



CABINET STATEMENT

Written Statement: Supporting children and young people – keeping them safe

Julie Morgan, Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services

From the start of the coronavirus pandemic, our priority has been to keep children and young people as safe as possible.

We have taken a series of unprecedented steps to reduce the speed and spread of coronavirus – these are having a positive impact. But we know many children and young people have found these restrictions difficult.

I want to thank everyone who is helping to keep children and young people safe.

We are working with our partners in local authorities, health and other sectors to support children who are vulnerable and at risk.

We have put a range of support in place – from guidance to additional funding for school counselling services. We have also passed emergency legislation to increase the number of registered social workers.

Education and childcare settings are open to children who have social workers and children of critical workers. We are the only country in the UK to offer free child care to these children (under 5).

We have written to all directors of social services and education to ask them to ensure all children with statements of education need are risk assessed to see if they need to attend school or hub settings and that a consistent, multi-agency approach is taken to encourage parents of children who have social workers to

see attendance at school or hubs as helpful, particularly if they are finding lockdown difficult.

We are continuing to prioritise the welfare of families who need help the most. We have provided guidance to schools and local authorities about what they can do to ensure pupils who receive free school meals continue to access to food while normal school is suspended.

An extra £40m has been provided to local authorities to continue to provide free school meals for eligible children until schools re-open or until the end of August. We are the first part of the UK to do this.

Health boards have continued to provide children's services, including health visiting as part of the Healthy Child Wales programme. Children with additional health or complex care needs, including safeguarding concerns, are being supported by school nursing and community children's nursing services.

Our [Stay Safe, Stay Learning, our Continuity of Learning Plan](https://gov.wales/stay-safe-stay-learning-continuity-learning) (<https://gov.wales/stay-safe-stay-learning-continuity-learning>) will ensure schools, local authorities and regional consortia adapt their ways of responding to meet the needs and development of all vulnerable and disadvantaged learners in all areas of school life.

We've provided an extra £3m to support digitally excluded learners in Wales – this is part of a £30m investment in education technology infrastructure for schools. As well as providing access to laptops and connectivity devices, our digital learning platform Hwb provides access to a range of safeguarding resources, for issues such as social media, bullying, sharing images, gaming, mis-information and grooming.

An online safety zone has been created on Hwb so children can access support if they are feeling unhappy or unsafe.

Special schools have set up effective multi-agency approaches to support learners and families, including co-ordination with social and health services. Special school head teachers report an increase in parental engagement and daily contact leading to a strengthening of the important relationship between special schools and parents.

We are pleased that youth work services are playing an active role in the coronavirus response. Youth workers are working in new and developing ways, including through online youth clubs, by supporting frontline responses and staffing schools and hub settings, and by engaging in outreach through digital and telephone methods to make contact with young people and responding to their concerns, questions, and requests for assistance.

Children's services are available and open to anyone who needs support. We have today issued a joint press notice with the NSPCC, Children in Wales and the Youth Work Board which sets out what we must all take responsibility for in keeping our children safe.

We have set up a dedicated page about [safeguarding](https://gov.wales/reporting-suspected-abuse-harm-or-neglect-safeguarding) (https://gov.wales/reporting-suspected-abuse-harm-or-neglect-safeguarding) and we are reminding people they should call 101 or contact their local authority if they have any concerns about a child or adult being harmed.

Children and young people who are worried about themselves or someone else can contact Childline on 0800 1111.

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