Coronavirus and Me:

Understanding how disabled children and young people have experienced the pandemic in Wales

Comisiynydd Plant Cymru
Children's Commissioner for Wales

This report includes the experiences of nearly 1,200 disabled children and young people, which were captured during the height of lockdown in May 2020. Experiences were shared as part of a Wales-wide survey led by the Commissioner which saw nearly 24,000 three to eighteen year olds take part. While there were some positive experiences shared by disabled children, this report shows that disabled children and young people had disproportionately negative experiences when compared to non-disabled children and young people.

> **"Mum says I need to go out for fresh air and exercise I don't want to go out cause I might die."**
>
> — 11 year old disabled boy, south central Wales

> **"There should be a lot more support for people who are vulnerable and didn't get a letter to self isolate and more support for every family and individuals with food, because myself and my mum and my sisters feel like we are begging for food and help."**
>
> — 12 year old disabled girl, unspecified region of Wales

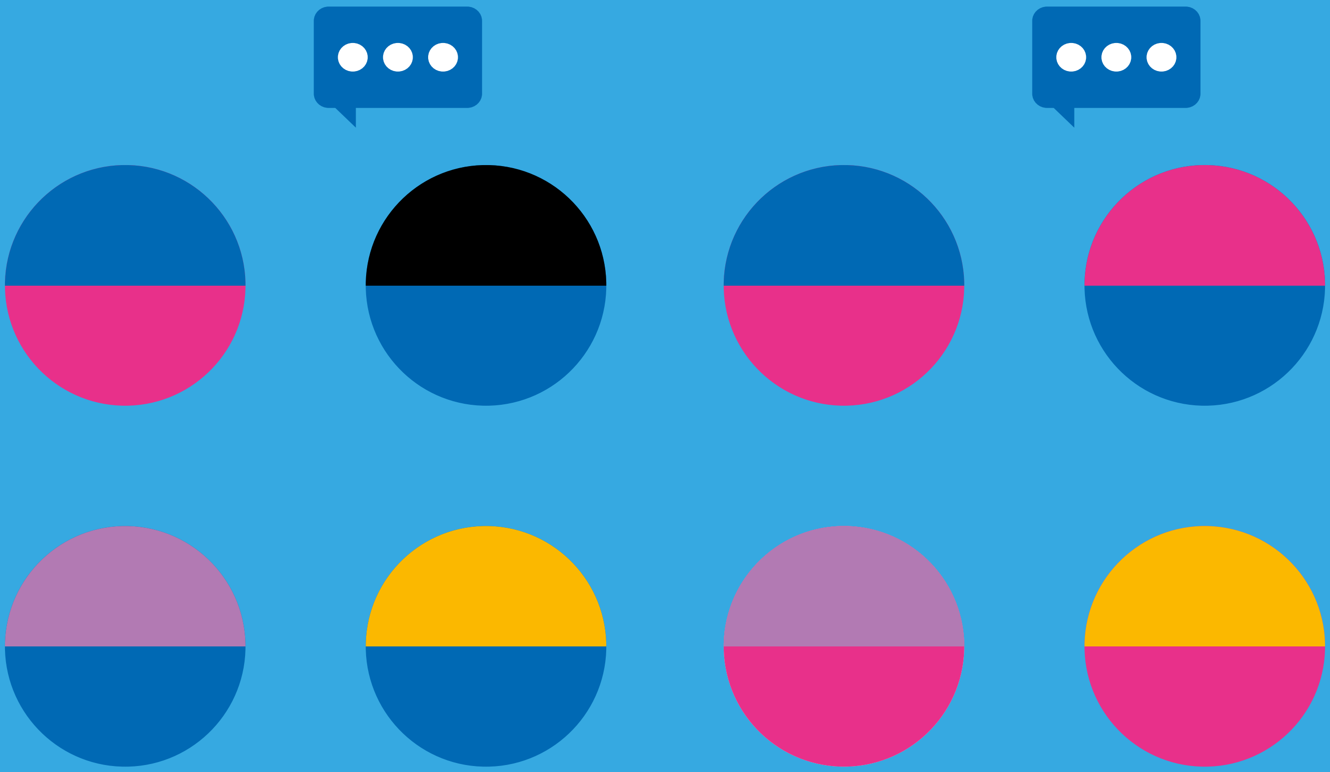
> **"I much prefer being at home with my family all day. I wish I could be home schooled."**
>
> — 10 year old disabled boy, south central Wales

> **"Both parents are key workers. School told my parents they could not guarantee my safety so I didn't go to school. I had to stay with my family for my parents to work."**
>
> — 18 year old disabled boy, south west Wales

> **"I'm experiencing what I call Freedom. And I will continue to do so."**
>
> — 16 year old disabled boy, west Wales

Background

On 13th May 2020, the consultation 'Coronavirus and Me' was launched to find out about the experiences of children and young people in Wales. This consultation captured information about the lives of over 23,700 children between the ages of 3-18, and ran for a two-week period during which restrictions to keep communities in Wales safe had been in place for two months.



The Coronavirus and Me survey was a partnership between four organisations:

- **Welsh Government**
- **Children's Commissioner for Wales**
- **Welsh Youth Parliament**
- **Children in Wales**

The Children's Commissioner's office led on all project management with financial independence from Welsh Government and other partners. The Children's Commissioner is the data owner for this project and is responsible for the production of this report.

In early June 2020 the Commissioner published an overview report with headline findings from this consultation[1]. In that report we committed to further analysis of the findings.

This analysis showed significant patterns of experience related to some of the personal characteristics of children who took the survey. Therefore this paper is part of a series of reports which highlight how the pandemic and the response to it has had particular impacts on some groups of children and young people.The reports focus on:

- The creative responses of 193 children under 7;
- The survey responses of 1,496 BAME children and young people aged 7-18;
- The survey responses of 4,377 older young people across Wales aged 15-18;
- The survey responses of 1,198 disabled children and young people with disabilities aged 7 -18 (this paper);

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) has 54 Articles, which set out the human rights of all children across the world. Welsh Ministers have a duty to pay due regard to children's rights under the UNCRC (in line with the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011). Children and young people taking the surveys were asked general questions about the pandemic under themes relating to articles of the UNCRC. This paper groups results under each Article in the same way.

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[1] Children's Commissioner for Wales (2020) Coronavirus and Me. Available at: https://www.childcomwales.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/FINAL_formattedCVRep_EN.pdf

Acknowledgments

The Children's Commissioner for Wales would like to thank Mencap Cymru and Disability Wales for reviewing and offering their advice on this paper and associated resources before publication.

Summary of Key findings

Understanding the key findings

'Children' refers to 7-11 year olds.

'Young people' refers to 12-18 year olds.

'Children and young people' refers to 7-18 year olds.

Answers from respondents reporting they are disabled have been compared with those from respondents reporting they are not disabled.

How did disabled children and young people respond to the pandemic?

- Disabled children and young people were more likely to be feeling worried about Coronavirus.
- A greater percentage of disabled children and young people expressed worries about catching the virus.
- Disabled children and young people were more likely to comment about the negative impact on their mental health.
- Disabled young people were more likely to say that the closure of a business or service was having a big impact on how they felt.
- Young people were more likely to say that they enjoyed not going to school or preferred learning at home if they were disabled.

How were disabled children and young people experiencing their rights?

Article 3: adults should do what is best for you.

- Disabled children and young people were more likely to say they needed extra help.
- Disabled children were more likely to say that they wanted support to help them feel happy and well.

Article 6: you have the right to life, to grow up, and to reach your full potential

Food security

- Disabled children and young people were more likely to say they needed help to 'make sure we get the food we need'.
- Disabled young people were more likely to say that they needed help to eat healthy food and stay physically active.
- Disabled young people were more likely to say changes to the way their family shopped for food were impacting them.
- Disabled young people were more likely to say it would help them to receive healthy food at home (food boxes).

Emotional needs

- Disabled children and young people were more likely to feel sad.
- Disabled children and young people were less likely to feel safe.
- Disabled children and young people were less likely to 'feel happy most of the time'.
- Disabled children were less likely to know where to get help if they needed support to feel happy and well.

Article 28: you have the right to an education

- Disabled children and young people were much less likely to feel as confident about learning.
- Disabled young people were more likely to say that not being able to see a tutor or join a class outside of school was affecting their learning.
- Disabled children were more likely to say that support was needed for additional learning needs.

Article 12: You have the right to be listened to and taken seriously

- Disabled children and young people were less likely to have been contacted by their school or college.

Article 15: you have the right to join groups and meet friends

- Disabled children and young people were less likely to have been staying in touch with family and friends.

Article 30: you have the right to use your own language

- Of those who usually attend English medium settings, disabled children and young people were more likely to say that they were not getting opportunities to use Welsh.

Article 31: you have the right to relax and play

- Disabled children were less likely to be playing more than usual.
- Disabled young people were less likely to be relaxing more than usual.

Consultation method and limitations

The Coronavirus and Me consultation was designed as a broad, population-wide survey so that as many children and young people as possible in Wales could take part, but it operated under considerable constraints due to the significant Coronavirus restrictions in place at that time.

The main constraints were:

- Restrictions made it impossible to include any face-to-face consultation;
- Consultation relied primarily on digital methods and digital distribution;
- The majority of settings were closed to most children, so consultation needed to happen in children's homes;
- Consultation needed to be designed quickly.

The survey took three forms: a survey for 12-18 year olds; a slightly shorter and simpler survey for 7-11 year olds; an accessible version with symbols to assist reading for 7-18 year olds. Ideas for questions were developed with young people, and grouped under Articles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The surveys were then trialled with children and young people and subsequently revised. This trialling included disabled children and young people and children with Additional Learning Needs, and professional consultation with teachers in Special Educational Needs (SEN) settings.

Usually, the Commissioner's office would also include face-to-face engagement as part of a consultation, and involve a variety of participation methods. This is particularly valuable for some disabled children, as some health conditions and impairments can make it difficult or even impossible for children to engage through a survey. In this consultation it wasn't possible to include face-to-face engagement because of the coronavirus restrictions. However, during the spring and summer of 2020, we did hear from a number of parents of disabled children, who shared the experiences of their children, some of whom were unable to take part in the survey. Although these data are not included as evidence sources for this paper, they informed (and continue to inform) the wider policy and influencing work of the Commissioner and her team.

There was a creative activity available for children and young people to take part in the consultation by drawing or writing about their experiences. This was completed mostly by younger children (3-7 year olds) but also by some older children who found this activity more accessible than a survey. Children were asked their age, but to reduce the required reading children were not asked other questions about their characteristics, such as whether they were disabled. You can find out more about these creative responses here but because it is not known if children completing them were disabled these responses aren't used as evidence in this paper.

Awareness of the digital divide as another barrier to participation meant that the Commissioner's office targeted communications with community groups and youth workers who were able to distribute devices, or to complete surveys over the phone with children.

The most recent UK statistics indicate that 8% of children in the UK are disabled[2]. Disabled Children and young people represented 5% of the total respondents to the Coronavirus and Me survey, which is a lower rate of representation than in the population as a whole. We therefore recognise there may have been barriers to some disabled children and young people participating in this survey; as noted above this is the first time we have worked with solely an online consultation approach due to the severe restrictions in place at that time. We have committed to undertaking a full internal evaluation of this project including the methodology. Evaluation will consider which groups of children were unable to take part in the consultation, and whether there were additional steps that could be taken to include more children in future consultations in which face-to-face engagement is not possible.

The Commissioner's team therefore recognise that this data may not be fully representative of the experiences of all disabled children and young people. However, the sample size is large and there are clearly significant differences in the experiences of disabled and non-disabled children. The Commissioner therefore believes it is important to be accountable to the children and young people that took part by speaking out about the experiences they have shared and by setting out her priorities for how to address the inequalities these experiences reveal.

A note about numbers and statistics

This report notes some large observable differences in experiences between disabled and non-disabled children. Where differences were smaller, Chi square tests were conducted on variables to check whether this result could have happened by chance. Wherever a statistic is labelled 'significant' it has been found to be statistically significant (using p-value <.05). This means this difference is very unlikely to have happened by chance.

In this report we use the phrase 'much more likely' when there is a large observable difference between the responses of disabled and non-disabled children.

We use 'significantly more likely' when there is a smaller, but statistically significant, difference in responses between these two groups.

You will also see in the report that some questions were answered by large numbers of respondents and some were answered by smaller numbers. This is because the survey was designed so that respondents had tailored questions according to their previous answers, which meant children weren't asked questions that were not relevant to them. Respondents could also skip a question if they wished. This means that the numbers of answers to each question varies, so the 'base count' is different for each of the questions asked.

How many disabled children and young people took part in the Coronavirus and Me consultation?

Children and young people taking part in surveys were asked if they had a disability.
This table shows how they responded:

Do you have a disability?	Number of respondents 7-11 survey	Number of respondents 12-18 survey	Number of respondents accessible survey 7-18	Total
Yes	497	580	121	1 198
No	11 077	10 058	523	21 658
Prefer not to say	183	283	22	488

This paper is therefore based on the responses of a total of 1,198 children and young people who identified as having a disability. Their answers are compared with those from the 21,658 children and young people who said they did not have disability, and the 488 who preferred not to say.

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[2] The Family Resources Survey 2018/2019 (FRS) is a continuous household survey which collects information on a representative sample of private households in the United Kingdom.

What else do we know about the disabled children and young people who took part?

Disabled children and young people taking part in the surveys represent children across all ages from 7-18. Every age group between 7-16 had over 70 disabled respondents and the age with the greatest representation is 11 year olds (135 disabled respondents). 17 and 18 year olds are the least represented in this evidence, with 52 and 51 disabled respondents respectively. This reflects the pattern of age distribution from the whole data set, in which 17 and 18 year olds were the ages with the lowest representation.

This group of children and young people come from all local authority areas in Wales, with the highest number of respondents from Cardiff, Swansea, and Carmarthenshire.

Most of the group took the survey in English but 32 disabled children and young people took the survey in Welsh.

59% (n=685) of this total group of children and young people are boys, 39% are girls, and 2% identified as trans. Boys are particularly highly represented in respondents to the 7-11 survey: 66% of disabled respondents answering the 7-11 survey were boys.

Most of this group of children and young people (1,086) are usually educated in school but 52 disabled respondents said they go to college or university, 39 said they were educated at home, 10 said they were not in education and 12 were doing training or an apprenticeship.

The majority of disabled children and young people described their ethnicity as 'White Welsh or British' (1,091) but there were respondents from each ethnic group listed in the survey.

How did disabled children and young people respond to the pandemic?

Worry about coronavirus

All children were asked to assess how worried they were about Coronavirus at the time they took the survey. Disabled children and young people were much more likely to be feeling worried about Coronavirus than non-disabled children and young people. Taking responses from all three surveys, 17% (n=203) of disabled children and young people selected that they were 'more worried than last week' compared with 11% (n=2,520) of non-disabled children and young people. Also only 17% (n=378) of disabled children and young people selected that they were 'not worried' compared with 37% (n=8,222) of non-disabled respondents.

All respondents were also asked to explain their assessment in their own words and these responses were analysed and coded. The most common response category was the same for disabled and non-disabled children and young people: the top response for 7-11 year olds and 12-18 year olds, in both these groups, was that they felt safe staying at home and following the rules.

> "I am not worried because i am obeying government rules and washing my hands daily."
>
> — 15 year old disabled trans young person, south east Wales.

> "Dwi'n gwneud yr pethau cywir ac yn arhos gatre, rydw i'n saf" [I'm doing the right things and staying home. I'm safe.]"
>
> — 13 year old disabled girl, south central Wales.

However, a greater percentage of disabled children expressed worries about catching the virus in their comments, and this was particularly the case for primary aged disabled children. 'Worried about catching coronavirus' was the third most frequent category of comment from disabled children answering the 7-11 survey whereas it was the ninth most frequent category for 7-11 year old non-disabled children.

> "I have complex and i am worried i could catch it, also i go into hospital a lot. to me it sounds like it is getting worse and if i do get it i dont whant to give it to my familie."
>
> — 11 year old disabled girl, west Wales

> "As I am Diabetic and classified as high risk I am concerned on how it will affect me."
>
> — 11 year old disabled girl, south east Wales

> "I keep thinking I am going to die and I can't sleep."
>
> — 10 year old disabled boy, mid Wales

17%

of disabled children and young people said that they were 'more worried than last week' compared with 11% of non-disabled children and young people

Other factors causing worry were broadly consistent between disabled and non-disabled children and young people, with children and young people in both groups expressing worries about family members, and about the numbers of people infected or dying.

Changes with the biggest impact

Young people answering the 12-18 survey were asked what changes had the biggest impact on their lives, and this showed that disabled young people were significantly more likely to say that the closure of a business or service was having a big impact on how they felt. Not being able to see friends, not being able to see family, and education settings closing were the top selected answers for disabled and non-disabled young people, but respondents selecting 'other' to this question could say what change was impacting them. The closure of services was the most frequently chosen category by disabled young people, representing 30% (n=10) of the free text answers, compared with 9% (n=24) of free text answers from non-disabled young people. Although the numbers are small this represents a statistically significant difference. Comments added demonstrate why this may be more important to disabled children:

> **"Because of uncontrollable seizures I injure myself a lot but before I at least used to me able to go to A&E for X-rays etc but now I'm scared i will sustain a severe injury and not be able to go to hospital safely. Also Due to my disabilities I was unable to leave to house often but my PA would take me out once a week so that has been hard."**
>
> — 17 year old disabled girl, west Wales

> **"My hospital appointments have all been cancelled!"**
>
> — 12 year old disabled girl, north east Wales.

> **"Respite supported has been withdrawn. Lack of structure."**
>
> — 17 year old disabled boy, south west Wales.

Good things about the changes

Children and young people were asked to specify any good things they would like to share about staying at home because of Coronavirus. The top three categories given by children responding to the 7-11 survey were the same for disabled and non-disabled children. These were:

- Spending time with family (commented on by 50% of disabled children and 52% of non-disabled children)
- There are no good things (commented on by 12% of disabled children and 12% of non-disabled children)
- Positive about staying safe (commented on by 9% of disabled children and 6% of non-disabled children).

> **"Me and my family have grown closer (including family I don't living with as we realise how much we miss each other)."**
>
> — Disabled boy (no age given), central south Wales

> **"Spending more time as a family. Not rushing around and being able to go out for slow walks."**
>
> — 12 year old disabled girl, south west Wales.

> **"I get to see my mum all day and ask her for help with schoolwork and just in general talk to her more than i usually do."**
>
> — 13 year old disabled girl, north east Wales

> **"Having my mum, dad & brother at home. Eating meals together, playing games. Lots of family time together & laughter."**
>
> — 14 year old disabled girl, south west Wales.

> **"The good things about stay home during this horrible time are that you get to play more with your siblings."**
>
> — 12 year old disabled boy, south west Wales.

The fourth most common category given by disabled children was that they enjoyed not going to school or preferred learning at home. 8% (n=31) of disabled children commented this way, which was a slightly greater percentage than non-disabled children, of whom 6% (n=506) commented this way. This difference was echoed in the accessible survey but in neither data was the difference significant.

However, young people between 12-18 were significantly more likely to say that they enjoyed not going to school or preferred learning at home if they were disabled. This was the third most common category of comment given by disabled young people: with 13% (n=49) of disabled young people reporting this compared to 8% (n=506) of non-disabled young people. (The top two categories of response to this question by disabled young people were the same as those for 7-11 year olds in the list above.)

The 49 comments coded under this theme illustrate a wide range of reasons for why respondents preferred learning at home. These include positive reasons such as enjoying learning with their family and enjoying having more time to learn. However, they also include descriptions of negative experiences of education settings such as finding school stressful, being bullied, hating school, not getting help from teachers, and having learning disrupted by others.

> **"I've gotten to spend more time away from toxic friendships and stressful environments such as school."**
>
> — Disabled 14 year old, north east Wales

> **"Not getting picked on or being worried about getting to school on time and I get to spend more time with my mum and I can take my own pace on work."**
>
> — 15 year old disabled girl, south east Wales.

> **"I want to be home schooled permanently. I feel like I can't ask teacher's for help with subjects I'm finding difficult."**
>
> — 12 year old disabled girl, unspecified region of Wales.

> **"For me personally, my disease triggers when I'm stressed. At school I'm highly stressed because of the amount I'm bullied. The teachers always pass it off as nothing when it's not."**
>
> — 12 year old disabled girl, north east Wales.

> **"I get less stressed out doing the work because other children are not messing about and disrupting my learning and I have been able to learn new things like how to speak Spanish because I have the time."**
>
> — 14 year old disabled trans young person, north east Wales.

> **"I am not getting stressed and having meltdowns as much as I was in college, I prefer to learn from home whenever I can. I like that all my family has time to join in now."**
>
> — 16 year old disabled boy, north east Wales.

> **"Personally, not going to school did get rid of some of the social stress of constantly being around others. I would usually bite my nails whenever in school or similar places. since lockdown, my nails have grown longer than I ever thought I would be able to grown them."**
>
> — 14 year old disabled trans young person, north east Wales.

Open comments

Children and young people were also invited to make any further comments they wished to about their experiences of the pandemic. Overwhelmingly the most common theme reported in the 7-11 and accessible surveys was missing people, and this was true of disabled and non-disabled children and young people. 17% of disabled children answering the 7-11 survey commented on missing friends and 7% described missing their wider family. Missing teachers, missing school or college and missing sports and leisure were also common across the three surveys, as were concerns about falling behind with learning. More positive themes that were frequently described included enjoying learning new skills at home and enjoying spending time with family.

> **"I am missing my friends. I am missing my teachers. I am missing my grandparents - they live in England."**
>
> — 7 year old disabled boy, north west Wales.

> **"I miss socially interacting with people. I cannot speak so I like to see people face to face, in person."**
>
> — 15 year old disabled boy, south central Wales.

"Cant wait to go back to normal and see my family and friends and school teachers."

— 14 year old disabled girl, south central Wales.

"I miss going down to the street to play on my bike/scooter with my friends. I miss the park."

— 10 year old disabled boy, west Wales.

"Isio cicio pel efo ffrindiau" [I want to kick a ball with friends]."

— 10 year old disabled boy, north west Wales.

However, using combined data from all three surveys, disabled children and young people were significantly more likely to comment about the negative impact on their mental health. 6% (n=29) of disabled children and young people commented on this compared with 3% (n=223) of non-disabled children and young people.

"I feel my education is gonna suffer considerably and I am worried that due to my college being closed and being unable to work due to government restrictions I'm losing valuable education and time so I beleive this will have negative impact on my chances in life and mental health."

— 18 year old disabled boy, south central Wales.

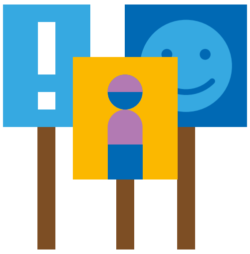
"My mental health has been really bad as usual but it seems to be getting worse and I'm a bit scared about how it's going to effect me in the long run. I'm not good at voicing my problems and I'm worried I won't reach out for support properly."

— Disabled 15 year old, south central Wales.

"I some times feel like I want to get it and die so that it is all over and I don't have to worry any longer. I want to go back to school and get back to normal, I hate this virus."

— 13 year old disabled girl, north west Wales.

How were disabled children and young people experiencing their rights in May 2020?



Article 3: Adults should always do what is best for you

Getting enough support

Children and young people were asked what extra support they needed during this time. Disabled children and young people were much more likely to say they need extra help, with 30% (n=316) of the overall disabled respondents feeling they didn't need extra help, compared with 39% (n=8,110) of non-disabled respondents.

The top selected response about what help was needed was the same for disabled and non-disabled 12-18 year olds, with young people from both groups most frequently selecting that they needed support to go online to do school work. The most frequently selected response to the accessible survey was to have more information about things to do at home, and this was also consistent between disabled and non-disabled children who completed the accessible survey. This option was also most frequently selected by non-disabled children answering the 7-11 survey. In contrast, disabled children answering the 7-11 survey were most likely to select that they wanted support to help them feel happy and well, with 33% of disabled children selecting this answer compared to only 17% of non-disabled children.

Respondents selecting 'other' to this question could give more details about what they needed. Disabled children answering the 7-11 survey were significantly more likely to say that support was needed for additional learning needs, with 24% of answers coded as this. In comparison, less than 1% of answers were coded this way for non-disabled children responding to the 7-11 survey.

"Distractions. More support with transition to comp. Support for my ASD."

— 10 year old disabled boy, south central Wales.

"More BSL sign language on television. I have to pay for online signed stories and even then they are for younger children. They should be free."

— 9 year old disabled boy, unspecified region of Wales.

"It needs to be clearer what extra support is available for children with special needs."

— 10 year old disabled boy, south central Wales.

Article 6: you have the right to life, to grow up, and to reach your full potential

Activities for wellbeing

Children and young people were asked what they have been doing to keep a healthy body and mind, and answers were broadly consistent between disabled and non-disabled children and young people. Activities commonly selected by disabled children and young people across all three surveys were:

- Speaking with family
- Exercise
- Doing activities from school
- Play
- Creative activities (e.g. art and music)
- Connecting with friends
- Using social media to stay in touch

All these activities were also commonly chosen by non-disabled children.

> **"Chasing rabbit around my garden once a week. Watching youtube."**
>
> — 9 year old disabled girl, north west Wales

> **"Cricket, throwing balls and learning lots of stuff."**
>
> — 7 year old disabled boy, west Wales

> **"Lots of sensory activities, garden time and time with my family I live with."**
>
> — 13 year old disabled boy, south central Wales.

> **"Playing games with my foster family."**
>
> — 13 year old disabled girl, north east Wales

> **"Going on computer games where I can play with my friends."**
>
> — 15 year old disabled boy, south central Wales

> **"Power washing the patio, cleaning the car, hoovering, baking."**
>
> — 14 year old disabled boy, north east Wales

Emotional wellbeing

Compared to non-disabled children and young people, disabled children and young people were much more likely to feel sad. Using the combined results of the 7-11 and 12-18 survey, 22% (n=210) of disabled children and young people selected that they were likely to 'feel sad most of the time', compared with 10% (n=2,024) of non-disabled respondents. Children answering the accessible survey were asked a slightly different question, but again this survey shows that disabled respondents were more likely to feel sad: 43% (n=52) of disabled children and young people answering the accessible survey selected that they felt sad, compared with 36% (n=186) of non-disabled children and young people.

Reinforcing this finding, disabled children and young people were also much less likely to 'feel happy most of the time', using the combined results of the 7-11 and 12-18 survey, 47% (n=465) of disabled children and young people selected this compared with 59% (n=11,750) of non-disabled respondents. Disabled children and young people were also more likely to select that they felt happy 'not very often', with 15% (n=148) of disabled children and young people selecting this compared with 7% (n=1,435) of non-disabled respondents.

Disabled children and young people were much less likely to feel safe. Using the combined results of the 7-11 and 12-18 survey, 77% (n=769) of disabled children and young people selected that they were likely to 'feel safe most of the time', compared with 85% (n=16,969) of non-disabled respondents. Children and young answering the accessible survey were also less likely to feel safe if they were disabled, with only 48% (n=57) of disabled children and young people selecting they felt safe compared to 60% (n=386) of non-disabled respondents.

22%

of disabled children and young people selected that they were likely to 'feel sad most of the time', compared with 10% of non-disabled respondents.

Getting help

Disabled children answering the 7-11 survey were significantly less likely to know where to get help if they need support to feel happy and well. 71% (n=353) of disabled children knew where to get help compared to 78% (n=8,512) of non-disabled children.

Disabled young people felt most confident in getting support from their teachers or other school staff if they needed help to feel happy and well, rather than seeking support from health services or other services. This was consistent with answers from non-disabled young people.

> **"I am struggling with my mental health and no contact from my councillors since lockdown."**
>
> — 16 year old disabled girl, mid Wales.

Disabled young people were also much more likely to say that they needed help to eat healthy food and stay physically active during lockdown, 31% (180) of disabled young people said this compared to just 22% (n=2160) of non-disabled young people. Young people were asked what help they would need and answers between disabled and non-disabled respondents were very similar, with disabled young people selecting the following as the top three answers:

- Ideas to help you eat healthy food (48%)
- Ideas to help you stay active (45%)
- Open up more places to be healthy (parks, leisure centres) (43%)

10% of disabled respondents selected 'other' to this question, and again free text comments were similar to those of non-disabled young people, including help with motivation and access to gyms and sport equipment. However, support with health conditions and impairments featured more prominently in free text comments from disabled young people.

> **"I'd like to be able to go swimming but I want this to be in a way I feel safe from coronavirus."**
>
> — Disabled 13 year old, south west Wales

> **"Enclosed sports space so I can keep space from others but practise my tennis. There's no space at home."**
>
> — 14 year old disabled boy, south central Wales.

> **"My mam helps with my fitness and healthy meals, i have cerebral palsy."**
>
> — 18 year old disabled boy, unspecified region of Wales.

> **"Nil my mouth and on lots of medication so need to keep receiving these items to keep me safe."**
>
> — 13 year old disabled boy, south central Wales.

> **"My mum is my carer and does all my shopping, meal plans, cooking and helps me."**
>
> — 16 year old disabled boy, north east Wales

Food security

Disabled children and young people were much more likely to say they needed help to 'make sure we get the food we need'. Using the combined results of the 7-11 and 12-18 surveys, 17% (n=186) of disabled respondents said this compared to 10% (n=2,088) of non-disabled respondents.

The suggestion that disabled children were more worried about food is echoed by additional data from the 12-18 survey, where disabled respondents were much more likely to say changes to the way their family shop for food were impacting them. 13% (n=74) of disabled young people said this compared to 7% (n=735) of non-disabled young people.

Disabled young people were also much more likely to say that it would help them to receive healthy food at home (food boxes). 35% (n=61) of disabled young people said this compared to 28% (n=573) of non-disabled young people. There was not a specific free text question about food, but there were a couple of comments about this from disabled children and young people, given in response to open ended questions.

"Mum is shielding and shopping is very hard she can't always get a delivery slot so we have to go without or mum keeps looking on all supermarket site for a cancellation but this means mum stays awake and doesn't sleep much because we have to eat to stay healthy."

— 13 year old disabled boy, south east Wales.

"There should be alot more support for people who are vulnerable and didn't get a letter to self isolate and more support for every family and individuals with food, because myself and my mum and my sisters feel like we are begging for food and help."

— 12 year old disabled girl, unspecified region of Wales.

Other open-ended comments also included concerns about income, job security and the standard of housing:

"Rydw i'n gweithio yn gwesty, felly dwi heb cael gwaith am 2 mis, mae hyn wedi cael effaith o ran talu yswiriant car a biliau ffôn" [I work in a hotel so I haven't had work for 2 months, this has had an effect on paying the car insurance and the phone bill]."

— 18 year old disabled girl, central south Wales.

"Sometimes you want to go out and cant so it anoyes you and we have a family of 5 and only two bedrooms and a living room so sometimes you need some space when you are slightly angry or upset and you cant just go out easily or just have a spare room to go to."

— 11 year old disabled girl, south central Wales.

"I am worried for me and my family and how my family will get income."

— 15 year old disabled girl, west Wales.

Article 28: you have the right to an education

Confidence about learning

Children and young people were asked how confident they felt about their learning during the period of school closures. Across all three surveys disabled children and young people were much less likely to feel as confident about their learning.

Data from all three surveys shows only 39% (n=371) of disabled children and young people chose 'confident' or 'very confident' to describe how they felt about learning. This compared with 52% (n=9,711) of non-disabled children and young people.

Reinforcing this, disabled children and young people were also much more likely to say they did not 'feel confident at all'. Using combined data from all surveys, 19% (n=176) of disabled children and young people said this, compared to 9% (n= 1,730) of non-disabled children and young people.

Disabled young people selected the same concerns about their education as non-disabled young people: worries about falling behind with learning was the top concern across both groups; and sadness about missing out on experiences was the second most frequently chosen concern for both groups. Two themes did however feature more prominently in open text comments by disabled young people. These themes were needing more online learning support, and worries about going back to their learning environment.

> **"One of my teachers has made it impossible to contact them and they are the only person who's work has confused me."**
>
> — 13 year old disabled girl, south east Wales

> **"It would be great to have a video chat with teacher and my friends, we could have an assembly and sing some songs together and that would help me to see my friends."**
>
> — 10 year old disabled girl, south central Wales

> **"I work better when in a team. I need help with motivation and staying on task."**
>
> — 13 year old disabled boy, west Wales

> **"Something the wording is hard to understand, I would like video's from the teachers with a demo."**
>
> — 12 year old disabled girl, north east Wales

> **"Doesn't seem to be any funding in Wales for laptops so worried about falling behind bcoz of this and already struggle as it is."**
>
> — 13 year old disabled boy, south central Wales

> **"I'm worried in case I can't find my refuge class when I go back to school in year 8 because I would have a new everythung and I've been worried for ages."**
>
> — 12 year old disabled girl, north west Wales

> **"School work is really hard as I need support. Normally in school I have a 1-1 who writes my work down for me. Now I have to get help from my parents but my dad is working from home and my Mum is a key-worker in hospital. A lot of my work isn't easily accessible for me to complete so it is hard to find time when my Parents can help me. I am struggling to keep up and there is no 1-1 provision in hub schools."**
>
> — 12 year old disabled boy, south east Wales

Learning outside school

As well as focussing on formal learning, children and young people were asked what changes have affected their learning outside school the most. The top 3 answers of disabled children answering the 7-11 survey were: not being able to meet friends or groups (82%), parks being closed (67%) and not being able to go outside as much (65%). This was consistent with 7-11 year old non-disabled children who had the same top three answers. This was also consistent with 7-11 disabled children educated at home who also selected these three factors as the most significant in affecting their learning during this period.

However, disabled young people answering the 12-18 survey indicated some different factors were affecting their learning outside of school. Disabled young people were much more likely to say that not being able to see a tutor or join a class outside of school was affecting their learning, with 31% (74) of disabled respondents choosing this factor compared with 24% (1224) of non-disabled respondents.

Year 7 transition

Children who were due to start secondary school in September were asked what support they needed to start their new school. Disabled children selected answers broadly consistent with non-disabled Year 6 children, with visiting secondary school and saying goodbye to primary school being the most frequently selected options. But 15% of disabled children also stated other, and these respondents were asked to specify what support they need. Analysis shows that the most frequently occurring theme in free text comments was support for Additional Learning Needs, with 32% (n=6) of disabled children who answered this question prioritising this. In contrast not one of the non-disabled children who answered this question commented about needing support for additional learning needs.

> **"I have ASD so it is important for me to feel settled and know my surroundings before i go somewhere."**
>
> — 11 year old disabled girl, south central Wales

> **"I have Aspergers and I think as I have not seen my friends this will make my social confidence slip."**
>
> — 10 year old disabled girl, south west Wales

Exams

Young people due to sit examinations this summer were asked their feelings about cancellations. Responses here were consistent between disabled and non-disabled young people, with the top two responses for both groups being uncertainty and worry. Free text comments also show similarities, the most frequently expressed themes for disabled young people were worries about how grades would be determined, concerns that grades wouldn't reflect true potential, and disappointment not to have the chance to prove themselves or improve their predicted grades. We have published a separate analysis of the experiences of 15-18 year olds, which focuses in detail on their education and experiences of cancelled exams. You can read more about young people's responses to exams here. Please note that this survey was conducted in May 2020, before the significant confusion over the awarding of grades, which arose in August 2020.

Future study

There were no significant differences regarding decisions about future study between disabled and non-disabled young people, with similar proportions of both groups decided and undecided about next steps. Similar feelings were expressed by undecided young people in both groups about what was needed to help them decide. This showed that advice to understand options and support for applications were the top factors that would help young people make decisions about their next steps. You can read more about young people's responses about future study in the 15-18s paper here.

Apprenticeships and Training

12 disabled young people selected that they were undertaking apprenticeships or training, and 7 of this group answered questions about their learning experiences during lockdown. Compared to non-disabled young people, these 7 young people did not experience any significant difference in how likely they were to have been supported with online learning and resources during the lockdown period. If you would like to see a more detailed analysis of young people's experiences of support for apprenticeships and training you can do so here.

Children and young people educated at home

39 disabled children and young people selected that they were usually educated at home: respondents were split across the three different surveys. Disabled children and young people that are usually educated at home did not show a significant difference in how confident they felt about their learning compared to non-disabled respondents who are usually educated at home. However, compared to disabled children who are usually educated in a school or college setting, disabled children who are usually educated at home were significantly more confident about their learning during this period. 58% (n=14) of disabled children and young people usually educated at home selected they felt confident or very confident compared with 39% (n=312) of disabled children and young people usually educated at school or college.

The majority of disabled children and young people who are usually educated at home said that things had changed for them when playing, learning and relaxing during the lockdown period. Responses about what changes had the biggest impact were broadly consistent between disabled and non-disabled respondents who were educated at home. For 7-11 year olds changes with the biggest impact were: parks being closed; not being able to go outside as much; and not being able to meet friends or join groups. Young people answering the 12-18 survey also noted the closure of museums, galleries and castles as being a change with a big impact on their learning and relaxation.

Young people not in education

10 disabled young people were not in education. All of this group were aged between 16-18, and although this dataset is small, responses to questions show that over half of this group were considering returning to education in September. When asked what would help them decide, responses showed that young people would like more advice to understand what their options are, support to apply for a place at college, and support to apply for apprenticeships.

These were similar to the responses of non-disabled young people not in education, although comments about paid employment featured more prominently for non-disabled young people who were not in education.

only 39% of disabled children and young people felt confident about learning, compared with 52% of non-disabled children and young people.

Article 12: you have the right to be listened to and taken seriously

Combined data from all three surveys showed that disabled children and young people said they were less likely to have been contacted by their school or college. 3% (n=33) of disabled children and young people said their school hadn't been in contact, compared with 1% (n=286) of non-disabled children and young people. This percentage difference is small but statistically significant and it shows that 33 children and young people with disabilities reported to have had no contact at all with their school or college.

However, it is important to note that the vast majority of children and young people were contacted by their place of education. The top method by which primary school aged disabled children had been contacted by schools was by phone, whereas phone was the third highest selected by non-disabled children, who were more likely to be contacted by Hwb or by e mail. Young people answering the 12-18 survey were most likely to be contacted by e mail: this was consistent for those who were disabled and non-disabled.

> **"Something the wording is hard to understand, I would like video's from the teachers with a demo."**
>
> — 12 year old disabled girl, north east Wales.

Article 15: you have the right to meet with friends and join groups

Disabled children and young people were significantly less likely to have been staying in touch with family and friends. Combined results of the 7-11 and 12-18 survey showed 6% (n=54) of disabled children said they are not staying in touch with family or friends, comparing with 2% (383) of non-disabled children.

> “I am missing my friends. I am missing my teachers. I am missing my grandparents - they live in England.“
>
> — 7 year old disabled boy, north west Wales.

Article 17: you have the right to honest information

Children and young people answering surveys were asked where they were getting information on Coronavirus. Across surveys, information sources were consistent between disabled and non-disabled children and young people. Children and young people answering the 7-11 and 12-18 surveys were most likely to get information from parents or family, followed by TV, and then followed by both news websites or apps, and news posts on social media. The accessible survey respondents more frequently selected school as a source of information, with children and young people answering this survey selecting this as the third most likely information source.

> “My hospital appointments have all been cancelled.“
>
> — 12 year old disabled girl, north east Wales

Article 31: you have the right to speak your own language

A smaller proportion of disabled children and young people taking the survey were educated in Welsh medium settings than non-disabled respondents. The 7-11 and 12-18 surveys combined were taken by 14% of disabled children and young people who are usually educated in Welsh compared to 25% of non-disabled children and young people who are usually educated in Welsh.

Of children in Welsh medium settings, there was no significant difference between how likely disabled and non-disabled children were to use Welsh during the school closures. The most common ways of using Welsh were doing activities from school and speaking Welsh with the family.

Children in English medium settings were asked whether they usually learnt Welsh. Those that selected yes were asked what opportunities they had to practice Welsh during the school closure period. Of children in English medium settings, disabled children were significantly more likely to say that they were not getting opportunities to use their Welsh. 34% (n=175) of disabled children and young people in English medium settings said this, compared to 29% (n=3,287) of non-disabled respondents who usually attended English medium settings.

Young people answering the 12-18 survey who selected they would like extra support with Welsh were asked what would help. 13 disabled young people answered this question and the most common answers were that they needed more support from teachers and more opportunities to speak Welsh. These were also the most common themes in responses from non-disabled young people. Children of all ages also included worries about Welsh in open ended text comments.

"I've never been good at Welsh, writing or speaking so any help would make a difference."

— 15 year old disabled girl, unspecified region of Wales

"More activities in welsh as fluent speaker but not able to use it whilst at home."

— 13 year old disabled girl, north east Wales

"More chances to talk in welsh with people."

— 14 year old disabled girl, south east Wale

"Could you make a comic and send it out to all of kids so we can have something to read in welsh as my mum and dad try but they are not welsh speakers."

— 8 year old disabled boy, south central Wales

"I'm worried I have no Welsh language at home & will struggle going back to Welsh medium lessons when I've had to switch to English medium lessons at home. This is because there are no Welsh medium lessons online & none of my family speak Welsh. I only get homework from school; no lessons."

— 14 year old disabled girl, unspecified area of Wales.

Article 31: you have the right to relax and play

Children answering the 7-11 survey and accessible survey were asked if they are playing more or less since schools closed on 20th March. Disabled children were much less likely to be playing more than usual compared to non-disabled children. The 7-11 survey data show that less than half of disabled children were playing more: only 46% (229) of disabled children said they are playing more often since schools closed. In contrast over half of non-disabled children were playing more, with 53% (5852) of this group said they are playing more often since schools closed. This is mirrored by the accessible survey, where 47% (n=56) of disabled children were playing more compared to 60% (n=310) of non-disabled children.

The same picture is shown in the 12-18 survey, though the question was slightly different, asking whether respondents were relaxing more or less since schools closed. This showed that disabled young people were much less likely to be relaxing more than usual compared to non-disabled young people. 54% (n=308) of disabled young people were relaxing more, compared to 62% (n=6169) of non-disabled young people.

Children were also asked to describe their play. Sports and exercise were the most frequently described play by disabled children, 30% of comments described this, with almost a third of these comments specifically about trampolines, and bikes and footballs also featuring prominently. The second most frequently described category of play was play with electronic devices or software (this featured in 17% of comments) and the third most common comment was playing with family (15% mentioned this, with just under half of these comments relating to siblings specifically).

These free text comments did show some differences to non-disabled children, who were most likely to describe playing with family (33%, with just over a third of these answers relating to siblings specifically), followed by outdoor play in the garden (13%). Engaging with friends online through online games was the third most commonly described activity by this group (11%).

In free text comments disabled young people described a range of activities they did to relax, which included play, arts, crafts, baking, gardening and mindfulness. The top three activities described were online gaming (65%), talking to friends online (61%) and exercise or other physical activity (41%). These activities were also included in the top three described by non-disabled young people.

> **"Playing offline video games and going on the Wii fit. Also using my parents Disney+ and Netflix."**
>
> — 14 year old disabled trans young person, north east Wales

> **"I like to cut up paper from old books to write down things like 'Better 6 feet apart than 6 feet under."**
>
> — 12 year old disabled girl, south east Wales

> **"We had a sports day at home as I have 5 brothers and sisters."**
>
> — 8 year old disabled boy, north west Wales

> **"Doing different things. Dressing up with sister and crafts more."**
>
> — 8 year old disabled girl, south west Wales

> **"I enjoy playing on my game console coz I can chat with my friends and cousins. I play football outside with my brothers."**
>
> — 11 year old disabled boy, south east Wales

> **"I enjoy playing with my mam on my trampoline."**
>
> — 10 year old disabled girl, south west Wales

The Children's Commissioner for Wales' priorities and recommendations

All of the following steps will require Wales' policy makers and public services to ensure that they have effective means to listen to and involve disabled children and young people and their families in finding solutions to these issues. I will also continue to do this in my own organisation.

Additional Learning Needs

It is not the case that all disabled children have additional learning needs. Nor is it the case that all children with additional learning needs are disabled. However, children and young people's responses to our survey showed that when education provision doesn't meet additional support needs, disabled children are disproportionately affected. Disabled children and young people were significantly more likely to say that support was needed for additional learning needs and they were significantly less likely to feel as confident about learning.

There were certainly very many teachers and schools doing their utmost to meet the learning needs of all their pupils during this period, including meeting additional learning needs. We must acknowledge that this was a difficult, unexpected period for schools when they were trying to offer education to their pupils without being able to see the majority of them, and also running emergency childcare hubs.

But at a national level, national guidance on live-streaming directed schools away from offering any one-to-one sessions. This meant that very many children and young people who usually learn with a support assistant were not offered one-to-one support using live-streaming, even if their statement of need is very clear in laying out that they need this to learn.

I would also argue that there was a lack of national leadership in setting out how schools and local authorities could best meet the learning needs of children and young people during closures, particularly those with Additional Learning Needs. No minimum expectations were set during the lockdown period about what children in Wales should expect, and there was no national direction about how learning support assistants and teaching assistants could be best used to offer individualised support to the children who we know need this to learn.

Of course, Government was also responding to an emergency situation, and I would not have expected this guidance to be in place immediately. However, as school closures went on, it became clear that more needed to be done to support home learning, particularly for children with additional learning needs. Opportunities were not taken to set a national expectation for how this could be done, and how duties to these children and young people could be met.

I doubt that any virtual or remote support is going to truly match the value of being with professional educators in an education setting. Digital tools may also not work at all for some children and young people. But Government needs to set a clear expectation so that children with additional learning needs are not disproportionately harmed by future school closures or by the need to isolate contact groups and keep children away from education settings. These expectations need to aim high and they need to encourage professionals to have the confidence to try out different tools and methods, to see what works best.

Following strong recommendations from my office, updated live-streaming guidance[3] no longer directs away from offering one-to-one sessions in all instances. Government also published guidance to support vulnerable and disadvantaged learners[4], which includes those with Additional Learning Needs.

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[3] https://hwb.gov.wales/api/storage/d4bee52c-cc37-485b-a6f5-2b9f1105d591/200902-live-streaming-and-video-conferencing-safeguarding-principles-and-practice-for-education-en.pdf

[4] https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2020-08/guidance-supporting-vulnerable-disadvantaged-learners.pdf

I recommend that Government must review these two guidance documents to assess how well they respond to the experiences of children with Additional Learning Needs revealed in this report. Children and young people and their families should participate in this review. This review should aim to make sure that the future needs of children and young people with Additional Learning Needs can be met if they can't attend school due to the pandemic.

Food security

One of the most concerning findings in this analysis was that disabled children and young people were more likely to say they needed more help to get the food they need. No child in Wales should be going hungry or worried about their family having enough food. Although Welsh Government provided money for children who needed to access the replacements for school meals throughout the summer, they should also consider carefully the results of this survey together with local authorities. It will be important to hear from children and young people directly as part of this, about any difficulties that were faced during the crisis, and ensure that this provision is equally accessible for all families.

We will continue to push for **a comprehensive Child Poverty Delivery Plan for Wales. This must recognise the underlying inequalities experienced by children and young people**, as this finding exposes a disparity in terms of access to this most basic human need.

Mental health and emotional wellbeing

Disabled children and young people were more likely to be worried and were more likely to comment about the negative impact on their mental health. But they were less likely to say they knew how to get support for their wellbeing and mental health. Visibility and availability of mental health support has long been a priority for my office, and it is essential that the accessibility of this specifically for disabled children is considered. I will work with children and young people to see how my service can better publicise to disabled children and young people information about how they can access support.

In addition, **I recommend that service providers in Wales create accessible information so that disabled children and young people know how to get help with wellbeing and mental health**. I will highlight this urgent issue with service providers in Wales.

Loss of support and services

Disabled children and young people were also more likely to feel sad, and less likely to feel happy and well. They were also significantly more likely to say that the closure of wider services were having a big impact on how they feel and they were less likely to have been staying in contact with a support network of family and friends. This shows a pressing need to make sure the needs of disabled children and young people are thoroughly considered in future decision making, and that measures are taken to mitigate the potential negative impacts of decisions.

This report highlights the clear additional barriers that disabled children and young people face in accessing support and services. So that decision makers can respond to this finding **I recommend that when decisions are made at a national and local level regarding support services, a Children's Rights Impact Assessment must be used to identify any further harmful effects and mitigate these by ensuring steps that meet the wellbeing needs of disabled children.**

Playing and relaxing

Disabled children and young people can experience barriers in accessing universal play and leisure facilities, and during the lockdown period disabled children and young people were not benefitting from play and relaxation as much as other children. The opening of parks and green spaces has varied across Wales during the response to the pandemic, and this continues to be the case, with some local authorities continuing to restrict access.

I recommend that as the response to the pandemic continues, decisions that are made at a national and local level about play and leisure facilities are informed with a Children's Rights Impact Assessment, which expressly considers the needs of disabled children and young people and puts in place mitigating measures for any harmful impact.

We saw in the national lockdown examples of exemptions that were introduced in recognition of the disproportionate impact on disabled children, such as the limits on daily exercise. It is vital this these broader impacts of the restrictive measures are expressly considered in respect of disabled children's overall health and wellbeing and there must be continued mitigation for this as the pandemic continues.

Bullying

Disabled young people were more likely to express that they preferred learning at home to being in their usual education setting, and this was despite the fact that disabled young people were much less likely to feel confident about their learning during the lockdown period. Open ended comments showed that there was a wide range of reasons for preferring learning at home, but prominent within these comments were descriptions of negative experiences of education settings, including experiences of bullying and not having bullying taken seriously by professionals.

I have published previous reports[5] which have highlighted that children and young people describe 'difference' as a key issue in bullying: 'difference', as children describe it, can mean a wide range of things but it includes identity-based bullying on the basis of protected characteristics, including disability. As a result, I have previously recommended Government place a statutory duty on schools to record all incidences and types of reported bullying. This information should be disaggregated in relation to each protected characteristic so that it can be used to evaluate and re-develop anti-bullying policies. This is necessary to sufficiently perform the Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act 2010.

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5. https://www.childcomwales.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Sams-Story.pdf

Government responded positively to this recommendation with the introduction of statutory anti-bullying guidance in 2019, Rights, Respect and Equity[6]. This guidance sets out duties for schools and local authorities, and these include an expectation that local authorities will monitor schools' equality objectives and progress towards achieving these, and that local authorities should monitor equality data in order to initiate responses or interventions.

Given the events that have unfolded since the publication of this guidance at the end of 2019, implementation of this new guidance may not have been a priority for schools or local authorities, but these are vitally important steps to prevent and tackle identity-based bullying.

I recommend that Welsh Government take further steps to inform governing bodies and local authorities of the expectations of the Rights, Respect and Equity guidance. These steps could include: writing to local authorities to re-circulate the guidance; online training modules for local authorities and school governors; sharing of good practice emerging in the use of this new guidance.

Evaluating our own use of these survey results

I will commit to undertaking an evaluation of how we use these survey results, and the impact they have.

Holding Welsh Government to account on the findings of this survey

I will be writing to Welsh Government to ask them how they will use these findings to influence their work in addressing the inequalities outlined in this report. I will discuss their response with the Deputy First Minister, who is leading the work the government is undertaking on how to embed protection and support on equalities matters into Welsh law and policies.

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[6] https://gov.wales/school-bullying