Is there a plan to focus on certain year groups or towards vulnerable learners? It isn't going to be an equal playing field for all learners when returning to school."
- Tanya & Sonny, Welsh Government Education – There is work ongoing as to how that funding will be distributed and what relevant weightings will be applied. It is the equivalent of 600 extra teachers and 300 extra teaching assistants assist. It could also include learning resources. A support package at school level could be a range: extra coaching, extra time, a range of learning resources. WG are finalising that as soon as possible. They will be working with the middle tier and local authorities to look at how intervention can be done on local basis. It is coordinated via the middle tier and implemented on a school level.
- Rocio Cifuentes stresses the current teaching workforce is not diverse, specifically lacking in ethnic, racial and religious diversity – "This opportunity should be fully utilised."
- Tanya recognises the point on representation in the teaching workforce. Another strand of work specifically on diversifying the teaching workforce is being led by Max White.

Safety in schools

- Question: If children are asthmatic, will they have to return to school in September?

- Dr. Payne completely understands parents' concerns about children's wellbeing and also concerns about staff with underlying conditions. All teaching staff will undertake individual risk assessments relating to their health and specific circumstances. They have had strong representations multiple departments in WG and all of the children's medical establishment. They must balance the risks to children, and the risk of not going to school is a considerable one. We are now into low double figures of new daily cases in Wales, currently 10-30 new cases. That is small for the whole of Wales. The Covid 19 background risk is low, not zero. The recommendation that it is safe for pupils and teachers to go back to school is back by evidence, well considered, If you have a specific question about your child or situation, you can talk to your doctor and your child's school.
- Question from chat : How will the reopening work for students in years 10 & 11 since these are unable to stay in bubbles of 30 due to various option choices and core subject banding?
- Children's Commissioner response from chat : The guidance issued on Monday acknowledges there will need to be some mixing across the year groups in years 10 and up - with extra hygiene measures. I expect government officials here could explain more on the safety of this.
- Welsh Government Technical Advisory Group Advice on Return to School: <https://gov.wales/technical-advisory-group-advice-return-school>
- Question: Will there be individual risk assessments for children returning to school in the same way there will be for members of the teaching workforce?
- The risk assessment is only for workforce. Data on children is not very specific. Advice from Royal College about children is that there is less risk. The view of the Royal College of Paediatricians regarding the risk balance is that is better to take kids off shielding and better for kids to return to schools.

Racism & Bullying at School – and school's responses

- The group raised concerns about protecting children from racism in the return to school, especially in light of increased online hate crime and recent reports about children being exposed to right wing views online during lockdown, which may impact their behaviour upon return to school.
- When the Children's Commissioner first came to office, children told her bullying was the biggest issue, often because of equality characteristics, including race, culture, and religion. Bullying was not a top issue for adults at the time, so her office worked hard to

push that as agenda. They influenced WG to reverse bullying policy so that schools must record incidents. The BBC report on more exposure to extreme views since lockdown is a real worry. Lots of worrying experiences were recounted by respondents to her office's survey.

- The Children's Commissioner's office has worked hard with organisations like EYST and Show Racism the Red Card to better understand experiences of classrooms for Black, Asian and ethnic minority children. For instance, working with SRTRC to develop materials to help children empathise better with those who don't share their characteristics and understand that hate crime is illegal. Their tackling Islamophobia project, done with EYST support, aims to develop empathy by having Welsh Muslim people talk about their experiences, including in Welsh. "We have such a long way to go." She is pleased to hear from Sonny that Welsh Government are setting up a group to review BAME representation in the curriculum. "We need to be thinking about what messages children get every day from role models right through talking about unconscious bias and racism."
- One person noted in the chat that the Children's Commissioner survey was shared with her son from his predominantly white school but was not sent to her daughter who attends the most predominantly BAME school in her city.
- A number of comments from the chat raised concerns that schools don't take experiences of BAME pupils seriously, particularly regarding racist incidents and hate crimes:
 - "Our children are not confident in reporting hate/racial incidents as they don't have trust in the school/ teachers, I thought this only happened when I was in school, obviously not much has changed."
 - Parent with concerns about particular schools can contact Show Racism the Red Card – "not an ideal solution, but we will assertively approach any schools whose parents contact us with concerns."
 - One third sector worker who liaises with schools said, "I have experienced schools brushing racism/ Islamophobia under the carpet and NOT willing to involve org such as EYST Wales/ Show Racism Red Card. Apparently they have their policy in dealing with it. The hate only gets worse as the hate continues outside of school."
 - "To all involved in education - How can you ensure hate incidents are recorded in schools? Some school do not want to believe it exists."
 - " We have all (3rd sector orgs) been lobbying WG very hard to make reporting of racist incidents compulsory. No luck so far. Keep asking the question."

- One third sector worker is concerned that “leaving everything to schools because 'they know their learners' flies in the face of some of the evidence we have gathered that shows some schools ignore/downplay the experiences of BAME pupils.”
- The Children’s Commissioner’s team is meeting with a large comprehensive soon where a number of young people have contacted her office with racism concerns. “There is still a long way to go on this.”
- Chat comments also referenced the need to prepare teachers need more in depth and well-structured training to serve pupils of colour and address racial bullying:
 - “As a previous high school teacher I would say that more focused training for teachers on how to tackle these thoughts/views is needed. I know in my experience it was a very vague half hour session during a September INSET.”
 - “ Dr. Heather Payne mentioned high level cultural competence training [for NHS staff]. This needs to be addressed throughout education as well.”
- A number of attendees shared information about anti-racism training or projects offered by their organisations in the chat:
 - Show Racism the Red Card is trying to offer virtual training for teacher asap on dealing with racism/racist incidents, so please get in touch wales@theredcard.org
 - Race Equality First offer racism awareness training in either 90mins or more comprehensive 4 hr sessions. Ellen from ACMA Cardiff can facilitate contact with them if you are interested acmacardiff@gmail.com
 - EYST offer ‘Don’t Hate Educate’ sessions for young people and organisations. Contact nicky@eyst.org.uk
 - There is the WLGA '100 schools' project 'Hate Crime in Schools' currently looking at delivery to schools - pupils and staff - and how this can go ahead under current circumstances.
 - GAVO’s Youth Volunteering Officer for GAVO is am leading a Task and Finish Group for WCVA creating Wales wide resources and training for young people on panels across Wales. One of the training sessions will be on unconscious bias. If you would like to be involved, please get in touch - sophie.symons@gavo.org.uk.

Children's Commissioner Sally Holland has provided the following update on her actions since the forum:

- Fed back the main messages to Julie Morgan, Minister for Social care and for Children. She expressed a keen interest in meeting the EYST forum herself.
- Fed back the education issues to senior government officials, including the Director of Education in Government, including digital divide, health concerns on return to school and asylum seekers' access to school uniform grants.
- Discussed the issues she heard in EYST's forum in a meeting with Jeremy Miles, Counsel General for Wales, and Cabinet Member, who is leading the recovery plans for government. She followed up in writing pressing the case on investment in children and young people in the recovery period, including bridging the digital divide, support for asylum seeking families, continuation of free school meal support in the holidays and attention to educational support for children from homes with English as an additional language.