



Exploring the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Learners in Wales.



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Glossary

Acronym/Key word	Definition
ALN	Additional Learning Needs
ALNCo	Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinator
ASD	Autism spectrum disorder
DECLO	Designated Education Clinical Lead Officer
EEF	The Education Endowment Foundation
eFSM	Eligible for Free School Meals
HEI	Higher Education Institution
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
LSA	Learning Support Assistant
NFER	National Foundation For Educational Research
Parent	'Parent' may include reference to parent or guardian
SLT	Senior Leadership Team
UWTSD	University of Wales Trinity Saint David
WG	Welsh Government

1. Introduction/Background

Introduction

- 1.1** This research study was commissioned in June 2020 towards the end of the initial period of national lockdown caused by the increasing spread of the Covid-19 virus. At the time, there was little, if any, indication that there would be further period(s) of national lockdown as a result of the pandemic. A timeline for the study, alongside key dates regarding access to schools during the period June 2020 – March 2021 is provided below for reference (fig 2.1). The study collected data that pertains to the experiences of learning during the initial lockdown period (lockdown 1, March 2020 – June 2020) and the phased re-opening of schools (June - July 2020). To a lesser extent, data also pertains to the period of schools being open (September – December 2020 during which time schools isolated classes, year groups and individuals as a result of a positive covid-19 case), and the second period of national lockdown (from January 2021). The period of data collection was one involving fast-moving changes in provision for learning across our education system. The data provide snapshots from stakeholders in schools (learners, parents, teachers, and leaders) that exemplify a wide variety of experiences of learning during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 1.2** In reporting the study, the research team are mindful of words in the final report of the Senedd Children, Young People and Education Committee (2021):
- ‘Positive steps forward: Acknowledging the impact of COVID-19 on our children and young people, and the disruption it has caused to their lives, is vital. But there is an important balance to be struck between recognising and addressing this and promoting much more positive messaging about children and young people’s resilience and their opportunities going forward. Replacing the unhelpful narrative and language about “lost learning” and need for “catch-up” must be a priority’ (p. 3).
- 1.3** This sentiment was reflected in the words of Geoff Barton, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders in February 2021 in a piece in the Times

Educational Supplement, ruminating about the return to a 'new normal' after the second period of lockdown across the UK:

'... in the meantime, I'm not sure that all the catastrophic language about a "damaged generation" or talk of apocalyptic levels of lost learning is doing any of us any good – certainly not our children and young people, who must feel they are about to be consigned to a never-ending hamster wheel of narrowed curriculum and mandatory catch-up clubs' 'Instead of fixating on a deficit model of learning, I hope we'll focus on the quality of what young people need, rather than the quantity'.

- 1.4** This report notes therefore that disadvantages in learning were present prior to the Covid-19 pandemic; the notion of 'new disadvantage' is therefore probably unhelpful. What this project has done is provide a platform for increased awareness of the range and scope of disadvantage that exists across our learners. Some of these disadvantages have been exacerbated by the pandemic, a few have been ameliorated. The research team wish to note that the data included many, many positive messages about schools, teachers, and their support for their learners throughout the pandemic.

Background

- 1.5** The closure of schools to the general population as a result of COVID-19 lockdown measures, from March 2020, resulted in pupils experiencing limited contact with teachers, varied curriculum provision, and uncertain take-up of 'home learning', all during a time of significant public and personal upheaval. A number of studies in the months following sought to measure the impact of these closures, the move to online, distance learning, and later re-opening of schools on pupils, particularly those identified as 'disadvantaged'. While the focus for Welsh Government was on ensuring that learning should make "meaningful progress" (Welsh Government, 2020b: 8) throughout closure and phased re-opening, in reality, there have been substantial barriers for pupils and teachers to overcome. According to the Children's Commissioner for Wales survey (2020, p.20), which examined the experience of over 23,700 children and young people aged 3- 18 in Wales during two weeks of the pandemic, challenges to learning were related to 'access to devices and

pressures in the home environment.’ The research found children wanted more contact and support from school with on-line learning (2020). Children with dyslexia noted (2020) it was difficult to access learning through text, those with Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) found the loss of routine found at school difficult and there was a perception of a general loss of learning by being isolated from friends. However, the respondents also noted the benefits of learning new skills and relief from ‘mental health difficulties or bullying’ (2020, p.5). Throughout ‘lockdown’, schools were still functioning as hubs for the children of key workers, and those deemed ‘vulnerable’, and were instrumental in ensuring families whose children are eligible for Free School Meals (eFSM) still received their meal entitlements, including during school holidays. There were significant challenges involved in achieving both of these tasks. See Thomson (2020) for an overview of the impact of this in schools in England by way of example.

- 1.6** It is estimated that the majority of pupils across the UK missed out on around 12 weeks (see fig 1) of face-to-face learning in the initial lockdown period (Royal Society DELVE Initiative, 2020; Sharp et al, 2020), though many have experienced time out of the classroom since, due to isolation protocols. A survey of Head Teachers conducted by the National Foundation For Educational Research (NFER) found that most teachers were covering less curriculum and pupils were completing less work than usual (Royal Society DELVE Initiative, 2020). Teachers in England report covering an average of 66% of the usual curriculum, and 98% report that their pupils are behind where they would normally expect them to be at the end of the 2019-20 school year (Sharp et al, 2020). The second lockdown period similarly represented about 3 months of school closure for most schools, however, this study pertains most directly to the experiences of learning in the initial lockdown period and subsequent phased re-opening of schools.
- 1.7** It is argued that the school closures impacted negatively on pupils across a range of compound issues, including ‘learning loss’, cognitive and academic development, physical and mental health, and wellbeing (The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), 2020a; Pensiero et al, 2020; Royal Society DELVE Initiative, 2020; Welsh Government, 2020c). Studies found that the negative impacts have been more acute for pupils identified as vulnerable and/or disadvantaged and, it is argued, will have increased inequalities already present in the classroom (EEF, 2020a; Royal

Society DELVE Initiative, 2020; Welsh Government, 2020a; Welsh Government, 2020c). Recent research indicates that, in the UK, children from lower socio-economic backgrounds are likely to be at greater risk of falling behind in their education compared to peers (EEF, 2020a; Lucas et al, 2020; Pensiero et al, 2020; Williams, 2020). Sixty-one per cent of teachers report that the learning gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers has widened since the previous year (Sharp et al, 2020). An interim report from the NFER (Rose et al., 2021, p.1), focused on attainment and socio-emotional well-being in Key Stage (KS) 1, attempts to quantify the general 'learning loss' due to a loss of schooling during the initial period of the pandemic (spring and summer of 2020). Their preliminary findings (2021), like that of Renaissance Learning, Education Policy Institute for the Department of Education (2021), highlight significantly lower general achievement as a result of school closure and specifically that learners already experiencing disadvantage were falling further behind their peers (Rose et al., 2021). Research findings also suggest that pupils from Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds were disproportionately disadvantaged in curriculum progression during school closures (Sharp et al, 2020). Pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) are more likely to suffer with mental health difficulties as a result of school closures and impacts on mental health appear to affect secondary more than primary aged pupils (EEF, 2020a; Williams, 2020).

- 1.8** Differences across families and their specific home situations will have further impacted upon children's ability and capacity to continue with schooling during the lockdown period. The lived experiences of families during the period of school closures will have had a great influence on children's learning and wellbeing, and the specificity of that experience may have led to and/or exacerbated inequalities (Royal Society DELVE Initiative, 2020). For example, unequal access to technologies, understanding of tasks set by teachers, access to additional resources, and differences in the amount of parent/carer time available to support learning at home (Royal Society DELVE Initiative, 2020). Research carried out by the IFS estimates that around just 50% of parents who were in work in February 2020 were still doing their job in May, while others had been furloughed, quit, or were now permanently out of work (Andrew et al, 2020). These factors increase stress and will affect both adult and children's wellbeing.

- 1.9** It is worth noting that the negative impact on pupils cannot be entirely attributed to school closures since other lockdown measures will have had concurrent impact. For example, isolation from friends and family, anxiety over health, confinement to home, and parental wellbeing and mental health (Williams, 2020). Furthermore, the notion of 'disadvantage' needs some exploration since this is often used as a shorthand to describe pupils who are eFSM (itself a shorthand indicating socio-economic levels), have identified Additional Learning Needs, or of Black, Asian, or Minority Ethnic heritage. The impact of the pandemic on health and wellbeing, and the reliance on technology and parental support for pupils to continue with curriculum learning may well reveal further disadvantages that had not previously been taken into consideration.
- 1.10** Further, research indicates that effective remote learning may have mitigated some of the learning loss and resultant inequalities (EEF, 2020b). However, it is also possible that the move to online provision will have further widened the gap and exacerbated disadvantage (Doucet et al, 2020). Research carried out by the NFER found that while, teachers are concerned about the engagement of all their disadvantaged pupils, they are particularly concerned about low engagement of pupils with limited access to IT and/or study space (Lucas et al, 2020).
- 1.11** In addition to access issues, there will have been wide variation in the amount and quality of remote schooling and support for home learning (Andrews et al, 2020; Royal Society DELVE Initiative, 2020). A Remote Learning Rapid Evidence Assessment carried out by the EEF (2020b) identified a number of effective approaches to remote learning that, they argue, would help ameliorate the potential negative impact of school closures on pupils. These include ensuring teaching is effective and incorporates clear explanation, scaffolding and feedback; ensuring access to technology particularly for those pupils who are identified as disadvantaged; and enabling peer interaction during remote learning to improve motivation and outcomes (EEF, 2020b). The recommendations are also supported by research carried out by Doucet et al (2020). However, while the summary statements are useful as a guide, they describe generalised, ideal scenarios, that assume a particular age and ability of the child, and homogenous home/family situations, and do not explore the infinite variety of individual situations. Furthermore, as EEF (2020b) argue in this review, pupils respond to different

approaches to and content of remote learning, so the emphasis here is on supporting teachers to develop and reinforce professional learning around the design and provision of remote learning opportunities. Arguably, the provision of online learning during the second lockdown period has been more fluent and confident than during the first, and the provision of synchronous learning experiences has been significant in this regard. This study collected data that was most pertinent to the experiences of learning through the first national lockdown.

1.12 Following the initial lockdown period from March 2020 to June 2020 (see fig 2.1), between late June 2020 and mid-July 2020, schools in Wales offered their learners the opportunity to attend sessions to ‘check in, catch up and prepare’ (Welsh Government, 2020c). Welsh Government (WG) issued guidance documents for statutory schools that covered operations (WG, 2020c), learning (WG, 2020b), and particular support for “vulnerable and disadvantaged learners” (WG, 2020a). The focus for learning was on a joined-up approach between home and school, and for schools to “develop a common understanding and language with parents, carers and learners; [which] can help underpin learning and support learning experiences” (Welsh Government, 2020b: 4-5). WG also advocated for parental involvement in the learning. The relationship between home and school would appear to be key, as it was during lockdown, yet this relationship has yet to be explored in research studies. Many of the findings outlined above provide useful generalised context and population-level data, few specifically focus on the situation in Wales. Furthermore, at the time this research was commissioned there were no studies that explored the experience of school closure and phased re-opening for pupils, teachers, and parents, nor was there significant discussion of the nature of disadvantage in this context. This research aimed to address these gaps and bring to life the experiences of learning during the initial phases of the pandemic by generating rich, experiential data that will provide insights in order to inform future provision.

1.13 The research aims of this study were:

- **To explore, across Welsh and English medium contexts and from the perspectives of stakeholders, the experiences of learners, especially those considered disadvantaged, during the Covid-19 school closures and phased re-opening of schools;**

- To consider the nature of disadvantage faced by learners during this period and any perceived differential impacts on learner groups;
- To consider specific learning from this study for integration into ITE programmes and sharing across the partnership networks.

Research question

The overarching research question for the study is:

What have been the experiences of learners, especially those considered disadvantaged, during the Covid-19 school closures and phased re-opening of schools?

Overview of this report

- 1.14** The report outlines the **Methodology** agreed by the three Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) which was developed inline with the requirements of the research call. This is followed by **Findings** sections which explores the data and is concluded with a summary which collates the data and responds to the research questions set. The **Main Findings** section identifies the key findings for the research. **Recommendations** for the consideration of WG, Schools, ITE providers and Consortia are presented at the end of the document.

2. Methodology

Overview

- 2.1** This study adopted an embedded case study research design, that was qualitative in nature in order that the experiences of stakeholders constitute the dataset. This means that the same research tools were available across each of the cases, that is, for each school, involved in the project. The data collection took place in two phases, these were initially planned to take place before and after the December 2020/January 2021 vacation period. Research tools in phase 1 included interviews with senior leaders, teacher and parent surveys, and completion of learner tasks. Phase 2 involved follow up group discussions and interviews with stakeholders. Phase 2 also involved collaboration with ITE partnership colleagues to explore the significance of the findings for ITE programmes. The timeline and associated narrative provided below explains the changes required in the implementation of the project as a result of the ongoing pandemic and associated school closures occurring from January 2021. All data collection for this project took place remotely.
- 2.2** The research design allows for replication of the study, however due to its qualitative nature the research team acknowledge that the responses provide a snapshot of stakeholder voices, captured at a particular time during a fast-moving and ongoing period of flux as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. While we would not make any claim to the generalisability of the findings beyond the case study schools involved, we do strongly make the case that there is no reason to expect that any of these schools experienced anything that was not experienced in some way elsewhere across the Welsh education system. We would argue therefore that the findings have face validity, they should speak to, and feel familiar for those involved in education at this time. The intention of the research team in adopting the case study approach was that the varied experiences and voices of learners, parents, carers, teachers, support staff and school leaders would have a platform. We hoped that this study would offer deeper insight into the experience of learning and disadvantage during the pandemic than is provided by the larger scale quantitative research reported above. We wanted to bring the experience of individuals to life, and this principle has guided our approach to research design, implementation, analysis, and reporting.

Sampling

- 2.3** In devising the sample of case study schools, the project team agreed that each university would work within its ITE partnership as far as this were possible. It was agreed that each university would seek to recruit four or five schools that matched a pre-agreed profile. The profile for the set of case study schools as a whole was designed to reflect a wide range of schools according to geography, language of instruction, size and phase. In addition to this range, we sought to ensure that the sample included a disproportionate number of schools catering for learners with ALN outside of mainstream provision. This was an intentional action designed to meet the project aims.
- 2.4** Schools were identified through a process of purposive sampling from either the ITE partnerships or to satisfy the profile agreed for the case study sample (i.e. schools associated with ITE provision, in accordance with WG remit, English medium and Welsh medium, Primary, secondary, 3-19 and special schools). These schools were offered invitations to participate in the study. Initially 14 schools agreed to take part, however two subsequently withdrew prior to any data collection due to the pressures of the pandemic and related impact on staff time. Two further schools remained part of the study for selected elements of data collection and did not take part in parental and teacher surveys or interviews/focus groups due to concerns about additional pressures and workload on these groups.
- 2.5** The resulting sample is summarised in table 2.1:

Table 2.1: Overview of the sample of case study schools with response numbers

Code in reporting School	Geography:	Size	Medium of education provision:	Type of school*	Data collection tools:					
					Senior leadership team interview	Parent survey	Teacher survey	Learner task	Parent interview	Focus group
School A	Urban	<500	EM	Primary 3-11	1	51	33	N/A	3	N/A
School B	Urban	>500	EM	Primary 3-11 with STF	2	74	54	6	5	N/A
School C	Urban	>500	WM	Through-school 3-19	1	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
School D	Rural	<>100	Bilingual	Special/ALN	1	10	22	24	5	6 Teachers
School E	Rural	<>100	Bilingual	Special/ALN	1	12	11	18	4	4
School F	Urban	<>100	Bilingual	Special/ALN	1	N/A	N/A	18	N/A	N/A
School G	Rural	<>100	Bilingual	Special/ALN	1	11	25	21	5	2 Teachers
School H	Rural	>500	Bilingual	Through-school 4-18	1	39	16	18	4	4 Teachers
School I	Rural	<500	EM	Primary 3-11	1	6	2	10	1	4 Teachers
School J	Rural	>500	Bilingual	Secondary 11-16	1	16	10	36	4	Teacher (x4)
School K	Rural	>500	Bilingual	Through-school 4-18	1	76	26	25	3	5 Teachers
School L	Rural	<500	WM	Primary 3-11	1	11	5	3	2	3 Teachers

* Special; with specialist teaching facility (STF); Primary 3-11; Secondary 11-16/18; Through-school 3-19/4-18

- 2.6** The research team, whilst recognising the limitations posed by the nature of the data sample, the variations in response rates between schools, and the self-selecting nature of parental responses, stand by the findings of the research.

Research tools

- 2.7** The research tools were devised collaboratively by the research team. The guiding principle in the design of the research tools was to aim to capture the voice of the stakeholders from the case study schools. This meant we were seeking rich data, narrative accounts with descriptive detail. We used qualitative research tools as a result, designed to allow respondents to report their experiences and perceptions in as open a manner as possible.
- 2.8** Initially, a question bank was collated through an iterative process of discussion and testing across the project team to ensure that data collected would respond to the over-arching research question and each of the research sub-questions. The question bank included all questions that would be asked of any stakeholder throughout the data collection process. The question bank was tabulated in order to indicate which stakeholders would be asked what questions. The tabulated question bank guided the development of each of the research tools.
- 2.9** The research tools were created to be used entirely remotely, that is, we did not plan for any face-to-face data collection. Initially the learner task was to involve a teacher-mediated task in the classroom, however lockdown 2 (see fig 1) meant that this was not possible for most of the case study schools and the task was re-designed for mediation by parents as part of home-learning. A data collection protocol was agreed by the research team and shared across researchers undertaking data collection. All data for each case study school was held securely by the Higher Education Institution (HEI) who recruited that school into the project. Surveys were created on each HEI's survey tool, with content replicated across each for consistency. There was no data-sharing agreement made across the HEIs as part of this project. Bilingual staff were employed to work with Welsh medium settings; all data was retained in the language of choice of the stakeholders

throughout the analysis and reporting process in order that the voices of participants could be reported directly.

Phase 1

Interviews with senior leaders:

- 2.10** The interview schedule for senior leaders was created from the question bank. This was sense-checked across the project team, in Welsh and English, prior to any interviews taking place. The interview schedule was intended for use as a guide, that is, the interviews were semi-structured around the 12 questions listed and the associated prompts provided. Each interview was planned to last for between 45-60 minutes.
- 2.11** The interview was designed to be held online through Microsoft Teams software, at a time convenient for the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) member. Each interview was recorded using the Microsoft Teams recording facility and transcribed. Transcription was undertaken either manually or via the Microsoft Teams transcription application and was broadly verbatim. A decision not to transcribe a particular section of the interview could be taken by the researcher where the conversation had strayed from the focus of the interview. Transcriptions took place in the medium of the interview and were not translated.
- 2.12** Each case study school was asked to identify an appropriate member of the senior leadership team for this interview, given that the focus was on the experiences of learners during the pandemic; these individuals included the headteacher, the Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinator (ALNCo), deputy and assistant heads.

Teacher and parent surveys:

- 2.13** Each survey was created using questions from the question bank. In addition, non-identifying respondent details were collected for the purposes of detailed analysis in the future. The project team note that cross cutting the data according to respondent characteristics was not necessary for the purposes of this project report, nor was it feasible given the project budget and the timeline for reporting, however it is likely that this detailed data analysis may be possible in the future. The survey

text was sense-checked across the project team, in Welsh and English, prior to the creation of the surveys on respective HEIs' survey tools. Each HEI created the survey in Welsh and English on the survey platform hosted by the institution.

Table 2.2: Overview of the survey platforms utilised by each institution.

University	Survey platform
Aberystwyth	JISC online
Bangor	JISC online
University of Wales Trinity Saint David	Qualtrics

- The survey was piloted by researchers from the HEIs' research teams prior to release to schools.

- 2.14** Each case study school was asked to send a survey link for the teacher survey to the school staff involved in teaching and learning support at the school, via an email to their professional email accounts.
- 2.15** Each case study school was asked to send a survey link for the parent survey to all parents and carers registered with the school via the usual electronic means of communication between the school and parent body. This varied across the case study schools, some schools used the email system, and others used WhatsApp, SeeSaw, and DoJo. Some schools used more than one system for school-parent liaison for different classes/ year groups. The surveys remained open for 4-6 weeks depending on the time they were sent, those few sent before the winter vacation remained open afterwards.
- 2.16** After short, closed questions related to respondent characteristics, the participants were invited to respond to a series of open-ended questions by writing their answers into the response box; this could be undertaken on a PC, laptop, tablet, or smartphone device. Teachers/learning support staff were asked 10 open-ended questions and parents/carers were asked 6 open-ended questions. Both groups of respondents were invited to provide an email address or phone number if they were happy to be involved in a further interview or group discussion as part of the research process. Respondents were at liberty to skip questions and submit a partial response to the survey if so wished.

- 2.17** Data was downloaded onto spreadsheets prior to analysis and remained in the language of choice of the respondent.

Learner tasks:

- 2.18** The research team were keen to use a simple tool for data capture from learners that was adaptable across the age range. We wanted to maintain a focus on learning in the task and avoid any implication that we were interested only in negative experiences. Learners were asked therefore to complete the following task: Draw or write about the two best and two worst things about learning at home when your school was closed.
- 2.19** This task was mediated by teachers when schools were open prior to the winter vacation (see fig 2.1) and mediated by parents following an email from the school during lockdown 2. The issues regarding consent for learners' participation, outlined in the ethics section below, detail why this aspect of data collection process was most difficult.
- 2.20** The learner responses to the task were anonymised, scanned/ photographed, and sent electronically to the link researcher for the school by either the teacher or the parent, depending on who mediated the task. Children's sex and age was recorded for each learner response.

Phase 2

Individual interviews with parents:

- 2.21** Participants for the individual interviews were stakeholders who had indicated a willingness to be contacted following completion of the survey. These parents/carers were selected to ensure a range of characteristics were represented such as diversity of schools (limited by willingness of participants to take part); variation on the basis of the age/school year of the contributors' children according to institution; considerations of the number and age of children within families; variation in the gender of contributors; language considerations; considerations on pupils' needs and consideration of general comments noted in the questionnaire.

- 2.22** This approach to phase 2 participation necessarily meant that only those individuals who had chosen to take part in the survey and completed it had the chance to take part. We recognise that this approach reduces the range of voices we hear in the process, however this approach was taken according to ethical guidelines and in order to minimise the number of approaches made to parents during a time of potential stress and worry.
- 2.23** Individual interviews with parents took place during lockdown 2, as part of phase 2 of data collection. At the inception stages of the research project, we did not anticipate the UK experiencing a second lockdown, however the timing of this event (see fig 2.1) meant that we were able to explore changes in learning experiences from the first to the second lockdown. The semi-structured interviews with parents were therefore organised around questions exploring change in the learning experiences and school provision for learners, including those experiencing disadvantage.
- 2.24** Where possible interviews were held using the Microsoft Teams software and were recorded using the recording application. Where interviews took place over the phone a recording was made on a handheld recording device. Transcription was largely verbatim and used the language of choice of the participant.

Group discussions for teachers:

- 2.25** Group discussions were undertaken with teachers; these teachers were identified either by indicating that they were happy to be contacted following the survey or via the school-based project link. Group discussion were usually about 4 in number though ranged from 2 – 6 teachers. These group discussions took place through Microsoft Teams and were recorded.

Collaboration with ITE partnerships:

- 2.26** Phase 2 also involved collaboration with ITE partnership stakeholders. Each HEI partnership undertook this collaboration according to the wishes of the partnership, and so a range of approaches was taken. These included workshops for ITE teacher educators, individual interviews with ITE teacher educators and focus

groups with ITE students. The collaborative discussions have been used to inform the recommendations in the conclusion of this report.

Ethical processes

- 2.27** This project was a collaboration across three HEIs. The project proposal, research design and research tools were approved by the ethics panels at each university prior to any data collection. Throughout the project the principles of respect for participants, voluntary informed consent, ongoing consent, and withdrawal without repercussion were upheld. Participant information sheets were provided for participants for each of the research tools prior to consent being sought. Consent for learner participation was sought from parents as well as learners themselves. All participants provided consent prior to taking part in data collection.
- 2.28** Due to the fact that all communication with participants was via remote means, gaining consent for learner participation was challenging. A number of approaches were used to try to maximise consent for learner participation and return of learner tasks. Prior to lockdown 2, parents were sent a survey link via an email to indicate consent for their child's participation. Information resulting from this contact was collated into a list of possible child participants who were then asked by their teachers for their assent for their material to be sent to the research team. This was a laborious process and did not generate high numbers of learner task responses. After January 2021, this mechanism needed adaptation since schools had closed (see fig 2.1); parents were asked to mediate the learner tasks. The task was then included in the consent survey and this approach improved the response rate, possibly as a result of parents being involved in home schooling anyway, and the learner task simply becoming another learner activity during the home-schooling day. All learner task material received by the research team was anonymised.

Analysis

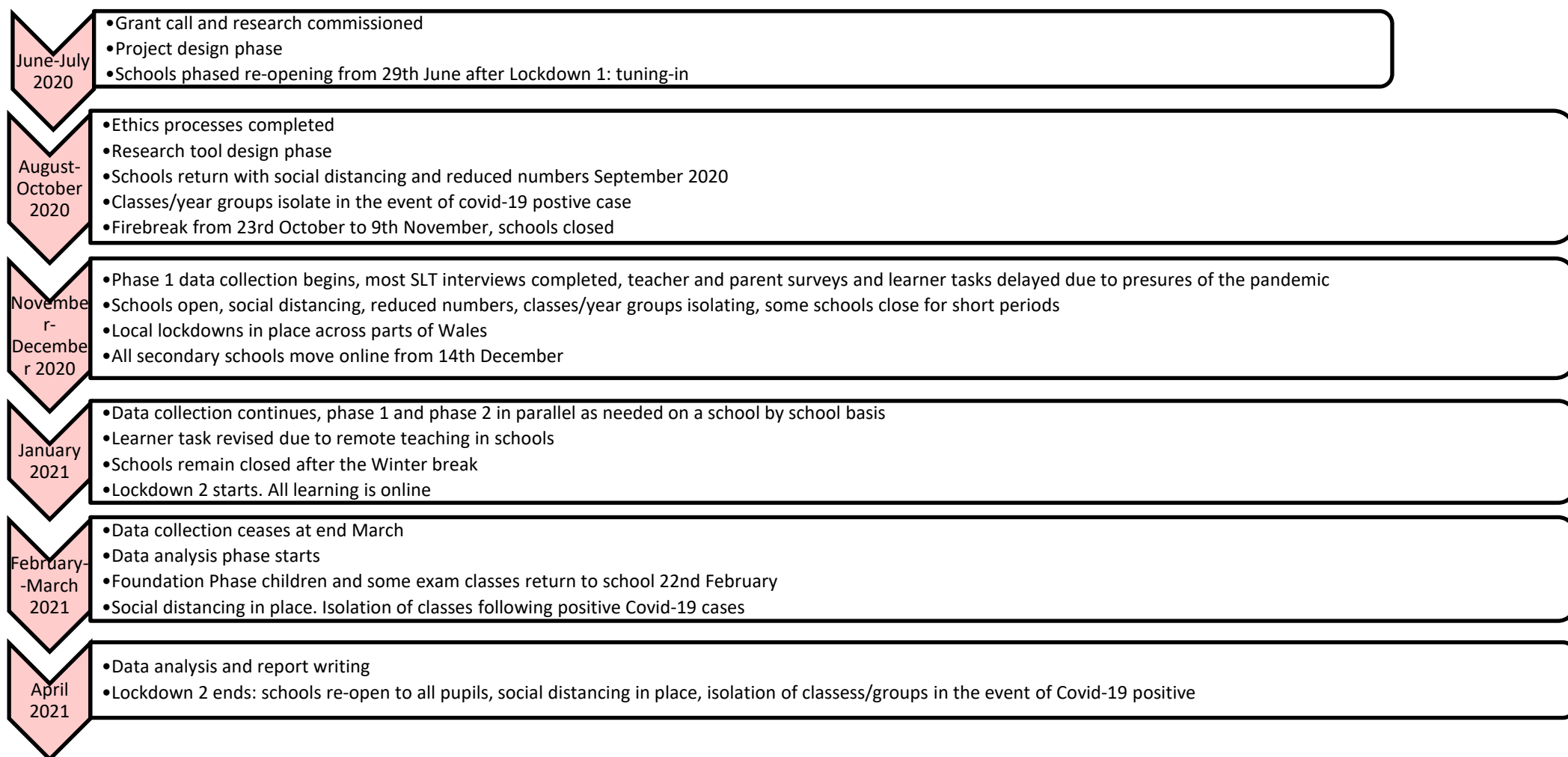
- 2.29** There are significant amounts of data associated with this research project. Each participating school generated a dataset that may include data generated from any or all of the research tools. The data is text-based and includes learners' drawings

and writing. The interviews and focus groups were transcribed for the purposes of analysis.

- 2.30** The intention of the research team was to generate a descriptive summary of the project dataset that emphasised the experiences of a wide variety of stakeholders. Since the research design sought to surface the voices of stakeholders about their own experiences of learning during the pandemic, the process of analysis and reporting was designed to ensure these voices remain prominent.
- 2.31** The dataset was analysed through a process of thematic analysis. Early inductive coding of the dataset took place for each school. These early codes were shared across the research teams from each of the collaborating HEIs and six over-arching themes were iteratively agreed. These themes are; access to technology; the home learning environment; school provision; the availability of specialist support services; mental health and well-being; and learning and academic progress.
- 2.32** Sub-themes associated with each over-arching theme were generated through the same iterative process. The sub-themes encompass all the early codes from each dataset. The themes and sub themes are explored in the findings sections, chapters 3 – 8, below.
- 2.33** Each theme and its associated sub-themes are reported using the voices of the research participants as much as possible, by including direct quotes from the dataset. The data has been used to develop vignettes that have been created either to exemplify a common response from stakeholders, or to illustrate a particular experience of an individual or group. The reason for such presentation is to ensure that the range and diversity of experience that was surfaced by this project is represented in this report.
- 2.34** Following focussed discussions among the research team, it was decided not to explicitly designate and attribute quotes and extracts to different types of schools (i.e., to primary / secondary / special schools) in every case within the 'Findings' section. The reason for this decision was that it was felt that designation of the extracts would detract from the inclusive approach adopted by the study. The researchers felt strongly that readers be given the opportunity to read about the impact and effects of the Covid-19 pandemic (and related lockdown procedures and disruptions to learning) on the Welsh educational community as a whole. No

prioritisation was made in school selections, and a balance was sought in enlisting the support of the types of schools involved with the sample. The findings are considered to be relevant to, and important for, all children and young people and those who work with them as part of their educational provision. The presentation of the extracts without explicitly defining their derivation or provenance, therefore, reflects this inclusive approach. The intention of this approach is to encourage readers to explore the impact of the pandemic and related disruptions on a broad range of learners.

Figure 2.1: Timeline indicating key events in the Covid-19 pandemic and the research process.



Limitations

- 2.35** Whilst this study provides a rich data base from which to draw initial conclusions and offer recommendations for future actions, these suggestions are caveated by some limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results. These limitations are outlined below.

Sampling

- 2.36** The data amassed is limited to the experiences of schools and families within three sets of HEI-school networks. Whilst these networks covered three broad geographical areas of Wales (north – Bangor; mid – Aberystwyth University; south – UWTSU), it does not capture a comprehensive view as schools that fell outside of these networks were not invited to participate.
- 2.37** Given the nature of the timing of the project, undertaken during the Covid-19 pandemic, response rates were low. The results of this study should therefore be viewed as a sample of potential responses and not representative of the whole experience during this time.

Design limitations due to Covid-19

- 2.38** As outlined above, the study design continuously evolved due to external factors relating to the changing situation associated with the Covid-19 pandemic, and its impact on schools and HEIs. This hampered our intention to involve pupils themselves in the research, to some degree.
- 2.39** Due to the volume of studies conducted in schools at the time of this study, surveys needed to be kept short and relevant. We were also cognisant of the need to ensure complete anonymity of individuals responding to our surveys, including school anonymity. Together, these limited the number and type of background variables that were included in the questionnaires, which limited, to an extent, our ability to assign certain responses to certain types of schools or individuals.
- 2.40** The findings are reported under the six themes; access to technology; the home learning environment; school provision; the availability of specialist support services; mental health and well-being; and learning and academic progress. The findings are caveated in relation to the limitations of data capture and

representativeness identified above. It should be noted that the vignettes provided exemplify the experiences of respondents and are not generalisable, though are likely to resonate with experiences of others at this time. The vignettes are intended to bring to life the varied challenges and issues that learners in Wales, their families and teachers dealt with during the very specific time frame under consideration (see fig.2.1).

3. Findings regarding access to technology

Introduction:

- 3.1 It comes as no surprise that stakeholders had much to say about the availability of technology to facilitate learning from home during the school closure periods.
- 3.2 Broadly, there are eight sub-themes constructed from the data across the case study schools:
- Hardware / Device availability
 - School provision of hardware and stigma
 - Broad band connectivity
 - Financial implications of online learning at home
 - Siblings - access for all learners
 - Availability of training for parents in use of IT
 - Staff expertise
 - Opportunities
- 3.3 The following vignette exemplifies a number of these sub-themes which are further unpacked below.

Figure 3.1: Vignette offering a snapshot of the experiences regarding access to technology.

Despite the best efforts of schools to provide the necessities for online engagement in the form of hardware provision in the form of laptops, the simple provision of hardware alone was not always effective without the provision of technological support and troubleshooting guides. As a parent from school K noted in their interview:

‘we had to borrow a laptop from school, and when we got the laptop wasn't working, and it wasn't programmed for the network. I had to take it back to the school and then had to go back to the school and pick it up. And it's just things like that. When you're trying to fix all of that around your job and supporting the kids, you know, is all you can do. And it's not like you can just take it and get it the same day. I think there was around about two weeks when we had this problem...’

Yet, a number of respondents noted that they sought access to resources through other means. One parent from school K noted:

‘unrhywbeth we ddim gyda ni we ‘begged, borrowed or stole,’ except we didn’t steal achos ma hwna’n wrong... [felly doedd] dim angen i fi ofyn i’r ysgol, o, allwch chi danfon laptop i fi i joino mewn’

[‘anything we didn’t have we ‘begged, borrowed or stole,’ except we didn’t steal because that’s wrong... so as we didn’t have to ask the school, ‘oh, can you send me a laptop to join in’]

Some parents, clearly, weighed their need in the balance and found it wanting compared to others, and thus sought to use technology which may have been somewhat dated. As the same parent noted how an older device was: ‘volunteered into service’ which was noted, rather unconvincingly, to succeed in ‘gwneud y job’ [‘doing the job’].

Yet not all sought to seek resources independently from choice. Some noted the need to seek creative responses to the lack of technological provision within the home as a result of ineffective communication which failed to highlight the opportunities offered by the schools to lend materials. As a result, one parent from school H noted how:

‘We didn’t have access to more than one device ... and the device that they could use was my work computer. So, it was it was very hit and miss the first one. My sister ... [has] actually bought... a computer so that she [the daughter of the interviewee] could do her schoolwork, and to have access to her classes because now she’s got her GCSE’s ahead of her. She can, you know, attend her classes and as much possible without having to obviously disturb me and my work to do it.’

Others were not as fortunate, and had to dip in to their own finances as a result of the miscommunication. As parent from school H noted in a survey response:

‘[Roedden] ni wedi gorfod prynu gliniadur ail-law i’n plentyn. (Eitem drud annisgwyl!)’

[‘We had to buy a secondhand laptop for our child. (An expensive and unexpected purchase!)]’

Hardware / device availability

- 3.4** Both parents and teaching staff acknowledged the disadvantage that arose from a deficit of hardware and broadband when home-schooling was needed. The survey and interview responses reflected a myriad of challenges perceived and experienced by learners in relation to this issue. Notably, these were more pronounced when families had more than one child who needed access to a device for their online learning, and /or when the adults in the household also needed access to devices for their own work.

‘... being online it was difficult to access due to my son not having a laptop, we would then have to use my mobile phone, hand write the questions/tasks and answers and take photos to send back to the teacher which prolonged the work further’. (Parent Interview, School B)

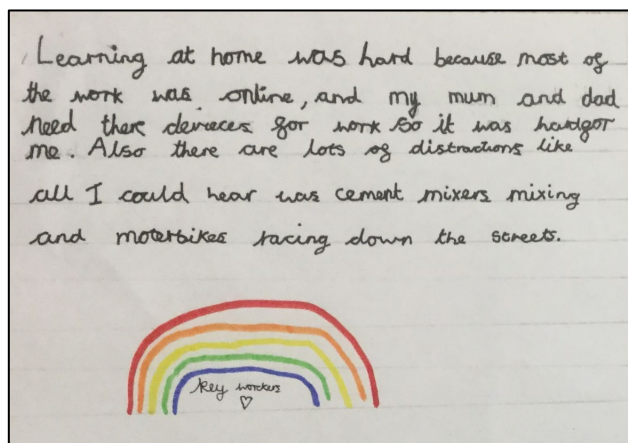
‘She's got an iPad with her laptop. Her personal laptop isn't the quickest and what we've noticed is sometimes when the attachments come out because the speed of the laptop isn't brilliant, it lags, and it takes forever for the page to load.’ (Parent Interview, School A)

‘the iPads are brilliant, but it's not a keyboard (laughs) we haven't, we haven't got a proper keyboard for it, so when you're using the touch screen keyboard, you're only playing with half a screen. So, I think personally from our point of view, what the biggest problem we had first time round was we didn't have equipment to be able to do it as good as we'd like to do it, you know. Now, I've got this laptop, so yeah, she has had access to this laptop. She's also had an Xbox for Christmas so she can access it through that.’ (Parent Interview, School A)

‘As we have no access to a computer, we found it hard to upload homework’. (Parent Survey Response, School B)

‘Working at home hard because most of the time mum and dad need their devices so it was harder for me. Also, there are lots of distractions like all I could hear was cement mixers mixing and motorbikes racing down the street’ (Pupil Task Response, Learner 3, Year 5, School B)

Figure 3.2: Image highlighting response by learner 3, year 5, school B.



'I found many of the PMLD pupils have been very hard to reach especially offering specific learning for those pupils, knowing that they won't have those kinds of resources at home. The sensory experiences we provide at school can't be replicated at home. So that would've been quite difficult. They would've been quite disadvantaged, although we have through Facebook signposted quite a lot of websites that they can tap into that can offer support, for example with sensory stories'. (Teacher Focus Group, School D)

3.5 There was recognition that there has been anything but a level playing field in terms of the learning experiences available for different children, because of access to appropriate technology.

'Some kids are fortunate to have access to the best equipment, others have to use dated 2nd hand equipment.' (Parent Survey Response, School A)

'Some children have the technology at home to do research and online lessons. Some do not. Some children have support at home. Some do not.' (Parent Survey Response, School A)

'I imagine that homes without all the necessary tech would have really suffered. If the pandemic had been a year earlier, we wouldn't have had the laptop and smart phone which were essential for all the home learning exercises. Also, homes with large families would have struggled to share equipment and space...I don't believe there's been a level playing field for children to learn through all of this.' (Parent Interview, School B)

‘Some families don't have Internet access except by mobile phone and it's not easy to do schoolwork on a phone.’ (Teacher/ Learning Support Assistant (LSA) Survey Response, School B)

School provision of hardware and stigma

- 3.6** During the pandemic schools supported pupils in a range of different ways including by sharing laptops to support their learners. The latter was deemed helpful to many parents in helping ensure siblings had access to their own device for online learning, especially as schools often used different platforms for different age groups (e.g., Teams for older learners), however for some there was a stigma attached to the need to borrow, as exemplified in the vignette above. For those with connectivity issues, some teachers sent hard copies of documents home, and this was welcomed.

‘So dependent on the circumstances in the home. We did send laptops home so that we tackled the inequality issue like that in some cases. But you know it isn't easy to make those decisions. Not always sure if you're going to have it returned in a good condition. Some of the children can't use these because of their needs and maybe you will see damage, or it not being used properly. I think that it's more complicated than a mainstream setting in these cases because there are other factors at play that you have to think about’. (SLT Interview, School E)

‘Resources and tools have also been a big part of it. We have some pupils and didn't have the technology at home. But we were able to sort those through the school. For example, I have one child and the family kept saying we're okay we're okay. And you found the more you spoke with parents the more you seem to find that they were problems, but they were reluctant to reveal these. It was easier talking by telephone for many parents. And if you could develop that relationship with parents, they would become more open. And in doing that finding things like one child we didn't have a working laptop but until then parents were ashamed to admit and wouldn't share that there was a problem in the child being able to access the work. We found out that this one laptop is being shared between five. And that was broken. This is a

child that we didn't think this this would be a problem for that particular family. It took a while for mum to say that he didn't have his own device that he could use for learning. And most of our children can't explain that for themselves so if the family don't provide the information, then it becomes very difficult. So, this little boy was disadvantaged, where he wasn't seen as being disadvantaged under normal conditions. So, he couldn't complete his work but by the time we sent a laptop home for him, he could complete the work that was being set. So, things that you wouldn't have thought about like big families and access to resources became seen as disadvantages. But you would never have thought that he had been disadvantaged. So, a big link between availability of resources and the parents' skills with technology'.

(Teacher Focus Group, School D)

'we were told that we could apply for some equipment through the school but to be honest with the amount of stuff we've actually got in the house it kinda felt a bit kinda cheeky really. Cos you know there's, there's worse off people than us, you know what I mean? So yeah so, I just didn't want to apply for one and risk taking it away from someone who actually might need it when we've got plenty of equipment here for us so...' (Parent Interview Response, School A)

'unrhyw beth we ddim gyda ni we 'begged, borrowed or stole,' except we didn't steal achos ma hwna'n wrong... [felly doedd] dim angen i fi ofyn i'r ysgol, o, allwch chi danfon laptop i fi i joino mewn' ['anything we didn't have we 'begged, borrowed or stole,' except we didn't steal because that's wrong... so as we didn't have to ask the school, 'oh, can you send me a laptop to join in'] (Parent Interview Response, School K)

'When the County started to identify laptop and IT provision and things like that, you know, there wasn't enough to go around and there still isn't. So, you're almost having to decide who is in the most need. So, from a survey - you know - if you've got a mobile phone, you're not as at a disadvantage as if you [...] if you've got a laptop that's better isn't it you're more advantaged. If you've got a phone, you got something but it's not the same as having a laptop and we've still got pupils who, through no one's fault, the only device they've

got in their house is a mobile phone which is tricky when you're doing live stream teaching or you're trying to get resources, you know, you can do minimal amount on there.' (SLT Interview, School J)

Broadband connectivity

- 3.7** For some the internet speed and broadband connectivity of their home caused issues in accessing home learning. This was reported across urban and rural settings and was perceived as another aspect of inequitable experience.

'The small amount of work set that was offline was fine, although challenging to get the children to engage. Unfortunately, we have no broadband at home as BT can't offer it to our address, so have to use our mobile phones to use the Internet. This is very slow and has a poor signal so we couldn't use the video resources or online games'. (Parent Interview, School D)

'Families without suitable devices or constant internet access will have struggled but school are supporting in every way they can.' (Parent Survey Response, School A)

'Yes, not everyone has the internet (it should be free).' (Parent Survey Response, School A)

Financial implications of online learning at home

- 3.8** The financial implications of upgrading equipment and accessing hardware was noted by many respondents. The expectation that families had access to printers was also challenging financially. For those who did not have access to printers some reported handwriting out tasks, as reported above under hardware/device availability. See also the Home Learning Environment section.

'I do not have the finances to provide... printers and printing ink for worksheets etc. This means that my home learning albeit doable it is limited to what is accessible.' (Parent Survey Response, School A)

'...we did have to buy another laptop'. (Parent Interview, School B)

‘[Roedden] ni wedi gorfod prynu gliniadur ail-law i'n plentyn. (Eitem drud annisgwyl!)’ [‘We had to buy a second-hand laptop for our child. (An expensive and unexpected purchase!)]’ (Parent Survey Response, School H)

Siblings - access for all learners

- 3.9** It was widely acknowledged that the technological challenges of home learning were multiplied when families had more than one learner at home. Apportioning equitable time for the use of the devices across the family and prioritising need within families created further complexity for families to negotiate. How to support such families also provided more issues for schools to consider when providing hardware for learning.

‘Working parents struggled much! To work and look after kids at the same time is difficult. Also sharing and allocation of devices was difficult to manage who was unable to afford individual devices’. (Parent Interview, School B)

‘There were also difficulties for some families in terms of they had maybe one or two devices, but mum and dad were working from home and therefore they weren't enough devices, those children wouldn't necessarily have fallen into the category of those that would be supplied with the device because they, they had devices ... And also, with those children without connectivity, so you know if you give them a device, they can't get on the Internet anyway because they may not have any Wi-Fi in the house. So, they may not have any, any connectivity at all’ (SLT Interview, School B)

‘Even in more affluent households it's quite a novelty to have, if you put four children and two parents working at home, to each have a device that is allowing you to do what you want to do. You might have a tablet and a couple of laptops and a phone but not each of those are equitable in terms of learning – they're something but, yeah, it's hard’ (SLT Interview, School J)

‘And then you've also got the pupils that are sharing devices in a household. So, we've got pupils who are, you know, one of three or four siblings and one's in year 13 and one's in year 11 and then you got 2 lower down the school. How do you decide in that household who's the most benefit of using that

device. They're prioritising within a household who should use the device at what point in the day so, absolutely, you know, pupils are disadvantaged if they haven't got that IT provision' (SLT Interview, School J)

'Initially there may be a child trying to access a Teams document on the parents' phone or, as I said, regarding a parent maybe 1 laptop in the house and the parent needs it, because they're working from home to do what they need to do. Multiple children in the house, maybe 3 or 4 children sharing one laptop or one device, so we made sure that there was offers for devices to be lent out, so we kept a track on that'. (SLT Interview, School C)

Availability of training for parents in use of IT

- 3.10** Some schools pro-actively provided training packages for parents in order to support their accessing of home learning materials. This was generally most necessary where the learners where not able to login and access materials themselves. Teachers reported that they spent considerable time with some parents trying to support access, and that this was exacerbated by varied technological equipment and resources available in the home. It was generally acknowledged that teaching staff, parents and learners developed their IT skills through the school closure period.

'but I also did find it quite frustrating sometimes. You know, when, by the time I'd sent out sort of the 5th or 6th video of me showing them how to log in, um, you keep on thinking yourself well, how can I make it anymore simple to follow? You know, without actually being there with the family and with them, it's you know on that note, I've just had a message now literally before I've come on to speak to you, with a mum asking if she can come into school, so I can show her how to log into her laptop' (SLT Interview, School B)

'So, I had parents messaging me, you know how do I do this? How do I do that? And I spent you know several hours with one parent trying to get her onto her laptop.' (SLT Interview, School B)

'...it took me a bit of time to get my head around how to access the home learning, ... I did have my son to help as well! ... It was easy to miss the

important stuff. I am ok with computers ... but I did wonder how it might be for others who find technology more difficult'. (Parent Interview, School B)

'Providing IT equipment to support home learning. Providing how to videos so that parents and carers feel better placed to support their child's/children's learning. Tuition videos posted by teachers so that pupils were not solely reliant on their parents/carers support. Teams calls with pupils so that they are able to see their friends and interact with them'. (SLT Interview, School B)

'Pupils became more digitally competent whilst learning remotely'. (SLT Interview, School B)

'Some families dont [sic.] have much experience with computers and so this can make it uneasy for them to help their children with learning.' (Teacher/LSA Survey Response, School A)

'parents who can use technology affectively to support their children had an advantage.' (Teacher/LSA Survey Response, School A)

'some pupils not so confident with IT and missed out on interventions.' (Teacher/LSA Survey Response, School A)

Staff expertise

- 3.11** Many respondents acknowledged that school staff had to work hard and very quickly in order to set up and support home learning, and that provision improved as time went on. Some learners, including those with ALN, were identified as being 'digitally savvy', some learners surprised their teachers with their progress however, some learners were reluctant to engage with on-line learning without parental input. Teaching staff explained how they made a great deal of effort to upskills themselves quickly (through training and sharing practice) to support parents and learners during this period.

'I have to say quite a few of the children, although they've got statements, they're quite tech savvy, so I knew that they could log in and access learning themselves. But I think for some of my children without the parental support to make them do it and make them go online and learn, they just weren't, they weren't doing it. '(SLT Interview, School B)

‘Some tasks particularly early on were not well instructed it seemed to be work that the children had not done before and as parents we were left not knowing how to teach it’. (Parent Interview, School B)

‘I think they done a fantastic job, but it was obvious that there was things that they weren't sure of and they were reacting to the situation rather than being proactive. And I think the difference now is that they've got the best part of a years' experience of delivering this. Delivering this, delivering their learning or online and remotely. So, they are better at it.’ (Parent Interview, School A)

- 3.12** There were a number of references to live lessons available being helpful in supporting engagement.

‘There are now more live lessons so children can be supported by the teacher.’ (Teacher/LSA Survey Response, School A)

‘More live lessons, intervention groups delivered online. Greater parental involvement if possible.’ (Teacher/LSA Survey Response, School A)

Opportunities

- 3.13** A few stakeholders explained that there are advantages to home learning for some learners (see also mental health and wellbeing section).

‘There is one pupil from one of the classes that has been using digital resources. She was shielding. She had to stay away from the school for a long time and she was able to join the lessons that other pupils were involved with face-to-face. So, the pupils maybe with longer-term medical issues the new types of provision might support them in being able to include then in lessons even though they may not be able to come to school. So, a teaching assistant would use a laptop to enable the pupil at home to take part in the lesson even though she couldn't come to school.’ (Teacher Focus Group, School F)

Summary

- 3.14** The use of technology to access education provision during the closure of school sites clearly became the norm. Provision in this area progressed developmentally

as schools, parents and children adapted, investigated, and innovated with various forms of provision. This required a steep trajectory of learning for all involved, but the participants suggested consistently that there was a readiness to adapt and develop. As the lockdowns progressed, it appeared that individual school provision developed both in sophistication and effectiveness, and pupils, generally, developed a resilience to adapted forms of learning.

- 3.15** A range of participants recorded that the technological skills and abilities of all stakeholders had developed significantly over the period of study, and that both schools and homes were increasingly able to utilise those technologies more effectively in the provision of learning opportunities. It is significant to note that this may, looking to the future, offer alternative and additional learning opportunities, even when full time attendance within the traditional school setting is possible.

4. Findings regarding the home learning environment

Introduction

- 4.1** It comes as no surprise that the stakeholders approached had much to say about the home learning environment of pupils, and the impact some key considerations in regard to the home had on the educational experiences which pupils received during the period of school closures.
- 4.2** Broadly, the sub-themes constructed from the data across the case study schools represent:
- Parental Support
 - Parental Wellbeing
 - Parental Employment
 - Parental Expectations
 - Nature of the Family
 - Home Provision
 - Increasing Financial Instability
 - Access to Resources
 - Access to Workspaces
- 4.3** The following vignette exemplifies a number of these sub-themes which are further unpacked below.

Figure 4.1: Vignette offering a snapshot of the experiences regarding the home learning environment.

‘Dydyn ni ddim yn gwybod am sefyllfaoedd rhai adre. Oes gyda nhw rhywle tawel i weithio? A wedyn, o rhan y gefnogaeth adref, ma hynna’n gwahanol o un lle i’r llall’ [‘We don’t know about the situations of some pupils when they’re at home. Do they have somewhere quiet to work? And then, you have issues regarding support at home, and that varies from home to home’] (SLT Interview, School H)

‘This is not an environment that they're happy learning in. They're conditioned to learn in school, and unless you're sat with them while they're doing their work then it tends not to get done. They tend to be diverted away with other things. If you're not sat next to him while he's watching it, then he doesn't tend to focus on it because there are many more distractions at home... There could be somebody delivering a parcel, somebody knocks on the door, or the dog barks... or the phone rings, [or] my mobile rings for work - it's used as an excuse to not pay attention and obviously deviate from the work set.’ (Parent Interview, School I)

Parental support

- 4.4** The importance of parental support was highlighted by stakeholders. Yet, it was apparent that the level of support varied significantly, and for various factors. Amongst these, the temporal element was a significant one. There was, according to the SLT contributor from school J, a strong initial support from parents:

‘Parents, initially, enjoyed the online learning as much as the pupils did... The feedback we received when we made our calls home during those weeks was that parent were enjoying learning again, which was something that I didn’t really think would happen in the first instance. They enjoyed having the opportunity to re-learn things that they had learnt in a school and filling their knowledge as much as the pupils did.’

- 4.5** Yet, as the same contributor later noted, the evidence showed a waning degree of support over a very short period of time:

‘[But] I think the novelty wore off after the two weeks that we initially thought it was going to be for.’

- 4.6** A sense of apathy developed amongst many parents. Increasingly there developed an acceptance amongst parents that, despite there being ‘nothing better than the teacher standing in front of a class and teaching,’ as one parent from school J noted. Yet, there was a degree of responsibility on their part to undertake some responsibility for supporting the education of their children. As the same parent remembered, ‘it was up to me and my husband to work our way through it [the schoolwork] with her.’ Many felt such a responsibility to be an increased burden upon them, but dutifully undertook the task.

- 4.7** The benefits posed to those learners who received committed parental support clearly shone through in the work presented by pupils. According to the consensus expressed by staff of school K:

‘[Y] plant sydd a’r gefnogaeth gartref... sydd yn gwneud y mwyaf. [‘[The] children with Support at home... are the ones who do the most.’]

- 4.8** It was also agreed that they did the best. For, as an SLT member for school L noted:

‘Ma hynna fel cael ‘one to one’ yn y dosbarth, nag yw e?!’ [‘That’s nearly the equivalent of having one to one in the class, isn’t it?!’]

4.9 As one member of staff from school H noted:

‘mae’r rhai sydd heb cael rhieni yn gallu gneud hynny [eu cefnogi yn gyson] yn cynrychioli’r 10 y cant sydd ddim ar lein oherwydd dydy’r rheini ddim yna i gwthio’r plant yn y cyfeiriad cywir.’ [‘the pupils who haven’t had parents there to Support them represent the 10% or so who don’t engage online, and that’s because they haven’t got their parents pushing them, as pupils, to do the right thing.’]

4.10 As one staff member from school J noted, the significance of applied parental support very apparent:

‘I had one piece of work in from one of bottom set year 9 pupils, and it was like exceptionally good. And then I asked the head of department and she said he would have had a lot of parental help and maybe help from his brother. And it was exceptionally good for that class. it was so clear that they have had that sort of extra support...It was useful to have had someone who’d just sat down and sort of excruciatingly gone through everything. But you can see that’s not the case with a lot of pupils as well, and there’s clearly no one sitting down with them.’

4.11 With the applied parental support, it was clear that pupils could succeed in receiving a comprehensive, and well supported education and thrive. Yet, in all too many cases that support wasn’t present. It was apparent that, as a teacher at school I noted, different parents took different views of the expectations that were set upon their children by the school. Some, it was noted:

‘are not aware of what the standards or the expectations are as parents, and of what the school would like. So... some parents’ expectations may be quite high, whilst others may be quite low and they just say, right, let’s just get the work in.’

4.12 As a result, some would undertake to ensure that their children presented meticulous responses to tasks presented by the school, thus ensuring that their children engaged meaningfully with the tasks and topics, whilst others would merely

seek to attempt to ensure that their children would complete the work expected of them in some way, shape or form, if that. For, as a member of school A noted:

‘there are some families who were eager to complete tasks and would take up every opportunity for learning online. Where as [sic.] some families made no or little contact...’ (Teacher/LSA Survey Response, School A)

- 4.13** The fact that parents took such a differing view of their responsibilities proved frustrating for educators and other parents. For those who attempted to maintain a high standard of educational provision, and who actively supported their children with responding to every task set by the school, and often despite additional pressures placed upon them by their employment, the frustration from the fact that other parents neglected their duties, or offered only ‘slapdash’ support, became apparent. One parent from school J remembered, their frustration at the opposition voiced by some parents to the school’s educational provision, and their unwillingness to have their children complete the full expectations upon them, and to aid their children in such endeavours, was apparent. The parent noted how other parents had:

‘contacted the school and said, ‘we’re just doing maths, English and science,’ and they’ve been told that’s fine. So, when my son then says, ‘Mum, I haven’t got to do all of this as most of the class aren’t doing it,’ then I’m struggling because I’m trying to maintain what I would consider to be fairly minimal amount of learning, and my son thinks I’m a witch because I’m making him do the work set [by his teachers].’

- 4.14** Parental support and provision was therefore considered key. Those who failed to receive adequate parental support were highlighted as the pupils who were most likely to fail to present work, and, therefore, to complete work. As members of the staff focus group in school H noted, simply:

‘Os ydyn nhw [y rhieni] ddim yn bothered... yna mae’r plant yn colli allan.’ [‘If they [the parents] aren’t bothered...then the children are sure to miss out.’]

- 4.15** And, from the evidence, it was apparent that many parents were significantly aggravated by the increased educational responsibilities placed upon them as a

result of the pandemic. As one parent from school K noted in a survey response, they:

‘[disliked] using what little free spare time I have, when my tax contributions pay for others to teach my son an education.’

- 4.16** In such cases their aggravation with the situation could easily express itself in the form of apathy, thus prejudicing the level of support, assistance and guidance that would be offered, thus resulting in decreased motivation on the part of pupils. A parent of two from school J noted:

‘I feel dreadfully sorry for the school [and pupils] because I think there has been a pushback from parents, and a lack of responsibility, really [on their behalf]. I said to my husband, we both work full time, and neither of us want to sit there and home-school all day. But, If I can't sit by the younger one [during the day] and if he doesn't do his work, then I feel a responsibility in the evening after tea... But I think other parents have just said ‘we're not doing it.’ It's ridiculous. They blame the government; they blame the school; they blame anybody but themselves. If the work isn't done, they don't just say, ‘my child didn't do it and he should have, and I didn't make him do it.’ Rather it's simply the teachers' fault...’

- 4.17** It was felt that parents, increasingly, as a result of the pandemic, had to be held ‘accountable’ for a degree of their children’s learning, and had to take ‘responsibility back’. Yet, there were some individuals, it was noted within school K where, ‘ni heb clywed dim wrtho’ [‘we haven’t heard anything from them’]. Additionally, there were numerous others within the school who were not engaging effectively with school communications. During such a changeable period, the importance of maintaining communication between home and school was highlighted, yet:

‘[Wrth symud i ffrydio’n fyw, a sicrhau cefnogaeth rhieni a gwarcheidwaid] roedd rhaid ffonio 120 o rhieni i gwblhau'r ffurflen, er fod e wedi mynd allan 4 waith – dwywaith ar ParentMail, a dwywaith ar Teams. Roedd hwna’n eithaf heriol...’ [‘As we moved to online learning, and we were attempting to gather parental consent] we had to call 120 parents to complete the form, and that was despite the fact that we’d sent it out electronically 4 times – twice via ParentMail, and twice via Teams. It was a real challenge...’]

4.18 Parents were, in addition, often unwilling to initiate communication with the school. As a result, when issues arose which undermined pupils' ability to interact, these issues were left unresolved until contact was initiated by the school within varying time frames between institutions. The responsibility, all too often, was therefore the schools' to contact parents to ask:

'Pam? Sut allwn ni helpu nhw? Oes angen cymorth gyda'r technoleg?' ['Why? How can we help? Do you need Support with the technology?']

4.19 Additionally, staff at school L noted that, despite efforts to contact parents and to aide, support, and in some cases cajole:

'er bo fi'n siarad a nhw dros y ffon dwi dal ddim yn gweld eu gwaith nhw...'

4.20 Interventions did, therefore, fall on deaf ears despite the best efforts of school staff. There were clear educational, and wellbeing benefits to ensuring such interaction. Yet, the provision was not universally grasped. As a result, meaningful interaction with some pupils and parents did, in some cases, prove impossible. Despite their best efforts with e-mail and telephone communications, staff from school K noted that:

'[Mae yna] 3 teulu ni di methu cael gafael ar allan o 340 o blant...' ['[There are] 3 families which we've failed to contact, out of 340 pupils...']

4.21 Despite the figure representing a small minority, there was an 'elfen o bryder yn eu cylch' ['a degree of anxiety towards those families'] where the school had had no interaction since the beginning of the pandemic. Support had been sought from the local authority to attempt contact with those individuals.

Figure 4.2: Vignette offering a snapshot of the experiences regarding the home learning environment.

'I worry about one pupil who is considered from a disadvantaged background. He does have a laptop, but I worry about the family aspect. I never see him. I haven't seen since September. It's like his parents are preventing him from having an education... The face-to-face isn't there so that you can check-in and make sure everything is okay. Every time I phone, I get Dad saying he's okay he's not doing any work. That's a very difficult situation because it's difficult to know what to do. We try to be supportive but sometimes you get the feeling that they think that you're interfering and that can get quite confrontational. What I've found with some pupils is that home is home, and school the school. So, you don't do

schoolwork at home. It's hard for pupils to understand then that's it is important to them to keep working because they don't understand that their education is supposed to continue at home. So, it shows the difference with our pupils that they can't really divide between the two worlds and understand how one has become part of another. Usually when they don't understand that or if they don't have support from the parents then these pupils might suffer more than others through lack of educational opportunity.' (Teacher Focus Group, School F)

- 4.22** Pupils were clearly disadvantaged of support and guidance by the lack of parental support, but, additionally, and significantly, it precluded pupils who may have been lacking in independent capabilities from accessing their education had they wished to do so. As members of a focus group within school I noted, parental support was essential for the youngest amongst primary school pupils. Without such support then these children, simply, could not access the provision offered by the school. Staff members recounted how:

'[With the youngest pupils] they need someone to sort of sit with them and get them online... I did have one parent message me saying, oh, she was at work and so she couldn't help them...'

- 4.23** A broader consideration was related to the fact that parents were not aware of the need for, and therefore did not provide for, the support of elder children. As staff at school I alluded to, differing provision and support was offered according to parents' misconception of the needs and abilities of children of different ages:

'I think there's kind of a feeling, oh, you're year in year 6 now, so you should be able to do it yourself. But they still need that support, too. And I think there might be a miscommunication with parents that perhaps older children don't need as much support as younger ones. '

- 4.24** Many parents, simply, did not, as members of the focus group convened with staff from school K noted:

'[Dydyn nhw] ddim wir yn deall lefel [anghenion] y plentyn...' ['[They] don't appreciate the level [of the needs] of their child...']

Parental wellbeing

- 4.25** The reality of supporting their children at home for 24 hours, 7 days a week, for extended periods – in addition to providing for their educational wellbeing - proved to be a rude awakening for parents, according to the evidence of some teachers. This was particularly the case for those with children with additional needs of varying degrees. Attempting to reconcile these needs with the attempt to provide an education was a significant, and sometimes overwhelming, task. It was not uncommon for parents of children with varying needs to contact the school in a state of frustration and exhaustion:

‘yn aml fyddai’r rheini yn llefain ar y ffon achos bo nhw methu ymdopi a’r plant adref.’ [‘often the parents would cry on the phone because they just can’t cope with their children being home.’]

- 4.26** The mental health of some parents took a significant hit as a result. Attempting to provide educational support for their children could, and did, prove to be a significant contributing factor to the exasperation of their mental ill health as they sensed that they were failing in their duty. As one parent from school H noted as part of a parental interview:

‘you get the frustration that you can’t help your child. And [you think] are you a bad parent for not doing the education at home? And then it just spirals, which doesn’t help your mental state...you just feel useless.’

- 4.27** They elaborated further by noting that the whole process was responsible for making them feel:

‘like I was letting her down, you know, not being able to do probably what...the [other] parents are doing.’

- 4.28** Such concerns led to the detriment of some learners as the weight of expectation on parents resulted in their inability to attempt to provide support for their children.

- 4.29** Additionally, as staff at school K alluded to, there appeared a concerning tendency amongst a select group of parents where they failed to understand the requirements of tasks and assignments, and therefore to assist their children in their completion. Past failings in the educational system in regard to these individuals were further frustrating the educational provision which could be offered to their children; a

tendency exasperated by the pandemic. The provision of introductory videos were, therefore, as beneficial to pupils as they were to some parents in tackling some subjects. Often parents would call in a state of emotion claiming, as members of school K noted: ‘bo’r gwaith yn rhy anodd i’r plant...’ [‘that the work was too difficult for their children...’]. Yet, in all cases it was ensured that the work was appropriate and based on tasks the children would be undertaking in school. Unfortunately, it may well have been that the personal failings of some parents, and the increased apparency of the lack of concentration on the part of their children, which resulted in their feeling that the tasks were of too difficult a quality. And, as was suggested, some parents withered in the face of such challenges. A parent from school K noted in a parental interview how they had to undertake significant research beforehand to prepare for aiding their child with their work. They noted how they had to:

‘go online and learn the subject myself to be able to help him to do it. So, it has been extremely hard. I’m having to go and learn myself and check things out... I had to go and teach myself on Google, and then you sort of get the hang of it.’

4.30 Yet, many were unwilling to do so, and felt that their possible educational failings made them immediately unsuitable educational providers. As a parent from school K noted, they were unsuited to support the learning of their child[ren] because, ‘I didn’t do very well in my gcse,’ with another from school K noting that what their child was focusing on was ‘way above my level of education!’ As a result, parents felt, either justifiably or not, felt that they were not in a position to aide their children, and so they were left to work unaided, or received support in select areas only.

4.31 Yet, as a parent teacher from school H noted, commenting on the situation that she had experienced as part of a parental interview, these anxieties were sometimes unfounded, and based on educational experiences of the past. The realities of parental knowledge were probably stronger than what was perceived, yet:

‘Mae gymaint o oedolion yn cofio’r pethau drwg o’u cyfnod yn yr ysgol a be oedden nhw fethu gwneud pryd hynny, yn hytrach na be oedden nhw’n gallu gwneud.’ [‘So many parents and adults remember the negatives from their schooldays and what they couldn’t do back then, rather than what they could do and enjoyed.’]

4.32 In addition to this, they noted how some parents, through their actions, and their unwillingness to deal with certain, select, topics resulted in the transplantation of their negative memories of their educational experience, and their perceived subject specific weaknesses, on to their children. They, therefore, threatened the future educational achievements of their children in these parentally abhorred subjects. She noted how:

‘maen nhw’n trawsblannu eu hofnau nhw eu hunain ar eu plant. Does ‘na ddim rheswm pam na ddylai plentyn fod yn dda gyda mathemateg oherwydd doedd mam neu dad ddim yn dda gyda mathemateg ugain mlynedd ynghynt.’ [‘they tend to transplant their fears and trepidation about numbers onto their children. But, obviously, there’s no reason why a child shouldn’t do well at mathematics just because their mother or father weren’t mathematical whizz kids twenty years ago.’]

4.33 Yet, despite this, parental behaviour during the pandemic, it was believed, had prejudiced some learners. Parental attitudes to learning, according to members of school I, both positively and negatively impacted pupils:

‘[there’s] different amounts of pressure on to parents, and I think that feeds onto the children who then, in turn, feel more anxious.’

4.34 Schools therefore responded by adapting their online approach from merely offering a simple repository of work, to supplying digital resources which included a tutorial element for parents. As members of staff from school L noted how Adobe Spark, in particular, had been utilised to support parents:

‘ma rheini yn gallu gweld y cyflwyniad gyda fideo yn y Gymraeg a’r Saesneg, a ma popeth gyda’u gilydd. A ma’ ‘na un Adobe Spark ar gyfer iaith, un ar gyfer Mathemateg, ac un ar gyfer themau. A ma hynny’n haws i rhieni ddilyn e.’
[‘parents can see an introduction along with a video either in Welsh or English, and everything is together. We have an Adobe Spark for language, one for mathematics and one for our theme activities. That makes it easier for parents to access and follow.’]

4.35 Effective platforms were therefore established with the support of parents as a key consideration.

Figure 4.3: Vignette offering a snapshot of the experiences regarding the home learning environment.

‘In my family parents deliver in HE and FE but that doesn’t make us experts at primary level. In fact, seeing gaps in children’s education and social skills developing and considering longer term impact is highly stressful.’ (Parent Interview, School B)

‘We as parents both have university degrees, so are able to understand most of the work sent home and help explain when needed. We have jobs, so are not having to worry about food, being evicted or bills. We have 2 laptops, we have a table for work to be done at, the children have a bedroom each and the house has a garden so they have space to work together or by themselves and space to be outside I imagine if we had none of these learning would be much harder with more frustrations.’ (Parent Interview, School B)

Parental employment

- 4.36** The employment status of parents had, increasingly, been brought into focus by the pandemic. Yet, at the beginning of the pandemic it was sensed that, in regard to the expectations placed on parents to aide with their children’s education, that certain:
- ‘assumptions were made that we as working parents had time to teach too.’
(Parent Survey Response, School B)
- 4.37** Staff from school K noted, in a focus group, that the children of key workers were increasingly found to be at a disadvantage. Unlike those who were furloughed, and therefore had a significantly increased opportunity to support their children during the pandemic, or those who could work from home and offer significant, yet somewhat curtailed, support, those who were key workers, and required to work, had to rely on the support of a partner, bubbled family members, or the school hubs. In numerous cases, the ability of these parents to support their children following a day of employment within key sectors, under the increased pressure of the pandemic, made supporting their children with uncompleted tasks, or homework, a significant strain which many failed to bear.
- 4.38** Anecdotally, one learner from school I commented how the employment dynamic of parents had affected their education. One of the negatives had been having to suffer ‘dad teaching me’ according to their testimony. Yet, certainly, different parents would succeed in presenting education in different ways. For example, one

parent from school K noted in a survey response how they were, unwittingly, rather impatient:

‘I’m super impatient, which doesn’t help when my daughter’s having a bit of a meltdown because she can’t understand the work and [I] can’t explain...’

4.39 Whilst another, echoing the same sentiment, noted:

‘I don’t have patients to explain everything a million times and because my child got distracted easily...’ (Parent Survey Response, School K)

4.40 With the parent who was believed best suited to providing an education having to fulfil roles associated with their employment, others had to bear the brunt of the responsibilities, with somewhat varying results.

4.41 In cases where both parents were employed, and working from home, the working arrangements supported by employees had an important role to play in the provision which parents could offer to their children. As a parent from school L noted in a parental questionnaire response:

‘[Roedd] sefyllfaoedd swyddfeydd rhieni [yn bwysig, roedd] rhai rhieni yn gallu ymdopi efo’r gwaith ‘flexi’ [‘the office arrangements of parents [were of great importance], some parents could cope with ‘flexi’ working arrangements’]

4.42 As a result, parents with flexible working arrangements were able to respond more effectively to supporting their children. As one parent noted, in summarising their rather Herculean efforts:

‘I start at 9 am. One child at a time. The other child plays or interrupts as much as they can. Break for lunch then I work with the next child till 3. Then I go over older boys work. Then I do my own work. Which i [sic.] finish by 8pm. Then we do the same the next day.’

4.43 Yet unfortunately such working practices were not supported across the board. Few, a parent from school H noted in a survey response, had the ‘luxury’ of not having to work, or the freedom to negotiate commitments freely. For those parents, the support they could offer was, according to the evidence of a parent from school I in their survey response, ‘sporadic and haphazard’ at best.

- 4.44** Those who were self-employed were in a fortunate position to support their children. As one parent from school L remembered the benefit of their self-employed status:

‘we worked from home, but we have a smallholding so we're mostly working outdoors [at home]... [and] we're working close at hand and we can give him a lot of personal attention.’

Parental expectations

- 4.45** Yet, there was evidence to suggest that those who were self-employed, especially in the agricultural sector, took advantage of having their children at home. The variabilities of farm life were noted as a fact that did curb the ability of some children to concentrate fully on their studies. As parent from school L noted in a parental questionnaire response, their ability to offer support, and the requirements on their children to occasionally pitch in, depended ‘on what needed doing outside on the farm’. A staff member from school H noted, further, in their written response how ‘home responsibilities’, including ‘farming’ did effect the quality of the provision which certain learners received. As members of the focus group convened with school J noted, they were, increasingly, ‘not seeing a lot of them [pupils from agricultural backgrounds] in the school day.’

- 4.46** Expectations within the home could, and did, increasingly, play a more prominent part in contributing to disadvantaging pupils. In addition to issues surrounding expectations associated with work, other pupils were, increasingly, burdened with caring expectations. Although these expectations may have been present pre covid, and undertaken primarily after school, it was suggested that they had increased on some during the pandemic as they were continuously home and at hand. As a member of school K noted:

‘We've got several young carers, and I've noticed that they've not engaged. I wouldn't expect them perhaps to engage to the same degree, but when they come to school maybe that's their escape that they perhaps aren't getting. They'd get to see their friends and they can pretty much just have normal lives but being at home now has pushed them back. I don't know if they're having to help more at home and things, but the pupils that I know are young carers, I've had nothing off them.’

- 4.47** Such expectations may have past unnoticed by the school in the past, or may have been aware to staff, but not considered as significant. For, as a member of the SLT for school H noted:

‘Efallai bod nhw’n gweithio’n OK yn yr ysgol, ond wedyn pryd ma nhw’n mynd adre y disgwyl ydy iddyn nhw weithio ar y fferm neu bod yn rhaid iddyn nhw edrych ar ôl plant. Ma pethau fel na’n dod mewn i’r peth. A ti jest yn ffeindio’r pethau ‘ma allan pryd ma ddisgwyl i weithio trwy dydd ar y we adref, a ma rhaid gofyn ‘pam dwyt ti ddim yna’ a ‘beth yw’r problem?’ A dim ond wedyn wyt ti’n clywed nhw’n dweud fod rhaid iddyn nhw neud hyn, hyn a hyn.’ [They may be working well when they’re in school, but then they may go home and face the expectation that they work on the farm, or that they have caring expectations with siblings. These things have, increasingly, come into play. We’ve increasingly found the significance of these expectations when they’ve been expected to work at home, on the internet, all day. We’ve increasingly had to ask some, ‘why werne’t you in the lesson’ and ‘what’s the problem?’ And it’s only then that we’ve heard of, and come to appreciate, the expectations on them as they mention that they have to do this, this, and this.].’]

Nature of the family

- 4.48** The nature of the family unit was also noted as a particularly significant consideration. Elderly relatives requiring care and support, or, more significantly, having newly welcomed additional members to the family could seriously disadvantage pupils. As a mother from school I noted in a parental survey reponse:

‘I couldn’t give full focus to my daughter to assist her with her work all of the time as had a young baby to deal with.’

- 4.49** Despite parents’ best efforts, such as one parent from school I who noted, as part of her survey submission, despite attempting to work ‘around baby having morning sleep,’ such strategies were ‘never guaranteed.’ In addition to the decreased opportunities available to support their elder children in such cases, it also meant that children often had to take up increased responsibilities, either directly associated with the care of their new-born sibling, or other siblings. As a parent from school H noted in their parental survey response:

‘I had to ask my eldest to help which proved frustrating for him as he would have to stop his own work.’

- 4.50** Pupils with siblings therefore found the experience, in numerous cases, a rather frustrating one, but so did only children. As one parent from school L noted as part of a parental interview, their son was found to have been disadvantaged by being the only child within the household. They noted:

‘We have an only child, and he just doesn’t see other children when he’s not going to school for weeks and weeks and weeks... So, I think, from a social point of view and they need to just be physically interacting and engaging with the teachers and kids...’

- 4.51** There was a common misconception that although the situation was difficult for only children and their parents, that the struggles of families with siblings were disproportionately increased. As a parent from school H noted in a parental survey response:

‘Basically, if you had an only child it would have been a walk in the park.’

- 4.52** Such a comment proved somewhat ill founded, as the detriment faced by these families, and particularly the learners, could not be considered equitable. Rather the disadvantage posed varied. Yet, it may well be the case that the division of time by parents in supporting their children could have been achieved more successfully with only one child. For as a parent from school H noted in their survey response, it was ‘difficult trying to help everyone at once’ with the temporal resources available to them.

- 4.53** Additionally, issues associated with access to resources could be exasperated with siblings within the family, despite issues regarding access to resources representing an issue for single child households. Within those multi child households, some provision may have been available in the form of single devices, which would render their claim to additional provision below single child households which may have lacked any access to technological hardware. As a result, the issues regarding technological access were more prominent in multi child households. Accordingly, provision had to be prioritised within such households to those siblings deemed

most worthy. Often, as a member of staff from school H noted as part of a focus group response:

‘y rhai hyn, yn blwyddyn 10, 11 ac i fyny fyddai probably yn mynd yn fwy i’w gwersi na brodyr a chwiorydd iau.’ [‘the elder children, in years 10, 11 or higher, are probably the ones you’re going to see accessing live lessons, rather than younger siblings.’]

- 4.54** Yet, in reality, the educational needs of children proved uniform. Rather, the proximity to key signifying events, such as exams, dictated siblings ‘right’ to access technology. Such a tendency, therefore, prioritised the deepening of learning of certain siblings to the possible detriment of those who would have been experiencing foundational educational provision. As such, the nature of the family, associated with access to resources, proved a noted consideration.

Figure 4.4: Vignette offering a snapshot of the experiences regarding the home learning environment.

‘I think with me seeing some children who I didn’t think would be disadvantaged showing to be so. Maybe some with brothers or sisters at home as well having to share attention of parents. And so that could create tension with this competition for mum’s attention. And then in other homes when mum and dad and working at home trying to do work and trying to look after the child. This has been a problem for us all, but you’re thinking in different degrees now. You’re talking about children with profound learning difficulties. So that can be seen as a disadvantage because the child doesn’t have the same amount of attention as they might have received within the school environment. And even though they might be in a classroom with another ten children the focused attention of classroom assistants and the teachers is a different situation to what they face at home. I think that’s become more apparent the more we’ve been holding conversations with parents.’ (Teacher Focus Group, School D)

Home environment

- 4.55** The fact that pupils and parents were spending increased periods of time together, with parents increasingly providing increased educational provision for their children meant that an increased strain was placed on relationships. As a parent from school J noted in a parental survey response, the situation had ‘caused tension within the family.’ Such friction was a cause of concern for staff where knowledge was already

possessed of such tensions. As staff from school I noted during their focus group, there was concern for certain pupils:

‘[Sometimes] you just know the situation at home and that they battle with their mum a little bit...’

- 4.56** Unfortunately, new tensions also emerged alongside the deepening of existing tensions. From the evidence it appeared that the pressures of home learning was particularly noted between parents and children with ALN. As was highlighted by a mother from school H as part of a parental interview, some pupils found it difficult to comprehend the move to home learning, and therefore to engage with education in a meaningful way from within the home. She stated:

‘[My son] struggled to comprehend the whole thing and learning [from home] because... school is for learning, and home is for relaxing and chilling.’

- 4.57** Or, as another from school H noted in a survey response, ‘home is home and being in school is for school’. As a result, as one parent from school H noted:

‘We have a fight every day for him to do his schoolwork when there's classes.’

- 4.58** Additionally, as a parent from school H noted in their interview, engagement within the home environment proved challenging for a number of pupils across the board:

‘unless I’m sat next to him while he’s doing those lessons, he tends to just have them playing on the iPad next to him.’

- 4.59** Yet, as had been highlighted, not all children had that support. Yet, as was apparent from the evidence of staff of school J, there was a sense that interaction and engagement decreased at home due to the lack of support to maintain focus, and the increased distractions within the home environment:

‘I worry is it because they’re just going off and they don’t have that attention span anymore. They don’t have those people in front of them to tell them, no, don’t go off and do this. Don’t procrastinate... It’s easy to notice a student walking out of your class, but it’s not as easy to notice a student’s slipping away offline.’

- 4.60** Without that parental encouragement across the board, some pupils became increasingly unprepared to undertake work in a race to the bottom. A teacher

interviewed as part of a focus group with school H noted how some of their pupils militated against education as a result of social interaction amongst peers. This was responsible for the detrimental education of some:

‘[They may think] that everyone’s being blasé, and nobody was completing any work. Because I’m sure in chats on Snapchat... they’d ask, ‘have you done that?’ and receive the answer ‘no, I’ve not doing anything. I’ve been on my X box all morning’ and... some kids actually believed that.’

- 4.61** One parent from school J highlighted the role social networks amongst pupils had in spurring opposition to aspects of home learning. She remembered one instance where their son expressed his opposition to a certain school initiative:

‘My youngest said, well, I’m not doing that... he said, well, half my friends say they’re not going to... it was like their little peer group, on their mobile phones, had already decided it’s rubbish and half of them weren’t going to comply. Surely, if the teacher tells you to jump up and down 10 times, you do it!’

- 4.62** Without the clear authority of teachers in a face-to-face context, opposition, and a rebellious tendency to challenge authority had developed at a sharp rate. As she noted:

‘we’ve been told to do something, so the fact that the teacher has asked us to do it means we’re not doing it. It wouldn’t have mattered what it was.’

- 4.63** As a result, the role of parental authority, and the necessity to lay down the law to ensure conformity with school expectations was increasingly highlighted. As a result of such, tensions could, and did, develop. A parent from school H elaborated on their experiences by noting:

‘I either have to upset my son to the point that he’s having a mental breakdown three or four times a week, or I just have to do what I can. And so, his actual schooling and education takes a little bit of a knock.’ (Parental Interview, School H)

- 4.64** Another parent, from school D, noted in a parental survey response that they had:

‘tailored my own version of home learning...it was more important to put my child’s mental health and wellbeing at this time above following any curriculum.’

4.65 In an attempt to guard against such tensions some parents curtailed the educational provision offered to their children. For, as one parent noted:

‘It’s not fair for me as a parent to get cross at my children for not doing online work!’ (Parental Survey Response, School H)

4.66 For the sake of their son’s general wellbeing, and the stability of the family unit, educational considerations, on some occasions, had to be placed on the backburner. Additionally, another parent from school H noted how in their interview ‘I’d rather be happy and making sure my child is happy,’ rather than have to push them to a point where, in the pursual of educational aims, they’d be ‘stressing’ and suffering harm to their wellbeing.

Increasing financial instability

4.67 Another key consideration was the exasperation of financial inequality, and the destabilising of financial bases as a result of the pandemic. The pandemic had highlighted the precarious nature of many families who were coping just above the bread line in normal circumstances. Yet, with the effect of the pandemic those families had slipped below that line. With the associated cost of maintaining a child at home, with the impact of a furloughed income, some families were highlighted as being on the precarious verge of poverty. In summarising the eFSM figures for his school, a member of the SLT for school H noted:

‘[mae’r ffigurau] wedi hedfan lan yn y flwyddyn diwethaf. Er enghraifft, ar y lefel uwchradd mi oedd 7.8% gyda ni’n eFSM, ond yn yr uwchradd nawr mae e dros 13%. So, wrth cyfuno gyda’r ysgol gynradd, sydd tua 25%, gyda’r ysgol gyfan mi ydyn ni’n 16% eFSM, sydd yn newid anferth yn y blwyddyn diwethaf... [Yn] 2015 roedd e’n 5.6%, a pob blwyddyn wedi hynny mae e wedi bod yn mynd i fyny rhyw 1%, ond wedyn mae e wedi cynyddu dros 5% mewn blwyddyn! Ma rhaid fod effaith Cofid wedi cael effaith’. [the figures have shot up during the last year. For example, for our secondary pupils was had a figure of 7.8% eFSM, but now it’s over 13%. And if we combine that with the primary school, which has a figure of around 25%, the average for the school is 16% eFSM, which is a massive increase on last year... In 2015 it was 5.6%,

and every year since then it's been increasing by about 1%, but in the last year it's increased by more than 5%! Covid and it has to be having an impact']

- 4.68** Members of staff at school K had also become aware of those new poor who found it increasingly hard to even support their families with food. As they mentioned as part of a focus group:

‘Rydyn ni wedi sylweddol ymhellach ar] teuluoedd, a efallai yn fwy oherwydd Covid, sydd yn stryglo o rhan bwyd. Dwi wedi gorfod cysylltu gyda'r banc bwyd...a dwi di gorfod mynd a bwyd i'r drws i dau deulu yn ystod y cyfnod.’
[‘We’ve noticed more families, and we believe this is as a result of Covid, who are struggling to put food on the table. I’ve had to contract the local foodbank on their behalf...and I’ve had to collect and deliver food for two of our families during the pandemic.’]

- 4.69** Additionally, as an SLT member of school H noted:

‘Ma’ rhai yn dod o teuluoedd lle nawr dydy’r mamau a’r tadau ddim yn gweithio, a bod dim gymaint o arian yn dod i mewn... ma na, felly, mwy o bobl o dan anfantais am nad yw eu rhieni nhw’n gweithio.’ [‘Some now come from families where neither mum nor dad work, and where the family income has been severely hit [as a result of the pandemic] ... there are, therefore, a lot more people at a disadvantage from having parents unemployed’]

- 4.70** Others, it was stated, had to seek additional employment to supplement their economic base. As a result, the freedom which these individuals had to support their children was even further impacted:

‘We are both working full time, we have even taken on extra jobs due to loss in income from travel expenses. It is near impossible to provide the continued level of support needed for our child to progress.’ (Parent Survey Response, School A)

- 4.71** The increased cost of ensuring the necessary provisions for their children to engage with their education from home had also proved costly to some. As a member of staff from school A noted, it:

‘can mean no access at home to technology/internet.’ (Teacher/LSA Survey, School A)

- 4.72** The cost of connectivity was highlighted as challenge to the increased economic fragility of some families. Staff from school K remembered a particularly harrowing example where one mother noted that:

‘[Roedd] bill BT wedi cynyddu gymaint fel roedd hi’n brin o arian ar gyfer y Nadolig.’ [‘The BT bill had increased by such a margin that she was suffering from a lack of money for her planned Christmas.’]

- 4.73** Additionally, one parent noted how:

‘My son preferred the conservatory as more light but cost us more in energy fuel keeping oil heater during the day.’ (Parent Survey Response, School K)

Access to resources

- 4.74** In regard to resources, one contributor noted:

‘I suppose you have that certain expectation that, erm, families can access online learning and have laptops, and you know it takes you back [when they don’t have certain items].’ (SLT Interview, School B)

- 4.75** The lack of resources possessed by some households was highlighted as a serious cause of concern by staff and parents alike. Economic deprivation, the closure of shops, and the lack of requirement for such, generally, resulted in homes being found wanting in simple resources. As members of staff from school K noted, they were shocked by the lack of:

‘[y] pethau sylfaenol fydden i ddim yn meddwl am pan oedden nhw yn yr ysgol pob dydd...’ [‘those basics that we wouldn’t think about if they were in school every day...’]

- 4.76** Despite their best effort to consider the need to provide for clear technological deficiencies, the lack of more commonplace resources had been overlooked. The content of pencil cases, for example, beyond specific mathematical tools, such as projectors and so forth, hadn’t traditionally been considered as such items could be easily lent or within the class. Yet the lack of such resources at home could result in pupils being unable to complete work. The staff conceded that they had grown to consider a much wider range of resource deficiency, for example, ‘dim pensiliau na

siswrn, ac yn y blaen, felly oedd rhaid mynd a rheina i'r drws.' ['no pencils, and no scissors, and so forth, and so we had to take those to families.'] As a result:

'[Roedd rhaid i ni] creu pecynnau rili sylfaenol i un neu ddau deulu lle doed ddim papur, pensiliau, creonau... siswrn, glud, na phren mesur. Y pethau yna fydddech chi'n cymryd yn ganiataol fod gan blentyn.' ['[We had to] create really rudimentary packs for one or two of our families who didn't even have paper, pencils, crayons...scissors, glue nor a ruler. Those things you'd take for granted that every child would have.']

4.77 There was an acceptance that there had been a tendency to assume that the lack of certain items signified that the pupil had forgotten or misplaced the items, rather than indicating resource poverty.

4.78 In addition to the preparation of resource packages, many pupils had to be supplied with packages of hard copies of the materials provided by the school for pupils to complete. For, as a teacher/LSA from school A noted, many children:

'go to homes with no internet access.'

4.79 Additionally, where there may have been Internet access, households did not possess the hardware, or financial abilities to print such worksheets. One parent from school K remembered noting in a parental survey response how difficult it was to:

'print off the work sheets as there was so many. One day there was almost 20 [pages!]

4.80 Some struggled, seeking help from close family members in gaining access to ink and printers whilst others simply failed. As a result, staff increasingly had to prepare and disseminate these packages during the early days of the pandemic.

4.81 Additionally, access to resources which would have aided the educational development of children within the home, such as books, were found to be wanting. The sharing of books and comics would usually be undertaken by school H, but:

'[Er] rydyn ni yn trio hyrwyddo darllen yn yr ysgol, achos y cyfyngiadau ar rhannu papur dydyn ni ddim wedi bod yn gallu rhannu llyfrau iddyn nhw fynd adref a nhw...' ['Despite our best efforts to promote the reading of Welsh within

the school, with constraints on sharing paper and hard copies we've found that we can't hand out books to our pupils to take home...']

- 4.82** And with so many families lacking such resources at home, their deprivation was apparent. The role of the school as a supplier of resources increased during lockdown. Teachers had, simply, as members from school K noted:

'Ni wedi cymryd pethau yn ganiataol rhy hir' ['We've taken things for granted for much too long']

Workspace

- 4.83** The importance of ensuring an effective workspace for pupils when at home was highlighted by a number of contributors. Work areas often had to be shared by family members and siblings. For example, one parent from school K remembered the frustration of possessing 'only one Office,' and therefore only one established and designated workspace where a normative working environment could be fostered. Many pupils, simply had to make do with making 'use of [the] kitchen table'. Despite benefits such as having support close at hand, the use of such public areas meant that distractions in the form of family members passing by, and the hustle and bustle of daily life, especially around and associated with the preparation of meals, made these locations rather unsuitable. As a pupil from school I noted in a survey response:

'Trying to concentrate at home with everything going on in the house [was difficult].'

- 4.84** Others were required to use their bedrooms. This meant that many pupils suffered from, as a pupil from school H noted in a survey response, 'no suitable learning space at home as i [sic.] share a room'. Additionally, with children working in bedrooms, and away from communal areas, the ability to monitor interaction and engagement was decreased. Parents could not 'keep an eye' and guard against their children getting 'distracted', as a parent from school H noted in a survey response, to the same degree when their children were behind a closed door. As a result:

‘parents let them [their children] go to the[ir] room and assume they are doing homework. That assumption is now being made about the whole school day and there are many pupils just playing games all day but telling parents that they are working!’ (Teacher/LSA Survey Response, School J)

- 4.85** Yet, distractions were not the only negative factor to consider. Fatigue was also a noted concern associated with working at home, within an environment which was not one which was geared, in the minds of children, to education. One parent from school H mentioned, during an interview how their child responded well, initially, to working at the kitchen table. They mentioned:

‘[A]r y dechrau roedd hi’n dygymod yn eithaf da efo’r sefyllfa.... [ond] ma hi jest di cael absoliwt llond bol o dysgu ar lein, ar cyfrifiadur, o adref [erbyn hyn].’ [At the beginning she coped quite well with the situation... [but] she’s just had enough of working on her schoolwork online, on the computer, and from home [by now].]

- 4.86** The emotional toll of working from the same confined location for weeks on end was highlighted further by a parent from school J during an interview. He noted how one of his daughters increasingly suffered a ‘total lack of motivation and a feeling of depression and of feeling down,’ which was, in his opinion, spurred the fact that they were confined for such an extended period of time to working from home, and alone from meaningful wider communication beyond the household. As a teacher in school I noted:

‘there’s a lot more children that we know, and that have been identified to us from communication with parents who are struggling at home and we need those children to come in... those children who we think are suffering with anxiety - more than anything – now come in [to school]. I think they’re suffering from just lack of contact with their friends. So, if they’re upset, an only child or if they’ve got any kind of vulnerabilities in a wellbeing sense, then we can get them in.’

Summary

- 4.87** The nature of support within the home was highlighted as a key consideration in regard to the educational wellbeing of learners when removed from the traditional school environment.
- 4.88** Parental preparedness to undertake the expectations placed upon them, both as educational facilitators, and educational supporters, were highlighted as being important. Where parents were prepared to aid and support their children the benefits were clear to behold, according to school staff. Yet, for those without the same levels of support then the experience of home learning could be a difficult and impoverished one.
- 4.89** Additionally, a lack of parental commitment to education could result in learners' becoming increasingly disassociated from the educational experience as their disengagement was not challenged by committed parents.
- 4.90** The nature of those factors which contributed to curbing the levels of parental support were clearly highlighted, from the effects of work commitments deemed 'essential' during the pandemic, to the rigid work expectations of employees. These factors, and others, clearly disadvantaged some parents.
- 4.91** Yet, it must be appreciated that numerous parents were, additionally, ill prepared, and felt that they were not furnished, initially, with the correct support for undertaking their new roles as educators.
- 4.92** Many were, additionally, ill prepared in regard to the necessary resources which were required for the maintenance of learners and their educational well-being at home, both in terms of technology and additional educationally supportive resources such as pens and papers. Many households were also ill-prepared to furnish learners with space to work effectively.
- 4.93** The requirement to ensure access to such resources, despite support available from schools, and the increased pressures associated with maintaining pupils at home for extended periods of time, alongside increasingly precarious employment statuses, resulted in many households suffering from increased financial precariousness.

5. Findings regarding school provision

Introduction

5.1 The issue of how the schools in the study continued to provide learning experiences and related resources during the lockdown periods was found to be both broad and complex. The findings on school provision were, therefore, subdivided into the following seven categories, in order to develop a focus on the key areas associated with provision. These areas of focus were:

- Communication between schools and home learning environments
- The adaptiveness and flexibility of provision
- Responses to the range and quality of educational materials provided, including both digital and physical resources.
- The provision of pastoral support for pupils and families / carers
- Provision of onsite educational support and facilities by designated Hub schools for children of key workers and vulnerable children
- Provision of support for those pupils transitioning between schools or key stages during the lockdown period and subsequent return to schools.
- Provision and support for those in examination years during the lockdown period and subsequent return to schools

Communication between schools and home learning environments

5.2 The levels and quality of communication between schools and families or carers was considered the first important factor in supporting provision, as this acted as a conduit in maintaining contact between schools and pupils and their families or carers. Additionally, maintenance of good and regular communication would enable schools to gather information about the situation of individual pupils and their families or carers and, based on this, wherever possible to adapt the provision to reflect the academic, pastoral and material needs of the individual. The establishment of clear and effective communication was, therefore, considered by many to be of paramount importance as a necessary first step in provision.

5.3 The processes, frequency, and importance of maintaining contact were described by school leaders and teachers involved in the study:

‘Our school devised a vulnerable learners tracker to ensure that these learners did not go without school support or contact for too long. This tracker is updated weekly and takes into account all siblings in the school also. It has meant that we as teachers can make personal contact with that family and the children to find out what we can do to support and encourage their learning at home. This has worked well on many occasions.’ (Teacher/LSA Survey Response, School A)

‘...it depended on families. Teachers were keeping in regular contact on a weekly basis and more than that. Either through email or a phone call. With some families it was more often than once a week. Dependent again on their situation, sometimes single-parent families maybe just wanted to talk through the work or wanted to talk through behavioural problems that they were experiencing with the child.’ (SLT Interview, School G)

- 5.4** Many parents found the levels of contact to be important, and applauded the efforts and focus of the schools in maintaining contact:

‘The communication has always been good, but I think the communication has really stepped up a level from both the class teacher, the supporting network she's got in the class and Headmasters as well because the headmaster was constantly in communication with all parents through the Dojo app.’ (Parent Interview, School A)

‘...school are always available to talk if I ever have worries.’ (Parent Survey, School D)

- 5.5** However, some parents were reported to be sceptical of, or in some cases even threatened by, the levels of contact offered and maintained by the school. One senior leader commented on some of the more problematic aspects of schools and teachers attempting to maintain regular contact with families or carers:

‘...by the middle parts of the period of lockdown, that's when communities started to go into a sort of bubble. With some families then the apathy increased. It was difficult to contact anyone during this period for some. I would ask my staff to report back to me regularly and keep a communication log and just to offer their views of how the families are getting on. You saw

patterns of being able to communicate with some three or four times a week, others once a week and some who were very reluctant to even have that level of contact. Because they thought we were being nosy and intrusive. And sometimes seeing it as a form of judgement, 'why are you asking these questions, who are you to be asking these kinds of questions? Do you think we're doing something wrong?' We were seen by some as prying. And I had to manage my staff in those situations and reassure them and asked them to use common sense. If you're sensing that this family is not valuing the contacts made. And maybe if you sense a confrontation along the lines of 'who do you think you are checking up on us all the time?' And remember, many families also had specialist services contacting them, so levels of contact were high at times, which caused tension among some families. We were just trying to maintain contact and to offer support, but it isn't always seen like that when families are under pressure, and given the kinds of responsibilities and pressure that being a parent of children with learning difficulties can be. So, we had to be careful to reassure and reinforce the message that this was educational contact and that we were offering our support with the education of the child.' (SLT Interview, School D)

The adaptiveness and flexibility of provision

- 5.6** It soon became clear to schools that responses to the conditions imposed by the lockdown periods, particularly in terms of provision of learning opportunities and resources, would need to be varied, adaptive and flexible to the situation and the new environment in which the learners found themselves.
- 5.7** An adaptive and positive approach to provision, dependent on the needs of the child within their current learning environment, was described as:

'Having a range of learning opportunities, from printed out work, online meetings to set activities, Google Classroom to set games and tasks. Some children didn't have access to IT, and others wouldn't engage in online teaching. It worked to have a range of different access to learning to meet the needs of different children and families. Keeping in contact via phonecalls

[sic], text, email also worked for many parents.’ (Teacher/LSA Survey Response, School F)

- 5.8** Some teachers expressed frustration with the perceived purpose of the provision, and whether the emphasis should be on pastoral or academic support:

‘There’s just the dichotomy. What do you want from us? Pastoral services go on all the time, and there’s a flood of things from pastoral regarding individual pupils, and general messages from middle management as well, telling us not to put pressure. But then, within departments, the expectation is there that we still need to be really pushing things for. We can do both, but sometimes it’s unclear exactly what we need to be focusing on.’ (Teacher Focus Group, School J)

- 5.9** Similar responses to the frustrations caused by demands to provide varied remote learning materials were expressed by members of the leadership of the same school:

‘multiple things were put in place to do our best to support them [the pupils], but you are left in this world of never feeling that you can do enough, because you can’t [support everybody].’ (SLT Interview, School J)

- 5.10** The study generated some good examples of provision that focussed on both academic and pastoral support, particularly in the case of supporting vulnerable and disadvantaged families:

‘We prepared laptops and other resources for different children. One pupil from my class for example has had a laptop. Because she borrowed mum’s smartphone after mum finished work at 9 o’clock at night. So, we recognised those kinds of situations at least try to help with those. Also, there with those pupils who haven’t come online at all because of disadvantage and poverty in the home. So, we’ve tried to support these families by trying to check-in and offering support in any way we could. So, in these cases we usually would invite the child into the school to be taught. This is a new kind of vulnerability or disadvantage that we were able to identify and act on in order to support the child. So, the easiest way that we would use to react to these kinds of

situations would be rather than trying to rely on the will or the resources at home, it's properly easier to bring them in.' (Teacher Focus Group School F)

- 5.11** The adaptiveness of the schools' provision developed, in many cases, in response to the circumstances imposed by the progress of the pandemic and the conditions created by lockdowns and gradual reopening of schools. It became evident that the schools were learning how to adapt their provision as the pandemic and the associated conditions progressed:

'I would say the first lockdown period was based on paperwork. We sent bulky paper packets home all in paper form, and then parents used the phone to tell us if there was too much or too little work. Some didn't do any work at all and many parents didn't do any work with the children. Before Christmas we invested in SeeSaw so for this lockdown, it has been much easier to prepare digital work. During this time, we have used more technology for our teams, Google Classroom, Google Meet. For me, it's a way for the pupils to see each other rather than doing work and so on. We have been able to use SeeSaw as a platform to send simple activities home, but we stress to parents that they are not pressured to complete the work at all. Sometimes doing lots of work, sometimes not. We've been sending work packages too. I think there has been a 'step up' in terms of the digital side, as a school and for me as a classroom teacher as well.' (Teacher Focus Group School D)

- 5.12** The following comments by a senior leader of a school that supports learners with a range of ALN reflects the adaptive approach that became necessary, due to the complexity of the situation for many children and their families or carers:

'There were three types of reaction to this. The informal, the semiformal and the formal. I'll start with the formal where they received hardcopies of work. Completing those and sending them in. And ensuring this was being renewed as part of that work. Thye [sic.] also worked online but not live. Semiformal that was a bit more of a mixed bag to be honest. There is a clear link there between their ability levels and their ability to commit and carry out the work. And then there was the informal. With these pupils it was more of a process of staff speaking with parents explaining to them the types of things they could do at home. Trying to establish a sort of routine by explaining the types of

activities they could do. In a kind of active support, you know? You know the type of thing wearing a coat, wearing shoes, getting dressed. These types of life skills. Helping to make a snack or something or eating at the table. Staff communicated in these cases via telephone and later on in the period starting to make more use of communication tools like Purple Mash and by now since September SeeSaw. We've started to use this a lot more where pictures can be transferred, and evidence can be shared and uploaded and so on. But particularly in the period during the first two months instead of messing with any other method or any of the media, the phone to start with. Almost as an emergency measure when nobody really knew much about the pandemic and how to respond to it. Because many parents have a phone, this form of communication is still popular and widely used by the teachers. Because it's a lot easier for them. You don't really know what the setup is at home and what sort of proficiency parents have regarding technological devices and forms of communication. Or even if there are devices and people using these. You've also got to bring in the element of privacy. I don't think even if they understood the device that they felt always comfortable about sharing screen so that you could see into their home. We all know each other's rooms and homes very well by now because of the use of devices and conferencing software. So, we had to be aware of this when contacting parents and therefore a very popular way to communicate was by telephone. They don't want to be forced to have somebody looking into the house.' (SLT Interview, School D)

- 5.13** Nevertheless, an overly adaptive approach to the provision of learning experiences and resources could prove confusing for some stakeholders. Some schools changed the media used as a platform for this provision during the course of the pandemic, for example according to directives on the types of virtual learning platforms to be used in supporting pupils and delivering lessons. These changes could cause confusion and frustration for parents who were trying to support their children's learning at home:

'...it was as a bit of a minefield for us parents because we'd been using one system in school called Go for Schools, which used to have homework on it, and we used to look at that to see what the homework was. But then we were trying to understand, and we were having a lot of different e-mails, and things

are changing constantly. So, we went from using Go for Schools, and we were then told we had to log on to HWB. Then there was a delay of, I think, roughly seven to twelve weeks - basically the issue was they couldn't go on to HWB because it hadn't been set up and the school didn't have an account... then we had access to HWB, so we were then trying to go on to HWB, and then we had to go on to Teams. And, I'll be honest with you, it was something of a minefield to try and find and to navigate it all... And then we had, eventually, something called Moodle, which is very good, but that was that was not in the first lockdown.' (Parent Interview, School J)

Responses to the range and quality of educational materials provided, including both digital and physical resources

- 5.14** The need to develop a range of suitable learning experiences and materials became evident very early during the first lockdown period, necessitating an adaptive approach to provision of these resources. Losses were felt in the provision traditionally offered on school sites to pupils across the ability range:

'With some parents and families, there's a lack of ICT resources and skills needed to complete web-based activities. Also, many miss out on the sensory activities such as the hydrotherapy pool, cooking classes and practical life skills, which is fundamental to our pupils.' (Teacher Focus Group School G)

'Yes - children with additional needs need expertise and input. It's not so easy to fob them off with iPads, films etc. Needing that constant attention and specialist resources was challenging.' (Parent Survey Response, School F)

- 5.15** Some parents considered the learning experiences and resources provided by the schools during the lockdown periods to be inadequate, or poorer in quality, in comparison to the normal school-based offer:

'[consisted of] crosswords, wordsearches, and I'm just giving you the basic example of things in the pack. It was the sort of thing that you'd look at and think, well, actually, as a parent, I don't think this is beneficial to him. I think he could be doing other things. Do you know I mean? They were just giving you

something to sort of try and bridge the gap, I suppose, and to sort of try tide us over.’ (Parent Interview, School J)

‘...it does feel that the year seven class’ expectations are very, very low. I’ve been astounded. I’ve actually checked out sometimes if I’m looking at the right work because it’s what I would class as what my son was doing in class two and three of primary school. And when I’ve checked it out, I’ve been told well, some year sevens are only functioning at that level... I’ve got a 12-year-old and the maths assignment for one day was $10 - ? = 4$?! I said to my son, ‘don’t give me that rubbish. Where’s your real work?’ This is it. I told him, ‘I don’t believe you.’ $6 + ? = 8$? So, I actually checked it out with other parents as well and asked, ‘am I missing something?’ (Parent Interview, School J)

- 5.16** Similarly, some parents involved in the study were critical of the limitations of the provision of live, online lessons and learning experiences for pupils during the lockdown period:

‘While the online lessons are great short term, I’m concerned that the children are missing out by not having the usual necessary support and teaching, and this will have a knock-on effect on their education, as well as social skills.’
(Parent Survey Response, School A)

- 5.17** However, many stakeholders, including teachers, parents and learners also shared overwhelmingly positive comments about the range and quality of the provision offered during the lockdown periods:

‘My son found the online activities very enjoyable. The teachers went into a lot of effort to support us and materials were either sent out, or, as the teachers became better at working with the technology, there would be more online activities and games that helped the children to get together. I think that the social part is so important for children with these kinds of challenges. So, it was good to see that.’ (Parent Interview School G)

‘I think the live lessons put on by the class teacher were a great help and good for the children to engage with the teacher and other pupils.’ (Parent Survey Response, School A)

‘Online sessions are really good because it is closer to normal life when children can spend time together and do some learning activities together.’
(Parent Survey Response, School A)

‘I also enjoyed doing my schoolwork at home because I felt like I could concentrate more and my family was there to help me and it was also quiet so I could focus on my work.’ (Learner Task, School E)

‘In the lockdown I got picked to be in a project with special needs pupils like me. I wrote a song, and it was played on the radio.’ (Learner Task, School D)

- 5.18** Other parents noted that the adapted provision helped to develop an alternative, but equally valuable set of skills among pupils:

‘I feel that in general our children have benefited from having to learn certain ICT skills quite quickly, such as logging into Teams and using the different features (mute, hands up) etc. Even the younger children have adapted to this very quickly which they will benefit from in the future.’ (Teacher/LSA Survey Response, School A)

- 5.19** These comments were supported by those of ITE students, who expressed that they had developed definite skills in online provision and that, rather than feeling disadvantaged by the lockdown periods and their effect on opportunities for school-based experiences, they considered that they had become a valued asset to the school a part of innovative approaches to interacting with pupils:

‘...in a way we've had something to offer the schools as well. You know using the different ways of trying to get pupils to interact. Menti and Kahoot! and those types of things. I've spoken with my mentor and he's really happy with the way that the kids have been responding in this way. It looks like some of them are more comfortable with responding through agreeing or emojis or that kind of feedback. The school is seriously looking into that as part of a way to take a new look at the way that we engage the pupils. You know those that aren't really happy to engage in classrooms and that. So, you see those kinds of innovations have grown and might continue to grow out of this situation. So not all bad, no.’ (Focus Group Discussion, ITE Student)

‘We can say that we maybe are the pioneers of this approach. And if this is the way that education is going to go anyway. Who knows where it will be in five or ten years time. But I think that people and teachers who might have been there for a while. Maybe they'll be looking at us as some kinds of experts. I have the feeling that we've helped out in our own way you know?’ (Focus Group Discussion, ITE Student)

- 5.20** Some parents were reported to be supportive of the innovativeness shown by schools and teachers in offering different and unique types of provision and support within home environments. The following example demonstrates how one school was able to resource learners with severe learning difficulties within their home environments in order to maintain their learning and progress:

‘We did send switches home with some learners and I’ve just received some switch adapters which can be adapted for using these types of technology at home. So, we’re still constantly reviewing and renewing what we’re doing to support individual pupils. So that maybe they can use the switch adapter with the TV at home so they can change the channel and so on. And this might feed into programmes helping them to cook so switching adapter linked with mixers or microwaves. So, we contact the family and discussed with them the best way to use these adapters to support individual learning programmes and skills developments. We’ve also got three children who are still at home because the health is so vulnerable, that’s keep in regular contact via Facebook and communication systems so that they’re still part of the class. If you look very carefully you be able to tell that that individual is not in the class. But it is very difficult tell and so this is a new aspect of the technology that we embraced and has changed our practice. Other ways that we can support individuals. It’s amazing. At some of the teachers have succeeded in just making sure that all the pupils are still part of the school even in situations like these.’ (SLT Interview, School G)

‘We made a series of between 30 and 40 live lessons on different areas. They were available through our website. And there was within these lots of musical based on movement-based activities that the children and parents found very popular. There was a big encouragement. The briefing was that teachers in

the fields of science, music and so on offered ideas about different activities related to the kinds of things that they would do at school. Some of the children were encouraged to copy the actions of the teachers and in that kind of simple way encourage movement, thinking and creativity. That, I think, was very successful. That provided the impetus or encouragement for parents to continue with this form of creativity in supporting their children at home. That certainly was very positive.’ (SLT Interview School D)

- 5.21** Hard copies of tasks or physical resources were also sent out by some schools to support learners at home. The rationale for sending out packs of hard copies or physical resources was provided by the senior leader of one school:

‘A little bit of everything. Again, dependent on our families. Some families were able to access Google Classroom and were confident in doing so. Others were able to have access to Google Classroom and were using it confidently but also wanted backup in the form of paper resources. We don’t use Google Classroom in the primary school. We used SeeSaw in primary. Again, dependent on the family and individual, we did send lots of paper-based packages out as well. Not everybody has a printer. So additional packages were sent out also to disadvantaged families. We pre-empted any conversations about whether families had printers or ink and so on. So, we asked what was best for individual families. These were sent out through the postal service. And cost an absolute fortune to us in posting.’ (SLT Interview, School G)

- 5.22** Other senior leaders also commented on the cost of the postage of these resources, whilst some schools resorted to utilising teaching and support staff to hand deliver packs of physical resources to some households.

‘With the hard copies of resource activity sheets and teaching materials, we would post them out to pupils. We were responsible for the cost of this process. It was costly but there were other things that were much more costly during this period. We had two days’ notice in a way at the start of the lockdown, so the first packages were sent home with pupils. I remember one day I was very restricted by the rota of teachers. One of the staff went around the catchment area in the school bus delivering these materials to individual

pupils' homes. We would leave them on the doorstep you know.' (SLT Interview, School D)

- 5.23** Parental responses, whenever offered, on the provision of hard copies of learning materials were generally positive and the resources were well-received:

'Packs were sent out regularly. We had lots of work to do - sometimes too much. But we were allowed to choose and manage the timing of these. The school was very good in sending and bringing the materials out to us, so that we knew that there is work for us. We use the materials they put on SeeSaw now too.' (Parent Interview, School D)

'My son liked having his schoolwork sent to him via the post. The school were very good at ringing and would always make sure my child understood the work that was given.' (Parent Interview, School D)

The provision of pastoral support for pupils and families / carers

- 5.24** The provision of pastoral support for pupils and their families and carers was considered by many stakeholders to be a centrally important feature of the schools' role during the lockdown periods.
- 5.25** Whilst many examples of the schools' pastoral role were commented on by a variety of stakeholders, the case below demonstrates the wholly unique nature of pastoral provision in individual cases. This excerpt also highlights the extraordinary levels of commitment shown by many teachers and learning support staff to the pastoral care of learners during the lockdown period:

'Dependent again on their situation, sometimes single-parent families maybe just wanted to talk through the work or wanted to talk through behavioural problems that they were experiencing with the child. In one home, the child would refuse go to bed. It's all because she thought it was holiday time so she was assuming that she could have a late night every night. So, the teacher would call at 7 o'clock every night to help mum out with routines in preparing the child to go to bed. You know telling a story and checking 'are you in your pyjamas now?' You know just going through that routine. So, to give support

to the mother because she was finding it difficult to get a child to go to bed.

Lots of these types of scenarios.’ (SLT Interview, School G)

- 5.26** Most schools also continued with the commitment to offer free school meals for some pupils. The provision of these, however, could become a complex and difficult experience, both for the school and for some families or carers, as attested to by the following case:

‘We also know our families very well because we are small school, and we have a close relationship with our families. Sometimes, especially in Wales I think, maybe you think that some families might qualify for free school meals, but they don’t want to. We know these families very well. So, the category of free school meals brings that kind of information to the school more officially. The system with free school meals that existed in the region was that families came to pick up meals from the school. But of course, what we realised from the start was that that wasn’t going to work for us as a special school. This hadn’t been thought through very well by the authority. Because we had children coming from such a wide catchment area. Much more so than mainstream school. It could be a three-hour journey now to pick up one meal. So, we decided that the schools local to the child’s home were informed so the families could pick up meals from these schools from the most local schools to them. But of course, it needed time to plan and to realise the situation in the first place. So, these were kind of unanticipated effects, which are specific to our type of school that may not have applied to other schools. We did see this within the first week. One or two families did have problems within the local communities where the communication wasn’t clear enough about the arrangement, particularly with children from English medium families. The local schools didn’t recognise the local families and thought maybe they were on holidays. And maybe this was a kind of another hidden effect of the lockdown. I had one parent on the phone in tears who told me that some other parents has been questioning her, asking her who she was and why she was in the area, not realising because the catchment is so big that she was a parent of one of the pupils at school.’ (SLT Interview, School G)

Provision of onsite educational support and facilities as a designated Hub school for children of key workers and vulnerable children

- 5.27** Linked with the above issue of pastoral support and the possible differential impact of the pandemic and resultant lockdown on vulnerable and disadvantaged children and families/carers, the following vignette portrays the important role played by Hub schools for vulnerable and disadvantaged children:

Figure 5.1: Vignette offering a snapshot of the experiences regarding school provision.

‘We have a hub in the school where the children of the parents who are struggling could send the children. The use of this increased a lot, we saw, during this last lockdown. The school has helped by supporting these types of children to come in and so have, in this way, helped with the parents at home who were struggling with having the child home all the time. So, this is another way to see how disadvantage came into it according to the degrees and how severe the learning needs of the child were. Or how difficult it was to support the child within the specific home environments if they were working and so on. So, it’s not always or wasn’t in the same way as disadvantage was seen earlier. It was different. Different types of disadvantage. So, the more restricted things became at home, the more we had to step in and support different types of learning needs for different children. So, it became clearer and easier to see where the disadvantage lay depending on the levels of contact you had and how you communicated with parents.’ (Teacher Focus Group, School D)

‘...many don’t understand what’s happening apart from the fact that they have had to go home, that the routine of going to school has been broken. This has had a significant impact on what they see as normality and how the routines have been affected and behavioural problems failed because of lack of routine. So, the impact of that will be felt for a long time. Long periods of time without being allowed to go outside has also affected many of our pupils. Sometimes that creates behavioural problems when either the child is unwilling to go outside or unwilling to stay inside. These kinds of issues can normally be resolved but some of our learners don’t understand, become frustrated and this can turn into behavioural problems and sometimes violence. Another child would follow mum around the house and was so used to being in house with mum that he was afraid of allowing her out of sight, so he would follow her. We’re talking about an 18-year-old following his mother to the toilet or the bathroom. So that was another reason why we offered for him to come to school, in order to break this

cycle in a way. So, it has had lots of different effects on our different learners.’ (Teacher Focus Group, School F)

- 5.28** A growth in numbers of children making use of the facilities offered as a Hub school between the first and second lockdown periods was reported by some schools:

‘I think going back to another point the numbers of children coming into us as a hub school because of conditions at home. How difficult some parents found having not only the child but possibly several other siblings. The numbers into the hub school coming into us have doubled during this last lockdown. That’s a combination of parents ringing up asking for help, and us being intuitive in offering support based on information that we are learning through communication. So, a difficult time from being at home all the time. And they’re quite vulnerable some of them. So yes, we have doubled in numbers.’
(Teacher Focus Group. School D)

- 5.29** The facility to give the choice to families of vulnerable children to attend the Hub school on-site, however, was a very nuanced and complex situation that did not become immediately apparent. The following description offers details of the difficulties that some learners with ALN faced when offered the alternatives of either being schooled at home or attending the Hub school:

‘We as a school have had to cooperate very closely with the family and social services to ensure that the decisions that we made worked for the individual. We were open of course for vulnerable children and the children of key workers, but for some of the children being at school but not in their usual classroom, without their peers, without the regular staff working, this didn’t work for them. This was too much for them. They couldn’t understand what was happening and it was too much for some, like those with profound and multiple learning needs. It was having a dramatic effect on their mental health. So, there was a need of course to cooperate with parents and outside agencies such as social services to decide, right okay we can help with the staffing on occasional days, but being in the school doesn’t work for this child. So maybe we’re not talking about being at home, but maybe in a location that wasn’t the school either. So sometimes finding a more neutral location. These

pupils needed a routine, they couldn't understand for example why the hydro pool wasn't open and available to them, or the sensory rooms being closed. And why there was nearly no one in the school. It was a very confusing situation for them and some of them couldn't cope with this. The behaviour then would be off the scale. We also had pupils with health-related needs or medical needs, for example teeth and unable to see the dentist. Struggling awfully in pain and unable to explain to them why nobody could find somebody to help them. This resulted in self-harm with the pupil, which was very serious until in the end he had to be admitted to hospital for emergency treatment. So, these kinds of situations were dealt with on top of the usual expectation of trying to provide for all the pupils with their educational resources and progress. And you know with other children, if you can call any children normal, it's hard enough to explain that they have toothache and need medicine. But some of our pupils particularly with profound and complex learning needs couldn't tell us when the medicine would start to wear off. And we couldn't explain to them what the answer was either. So medical issues of that type and nobody available to see them. This added greatly to the effect of the pandemic on top of the obvious break to routines. So, you could say that the effect almost doubled and had more pronounced effects on the types of pupils who attend our school. If somebody was to ask me to say who has been affected most seriously or has had the most effect, I would say on those individuals who depend on routine under a settled situation. So, in a way that cohort and those who show challenging behaviour as a result of frustrations and changes to routine and who maybe can't make a real sense of the situation. Many of the pupils depend on behavioural programs and develop more challenging behaviours when they lose routine or if they don't have anything to do. They become bored. Many of the pupils can't amuse themselves, so amusing themselves turns into stimming, and sometimes this develops into self-harm. So, we had reports of increases in this in homes where parents would struggle to support the children for various reasons. And this also happened in schools because of the changes to routine and staffing in classrooms and locations. But we are lucky, but this was in the minority. I

can count on one hand how many pupils fall into this category.’ (SLT Interview, School G)

Provision of support for those pupils transitioning between schools or key stages during the lockdown period and subsequent return to schools

- 5.30** A specific area of concern for some parents was related to the experiences of those pupils within transition phases. Some concern was expressed towards provision for those pupils moving from primary to secondary schooling. These concerns were most commonly shared through the parental and carer surveys and learner task. One parent also shared their views on this issue as part of an interview:

‘No graduation support coming from Year 6 up to Year 7 learning, when it is so different.’ (Pupil Task, School J)

‘For the youngest son, it's been a disaster. So immediately, you know, the children were sent home when, as a year 6, he should be getting ready for high school. There was hardly anything provided from the school, and what was provided was pretty inadequate. He had a couple of taster days in high school, and that was okay, but they teachers didn't have a chance to get to know the class before another lockdown sent them home again.’ (Parent Interview School J)

- 5.31** Concerns were also expressed about provision for those older pupils who were nearing the end of their school experiences and having to prepare for post-school life and entry into higher education during the lockdown period. These concerns were mostly expressed by teachers as part of the teacher and learning support staff surveys:

‘Not prepared for future studies, college, university etc’ (Teacher/LSA Survey Response, School H)

‘Further concerns about HE. (Teacher/LSA Survey Response, School J)

Grave concerns about future and family and society. Education for sixth formers.’ (Teacher/LSA Survey Response, School J)

- 5.32** These concerns were justified by the fact that some pupils in the 2020-21 cohort ended their school experiences during the first lockdown period, at a time of

uncertainty regarding decisions about final year examinations and subsequent entry into higher education or career pathways.

Provision and support for those in examination years during the lockdown period and subsequent return to schools

- 5.33** A further area of concern about school provision during this period related to the support offered to those pupils in examination years during the lockdowns and subsequent return to schools. Comments made by a range of different stakeholders portray the sense of uncertainty that school leaders, teachers, parents, and pupils felt towards assessments and examinations during the lockdown period. This feeling of uncertainty and the resultant frustration felt by pupils was described by a senior leader:

‘Not knowing how long we were going to be away for was a stress on the exam year groups and was felt intensely because they weren’t getting the teaching in a time period when, normally, ... they’d be finishing course work and beginning mock papers and getting into the nitty gritty of the exams. So, the pressure from the Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5 pupils, I felt, showed that they weren’t satisfied with that learning approach.’ (SLT Interview, School J)

- 5.34** Views on the perceived adverse effects of these pressures on some of the pupils were described as:

‘Mental health has deteriorated and struggled to return to school - CAMHS intervention required. Doesn’t feel can complete A levels.’ (Parent Survey Response, School H)

‘Obtaining the required results for university, while not taking any exams. The pressure has been constant for my daughter, as regular assessments were carried out throughout the school year.’ (Parent Survey Response, School L)

- 5.35** The immediate reasons for concern and dissatisfaction with provision related mainly to uncertainty about the form that assessments would take during the 2020-21 assessment and examination period, and lack of information about examination procedure during this period.

‘Dealing with the uncertainty of how they will be assessed.’ (Teacher/LSA Survey Response, School H)

‘The general uncertainty about going back to school and exams, so not knowing what to prepare for.’ (Pupil Task, School H)

‘Mae'r ffaith nad yw athrawon yn gwybod os fydd blwyddyn 10 ac 11 angen cymryd arholiadau yn 2020/21 yn golygu eu bod nhw'n gorfod parhau i gadw'r pwysau gwaith i fynd.’ [The fact that teachers don't know whether years 10 and 11 need to sit examinations in 2020/21 means that they have to keep up the pressure with the work.] (Teacher/LSA Survey Response, School H)

- 5.36** Perceptions of the wider ranging and possible longer-term effects of the disruption on pupils in different examination groups across the schools were also described by both teachers and parents:

‘Key Stage 4 and 5 classes. Some students have now not sat GCSE exams, but are expected to work at AS standard, A level groups not sat AS exams. Year 11 the course has been completely disrupted and yet need a grade this summer. Year 10 less affected to date, but this is again mid-course disruption.’ (Teacher/LSA Survey Response, School H)

‘With exams being cancelled, revision skills have not been developed and that may impact on future performance.’ (Parent Survey Response, School J)

‘Worried about the long-term impact on their learning. This is particularly the case with older groups, such as GCSE and A level.’ (Teacher/LSA Survey Response, School J)

‘Year 12 their coursework units due to lack of access to specialist resources or equipment which school could provide.’ (Teacher/LSA Survey Response, School K)

‘My daughter didn't do GCSE because she missed them because of this, she's not going to do her AS's now, and so her next possible exams are going to be her A-levels. Which could be interesting because she doesn't know how to revise, for example, because she's never had to, and if you mess your A-levels up then that's quite slippery slope. What do you do? They could have set up a moderation system so quickly in Wales because they had all the

moderators. We were just let go by the exam boards. There were so many missed opportunities from what I see. And if I'm honest, I just think they're going to trying to go back exactly to how it was. And I'm worried about exams next year because obviously that will affect my eldest doing her A-levels. Yes. And then the other one will be doing GCSE and they've just missed so much of their lower sixth and year ten.' (Parent Interview, School J)

Summary

- 5.37** Stakeholders' responses to schools' provision of learning experiences and resources during the lockdown period were mixed.
- 5.38** Of those who took part in the survey, many parents were happy with the quality and frequency of provision. Many parents considered the range, innovation, and the introduction of new, technology-based skills to be of long-term benefit to the pupils.
- 5.39** Some parents expressed concern about the provision of what they perceived to be resources that were inferior in quality to those that had been normally offered as part of pre-covid, on-site schooling. Concerns were expressed about the impact of this form of provision on pupils' long-term academic progress.
- 5.40** Forms of provision were very varied and could show a great amount of innovation. Some ITE students expressed the idea that they had been part of an innovative response to educating within the restrictions imposed by the lockdowns and considered that the new approaches may have long-term implications for supporting learners in the future, e.g., in using innovative ways to elicit learner responses.
- 5.41** Parents welcomed the use of digital resources and learning experiences, as well as physical, hard copies as learning materials during the lockdown period.
- 5.42** Schools found the production and distribution of physical, hard copies of learning materials to be expensive.
- 5.43** Schools offered different forms of pastoral support for pupils and families / carers, dependent on need.
- 5.44** Schools with a high proportion of pupils with ALN often used their facilities as a Hub school to support vulnerable children and families, or pupils and families/carers who

had become vulnerable due to the conditions imposed by the lockdowns, by offering on-site education to those pupils. These pupils were often identified as part of a cooperative approach between schools, the local authority, and social services.

6. Findings regarding the availability of specialist support services

6.1 The availability of specialist support services during the Covid-19 lockdown periods and during the period of reopening schools after the lockdown periods

6.2 The wider effects of the disruptions caused by the pandemic and lockdowns were seen in the development of issues related to the availability of specialist support services, particularly regarding vulnerable pupils and those with Additional Learning Needs. Specialist support services and their interaction with schools, individual pupils and their families are an essential part of adopting multidisciplinary approaches to supporting all pupils. The agencies that can provide support for, and cooperate with, schools in supporting individual pupils can include, within the more general framework of support in cooperation with the Local Authority, social services, therapies such as occupational therapy and speech and language therapy, medical services for those pupils with healthcare needs including the child's general practitioner, educational psychologists, and specialist assessors. Reliance on these types of specialist services can be greater in schools with high proportions of pupils with ALN.

6.3 The effects of the lockdowns, the social distancing measures, and the requirement to work from home whenever possible, on the levels of cooperation between schools and specialist support services varied according to the schools and individual cases. It was observed by one school, for example, that some families, in the absence of close coordination between these services at the school, were forced to draw upon their own skill and experiences of working with specialist agencies in order to secure support for their children:

‘...there is a firm core of parents who have children with the most profound learning needs. They are pretty good. They show initiative in ensuring that services come to the house and home to support clinical and medical needs sometimes. They're usually front footed and can do this kind of thing for themselves because they battled for so long from early on to secure support for the children. Similarly, parents were at home so they were able to phone

and secure the kinds of services that they would normally have at school but brought to the home.’ (SLT Interview, School D)

- 6.4** The role of social services was seen to be particularly important during the lockdown periods. In the absence of closer monitoring through the school, social services’ maintenance of contact with, and monitoring the effects of, the conditions created by the lockdowns on vulnerable families and on relationships within families became an essential part of ensuring that families were adequately supported. Positive comments were expressed about the work and availability of social services, and their role in contacting and monitoring the situation with individual families. In particular, their adaptability and efficiency in identifying specific cases where there was a need for additional support was considered to be very important.

‘During the first weeks in a way, most pupils when they understood there was no school, they settled into a new routine and it was just like an extended holiday that has come early for them. But of course, as the weeks and months when past there were more who were struggling. Parents maybe more than the learners. And it was very difficult to get the balance between thinking about what was best for the health and well-being of the individuals in terms of deciding who will be in prioritise for coming into the school. Some pupils were very, very vulnerable but were coping very well at home. There were others who weren’t. So, we prioritised with social services who would be most vulnerable, and prioritised for coming into the school. Of course, it was very difficult because we had to work out a staff rota or timetable. 90% of the workers at school are female and young women with children of their own. Because their own children’s schools were closed, there were implications for our capacity to staff the school. We also had about eight members of staff who fell under the category of vulnerable and so they couldn’t come to work either because they were shielding. This reduced the capacity of who was able to go onto the staff rota. We did establish the system and a routine where everybody was in agreement. We had regular meetings with social services and the local authority. I must say that the authority was very supportive. And where there were some of the social services teams pushing for children to be allowed to come into the school, the meetings with social services and the local authority helped just to provide a broader picture of the full situation to

see who were the priorities among the children from families that were vulnerable at the time.’ (SLT Interview, School G)

- 6.5** Comments made by the schools suggest that the relationship between the schools and social services became dynamic and adaptive to the circumstances of the pupil and was characterised by constant change, dependent on factors such as the pupil’s learning needs and changes in the home environment:

‘So, some pupils came to school, more or less these are who you would see as being the more vulnerable pupils. Some of them were in five days Monday to Friday and holidays. For others it was dependent on how we grouped them. We grouped them according to agreements with the parents and specialist child-support services. We would have interviews with specialist child support services. Some of the children’s needs are very profound, some of them were in for five days. Others were in two or three days; others went to two days a week. But that could change. That was flexible during this period. If we had a phone call or a heads up explaining that someone has had a bad week, we would decide on action. So, we had to make decisions dynamically based on the situation at home and the challenges faced by pupil and the parents. We would try and take the pressure away from the home in this way.’ (SLT Interview, School D)

- 6.6** These forms of support through cooperation with social services became more nuanced and complex as the course of the pandemic developed, and according to the learning needs of the pupil. Responses needed to be adaptive and flexible, according to the specific needs of the pupils and the impact on the home or the school.

‘We as a school have had to cooperate very closely with the family and social services to ensure that the decisions that we made worked for the individual. We were open of course for vulnerable children and the children of key workers, but for some of the children being at school but not in their usual classroom, without their peers without the regular staff working, this didn’t work for them. This was too much for them. They couldn’t understand what’s happening and it was too much for some like those with profound and multiple learning needs. It was having a dramatic effect on their mental health. So,

there was a need of course to cooperate with parents and outside agencies such as social services to decide right okay we can help with the staffing on occasional days, but being in the school doesn't work for this child. So maybe we're not talking about being at home, but maybe in a location that wasn't the school either. So sometimes finding a more neutral location. These pupils needed a routine, they couldn't understand for example why the hydro pool wasn't open and available to them, or the sensory rooms being closed. And why there was nearly no one in the school. It was a very confusing situation for them and some of them couldn't cope with this. The behaviour then would be off the scale.' (SLT Interview, School G)

- 6.7** The effects of the lockdowns, the expectations to distance socially and the instruction to work from home often combined to create complex situations that could result in a rise in tension between schools and specialist support services, as described in the following vignette.

Figure 6.1: Vignette offering a snapshot of the experiences regarding availability of specialist support services.

Some schools expressed that the disruptions caused by the lockdowns, and the resultant reduction in the presence of some specialist services and support agencies during the lockdown periods, and in particular during the period between the lockdowns when schools reopened, had unanticipated and often problematic effects. This was the case, for example, with a school that supports learners with a broad range of ALN:

'...there are other types of provision that we have to make during this period .. But of course, sometimes that was difficult because of restrictions we socially isolating people coming into the home and so on. I can't speak on behalf of health boards and the therapists and so on. There was a time period when these types of services seem to have disappeared nearly. I made a point from the start that I wouldn't get dragged into this type of micropolitics. We're not a brokerage at this point. We support parents with skills to do that type of communicating. But as the whole period was moving along you did see some issues develop along those lines in terms of who amongst the specialist services was supposed to offer provision. We didn't feel that we should be dragged into refereeing in those types of situations. We're finding it difficult because we haven't seen any of the therapists come in. You know the form of virtual assessment doesn't work with somebody who is four or five years old and has profound learning needs. It just doesn't work. A by-product of the Covid situation. I don't know what the work policies and so on are in these agencies, since September my view is if it's good enough for us, it's good enough for them. It's as simple as that I expect to see them on site. And this is what I tell parents. There are differences among parents. Some of them were very good at ensuring that they gained

the provision that the children were entitled to. That is when it was practically possible to do that considering the situation and the restrictions. And others when we had to intervene and work with parents or when teachers would sense through communication with parents that extra support was needed in these areas. We're very good at signposting, and by about Easter we had established routines through staff when we could monitor and support in these cases. And we could offer practical advice and support in signposting for parents how they could, under the restrictions, ensure or appeal for support and provision for their children within the home.' (SLT Interview School D)

- 6.8** Some schools reported a perceived loss of contact and difficulty in accessing support from specialist services during the interim period between lockdowns, when many of the learners had returned to schools. During an already demanding period due to conditions and directives related to social distancing and pupil safeguarding, the leadership of some of the schools expressed that difficulties associated with accessing key support services made their experiences as a school challenging.

'I would say that after returning to school in September I have been dealing with staff that have been fairly annoyed and upset, staff generally in education maybe, everyone back. Lots of us in a school in a relatively small building and so can't distance themselves. Lots of challenges associated with this. Educational co-workers, like officials, continuing to work at home of course, so there was less services available for the learners in the form of the different therapies and so on. And concerns about all this making people anxious and perhaps annoyed and to have a short fuse. But interestingly by now staff have come to terms with this and that dealing well with the situation. But we are seeing its raise its head now with the children. I think the long period away and the anxiety that some feel of having been at home now back in school and not knowing what's going to happen next is causing stress amongst the children. And also, in similar services that support us and the learners for example taxi drivers perform a very important role in bringing children back and forth to the school. You can see anxieties building and sometimes stress and annoyance. So that translates for me into parental complaints about the services where the workers are on maybe stressed causing flashpoints to happen. So, these are maybe the more hidden and not so publicised effects on the wider

services that we rely on to provide education for the children come to our school. I think it's an effect of the whole period.' (SLT Interview, School F)

6.9 Similar issues, relating to difficulties in accessing specialist support services, were also described by parents of learners with ALN taught in mainstream schools.

6.10 Whilst many parents considered that schools had worked hard within the restrictions and with the available resources to provide appropriate support for pupils, it was felt by some parents that the nature of their children's needs meant that difficulty in accessing specialist support services were having a detrimental effect on their children's development:

'...finds it difficult to accept that he should be learning from home due to the nature of his disability...missed out on a whole year of intervention - daily gym visits, physiotherapy, in person speech and language therapy...will never be able to catch up. Online lessons weren't offered due to the nature of the learning difficulties of all the children in my son's class. My son has a range of interventions from a range of specialists (speech language, physio, hearing impaired etc) I don't have the experience to deliver this... I could support my sons learning at home effectively due to his resistance - he has very clear parameters about what is school and what is home and has found it impossible to blur the boundaries. Having to look after a disabled child whilst trying to work in my own job and facilitate my other children learning has been challenging.' (Parent Interview, School K)

6.11 External support agencies and mechanisms that would have usually been in place were restricted due to the limitations imposed on schools, but also due to the lockdown of large parts of the working population in general. Some parents and teachers expressed the view that children affected by these difficulties in accessing wider support services during the periods of lockdown were placed under increased disadvantage:

'...prior to covid he was having daily sessions in the gym and the unit was right next to the gym and so he was going there daily for exercise session. He was also following a physiotherapy programme where they've got all the equipment in school, and the know-how, and a physiotherapist was overseeing that. He also has speech and language support. And he's also got some hearing

difficulty, so he had input from the hearing-impaired teacher. You know, all of that sort of intervention has come to a stop. That's not to say they aren't involved in what provision they provide, but the best will in the world because he's shielding anyway, there's no way he could go to the gym every day for half an hour. And there are no gyms open anyway. So that kind of intervention, through no fault of the schools, is not being offered and he will never catch up with that. You know, a year of physical activity when he's physically compromised at the best of times, will be difficult for him to catch up with, especially as he's only got another year left in school anyway.' (Parent Interview, School K)

'He struggles in school as it is, and they're really good in school. If he does struggle, he has access to support facilities in school to help him through that, where he doesn't have that at home. His support facility at home is myself, and if I'm busy or if I'm trying to work because I do work two jobs and, thankfully, I can work them from home.' (Parent Interview, School H)

'Because he went back to school in September, and nobody was allowed into the classroom, you know, other than people who were there as one to ones, and he was having these Teams meetings with the speech and language teams. But for children like my son, it's quite difficult thing to engage online in the same way. That's not for the want of the school trying. That's to do with the nature of how my child is.' (Parent Interview, School K)

'No provision available for them - e.g., appointments with Speech and Language Team' (Teacher/LSA Survey Response, School K)

Summary

- 6.12** Many schools, particularly (but not exclusively) those with high proportions of learners with ALN found the period between lockdowns, when the children had returned to school to be particularly challenging. The combination of having to manage pupils within groups or 'bubbles' and having to deny access to pupils' routines and spaces due to restrictions associated with the pandemic caused difficulties for school leaders, teachers and learning support staff, and, more

particularly for learners. These were seen to be exacerbated by difficulties in accessing the types of specialist support services that may have alleviated conditions for the learners.

- 6.13** The cooperation between the local authority, social services and schools was considered to be very important during the lockdown period. Key roles between these three agencies involved identifying pupils and their families' / carers' needs, offering, and providing support for pupils and their families / carers and cooperating in identifying those pupils that may have benefitted from attending Hub schools.
- 6.14** The absence of specialist support services for pupils, particularly those with ALN, may have a long term and detrimental effect on individual pupils' progress in some cases.

7. Findings regarding mental health and well-being

Introduction

- 7.1 Stakeholders had much to say about mental health and well-being of those undertaking learning during the school closure periods. They also discussed the mental health and wellbeing of those supporting learning during this period, such as teachers and parents/carers.
- 7.2 Broadly, there are five sub-themes constructed from the data across the case studies.
- Concerns about learners', parents and staff's mental health and well-being
 - Learner social isolation
 - Safeguarding issues and concerns initially preventing live sessions.
 - Positive experiences of learning from home
 - Home schooling
- 7.3 The following vignette exemplifies several of the sub-themes which are further analysed below.

Figure 7.1: Vignette offering a snapshot of the experiences regarding mental health and wellbeing.

A key element of concern for all schools who were involved in the research was the maintenance of the well-being of their learners over the lockdown period. Much attention was directed at those who had already been identified as 'at risk' prior to the lockdown, be it as a result of low achievement, ALN, eFSM, interaction with children's services, or the schools' knowledge of issues within the family unit. These learners were, therefore, the main cohort who were signalled for additional support during the transition to teaching from afar. As one SLT member for school J noted as they summarised their school's policy:

'We identified our vulnerable pupils, so we had an extensive list of everybody that was open to the numerous pastoral elements within school, and the team very quickly began doing weekly check ins with our vulnerable pupils, and sometimes they were more than weekly. Sometimes, with some pupils, fortnightly communication was ok.'

Direct interaction with the child, and the insight offered by chatting with the child on an individual basis, it was noted, had always played an important part in signifying disadvantage. But, with lockdown, that ability to assess learners individually was lost. New strategies, therefore, had to be developed. In summarising one school's response, one respondent contributor from the senior management team of school I noted how:

'In our weekly staff meeting...we would talk as a staff and note if we hadn't heard from anybody, and how we thought things were going. It was a real time for us to share as a staff, and to note any issues or problems. The deputy head would then call the students we were concerned about, just to check that everything was ok...or to see if there was anything we could do. So, as a staff we were quite open in talking to each other to try and identify any problems, and especially so if there were siblings between classes... We tried to work together to identify any problems.'

A significant element of consideration for well-being was therefore nurtured alongside considerations on nature of the tasks themselves. As one contributor from school L noted, it appeared that the children had lost the ability to 'joio yn gyffredinol' '[enjoy, generally]'. Teachers from school K noted that:

'Some pupils' wellbeing was affected by lockdown and although the school/heads of progress worked hard to contact vulnerable learners, some didn't engage. Some pupils sunk into a depression because of lockdown.'

For many the school was the only source for social interaction. In response to the needs of the pupils many schools developed their systems of check-ins and support from the pastoral teams. Telephone calls and messages were sent to the specific pupils and their families.

Pupils noted that they felt isolated and that they missed their friends. All though they met in classes through learning platforms they still felt isolated and missed being in the same room as their peers and their teachers. A significant number of pupils noted that they missed being able to play with their friends. Some pupils noted that they enjoyed being at home more and were able to spend more time with their families and learn in the comfort of their own homes.

One parent from school I noted:

'It is very, very difficult to try and motivate him to get any work done. And it would often result in, during the first lockdown and to some degree this lockdown, in family arguments. And this is his safe place at the moment. And we as parents aren't prepared to have him being upset at the thought of us having to teach them at home. So, you know, we made the decision that actually his safe place had to be safe and not a place where it was going to be a battleground for education. There is a huge despondency in her. Mental health in general is a real issue with this.' Whilst another noted 'There was just a total lack of motivation and a feeling of depression and of feeling down. Quite upset and fed up with not being able to see friend, and I had to actually contact the school, and yes, now that I kicked off about it, we do get weekly calls to check that she's all right, but it does feel that it's only because I've kicked off about it that they're doing something otherwise they wouldn't have done it. And I think about other pupils whose parents wouldn't have said anything. And I think they [the school] wouldn't have a clue.'

It was noted by a parent that their child's anxiety had reduced at home and that there was much less stress in the household in the morning.

Mental health / well-being

- 7.4** Staff identified concerns about learners' mental health and well-being during the pandemic. Schools explained how they tried to support their learners and their families' health and well-being during this time.

'I think a lot of people and teachers know and assume that we will need to work hard to lessen the impact on learner's mental health. Some individuals don't want to return to school at all. Another pupil that I know about just as an example is obsessed with cleaning and sanitising his hands. He has autism and they audibly counts to 20 when he's sanitising and cleaning his hands. I mean the effects of this pandemic on children in mainstream schools is quite significant but when you're talking about the types of learners that we have, you see that that impacts is much more pronounced. It is anything - he sanitises if he meets anyone who sanitises. So, everything revolves around the pandemic in terms of the lives of many of our learners at the moment. As many don't understand what is happening apart from the fact that they have had to go home that the routine of going to school has been broken.' (Teacher Focus Group, School F)

'We had teams as I say, where we put people into teams. So, our well being team were really keeping a handle on all of those, and doing regular phone calls, and ringing the parents. How are you? Is everything OK? You know, is there anything we can do? We were also keeping tabs on people by doing food drops as well. The free school meals, food bags, dropping those off.' (SLT Interview, School B)

'Again, the teachers were mindful of trying to think of ways that they could spend time with the family member, so, it could be cooking something. It could be making a piece of art in the garden using whatever you can find as well as maybe practising, writing your name for the Reception children and so on'. (SLT Interview, School A)

- 7.5** As the need for learning at home persisted throughout the year the concerns of both teaching staff and parents began to focus on the mental health and well-being of

children. They all recognised that these issues are important to address as foundations to effective learning and engagement.

‘Pupils have regressed in their academic performance and COVID-19 has negatively impacted child well-being. Also, in my opinion many children have become inactive and not regularly exercised over the course of the lock down period, which has negatively impacted health & well-being.’ (SLT Interview, School B)

‘I’m very worried about the children’s weight as well. Lots of children have been putting on lots of weight. Some have become what you would call obese. Being at home eating what they want it’s another part of a break of routine. When at school they know what they are going to eat and when meals are prepared carefully. They go out to play. They have physical education. But during lockdown all of those routines have been broken. I also worry a lot about this. This is really affecting the health side of things for the children. We’ve been trying to hold physical education lessons and yoga online. That’s the children that we never see online we assume don’t have this kind of exercise session so you worry about what they eat and how much they move during the day. I know one child; he is treated like a baby of the family and gets anything that he wants I’m so it seems that he is overeating and nobody is preventing this. That’s a really difficult situation. How do you tell the parents that are allowing him to do this that it’s having an impact on his health?’ (Teacher Focus Group, School D)

‘Mental health is the main concern throughout all groups of learners. Learners whose parents aren’t as confident working with their children, which is giving them a huge disadvantage.’ (Teacher/LSA Survey Response, School A)

7.6 Participants explained how learners’ anxieties arose from a range of issues.

‘The anxieties for children arose from a range of issues. Also, where parents were key workers, it created another layer of anxiety for some children. Due to work commitments for some, lack of technical knowledge for some, connectivity issues for some, mental health issues of isolation for some parents and children.’ (Parent Interview, School B)

‘Also, if a parent had mental health issues, e.g., depression, they might be having a bad day and transfer that bad energy onto the child.’ (Teacher/LSA Survey Response, School B)

‘Some families are having both parents working as key workers-constant worries of those children about their parents caused stress and harder concentration on schoolwork. Not adequate access to the internet connection or not having a digital device to access schoolwork.’ (Parent Interview, School B)

‘I worry that my daughter is going to have more anxiety when it comes to learning. She already suffers with low self-confidence and panics when she's struggling, that the fact her safe environment is now also an environment of stress is not helping her confidence. This impacts on her will to learn. I also worry that due to her being four that she is missing out on vital developmental years of learning that consequently will cause delays in the following years to come of learning disadvantaging her opportunity for a full, fair education.’ (Parent Survey Response, School A)

‘Anxiety towards going outside. Mental health issues relating to missing their peers. Stress and strain put on parents to juggle work, taking care of children at home, and trying to educate them at the same time. Which inadvertently affects the children.’ (Teacher/LSA Survey Response, School A)

7.7 Parental health and well-being were impacted during this period as some parents struggled to juggle jobs and their children’s learning; this impacted the learners.

‘I am concerned about my children going back to school at the moment as I am heavily pregnant and youngest child has chest issues. The risk of covid in our household is frightening and would have a huge impact.’ (Parent Survey Response, School A)

‘I'd rather my son was at home with me, I put him on the school bus every morning worried that I'm sending him to a potentially unsafe environment, no one can keep my son safe and well looked after better than me.’ (Parent Interview, School D)

‘Yes, I only have two very different children. Some families have far more although I am a single parent. Everyone's health and wellbeing has been affected this year and its whether you have the ability to cope under this amount of pressure.’ (Parent Survey Response, School D)

‘Yes, I do think, we were lucky as myself and husband both were working from home so were able to give our child the time to help complete schoolwork. We were also lucky as our child is very well behaved and can manage the change of routine.’ (Parent Interview, School D)

- 7.8** Some parents and teaching staff acknowledged the challenge for parents of trying to get older learners to engage with their learning.

‘Some of the learners especially when they’re older, because of conditions might to become aggressive and might react in a negative way towards parents suggesting that they attend to the work, especially when they’re older maybe 18 years and older. That’s when the parents can’t push them as much within the home environment in terms of trying to get them to engage with their education.’ (Teacher Focus Group, School F)

‘We are worried that if they are sent home will have the fallout of the change to there [sic.] routine like last time that lead to damage to the house.’ (Parent Survey Response, School D)

- 7.9** Senior Leaders discussed how teachers also experienced anxiety about returning to school with the infection still at large in the population.

‘I suppose the biggest concern is the fact that we are still in the middle of this. And that we can’t really see an end to it at this time in the effect that it has on the learners and how we are having to react on their behalf. I would say that after returning to school in September I have been dealing with staff that have been fairly annoyed and upset, staff generally in education maybe, everyone back. Lots of us in a school in a relatively small building and so can’t distance themselves. Lots of challenges associated with this. Educational co-workers, like officials, continuing to work at home of course, so there was less services available for the learners in the form of the different therapies and so on. And concerns about all this making people anxious and perhaps annoyed and to

have a short fuse. But interestingly by now staff have come to terms with this and that dealing well with the situation. But we are seeing its raise its head now with the children. I think the long period away and the anxiety that some feel of having been at home now back in school and not knowing what's going to happen next is causing stress amongst the children. And also, in similar services that support us and the learners for example taxi drivers perform a very important role in bringing children back and forth to the school. You can see anxieties building and sometimes stress and annoyance. So that translates for me into parental complaints about the services where the workers are on maybe stressed causing flashpoints to happen. So, these are maybe the more hidden and not so publicised effects on the wider services that we rely on to provide education for the children come to our school. I think it's an effect of the whole period.' (SLT Interview, School F)

- 7.10** Teacher absence due to Covid-19 infection/positive tests seem to have put an additional strain on schools as they tried to maintain routines.

'I think in terms of the education that is going on as it was before. The only challenges with that our periods of losing staff because I have to send them for testing and if any staff test positive of course. I think that's a challenging situation in any school but to have changes in staffing constantly because of the pandemic has a very significant effect on our type of children and learners because many of them are so reliant on familiarity and that type of constant change cannot upset and effect a whole range of learners. So, there's a lots of knock on effects now on schools like ours because of the situation the pandemic because of the demands made by testing and tracking trace. So, I think it's the emotional effects that by now are having an impact on how we can function as a school. And I think the effects of this I felt keenly by their children. Lots of meltdowns, children suffering from stress because of changes to routine or not being allowed into the spaces that they have been allowed to go to in the past.' (SLT Interview, School F)

- 7.11** A lack of routine and social interaction was also considered by teachers and parents to impact mental health and well-being, making learning more challenging for some learners during this period.

‘Our ALN learners rely on routine and predictability, having both of these taken away from them caused significant anxiety.’ (SLT Interview, School B)

‘Children who find it hard with different daily routine.’ (Teacher/LSA Survey Response, School A)

‘... not having friendship groups, routine and stability, anxiety of children and parents to complete any outstanding work set by school.’ (SLT Interview, School B)

‘I can also see among children with the most significant needs, for example those without language and speech. Definitely seeing a rise in stress levels among these children. I’m not sure whether it’s because again results of the whole period or because of the restrictions due to the building that we’re in. Because we have to keep to the bubbles and the children sometimes can’t go outside what are the areas where they are used to being. So, lots of restrictions seen around this.’ (SLT Interview, School F)

‘Lack of social interaction. Lack of structure/daily routine causing worry and anxiety for children. Very little or no home learning being completed leading to some children falling behind their peers.’ (Teacher/LSA Survey Response, School A)

‘They missed their friends and the routine of school life. Vulnerable children being at home more where school was their ‘safe’ place.’ (Teacher/LSA Survey Response, School A)

Learner social isolation

- 7.12** As exemplified by some of the vignettes above, social isolation seems to have directly impacted learners’ well-being and mental health.

‘Many parents/carers have commented on their child's happiness being impacted and stems from their inability to attend school and meet with their friends and peers.’ (SLT Interview, School B)

‘An inability to socialise with their friends and peers have impacted on their mental-health.’ (SLT Interview, School B)

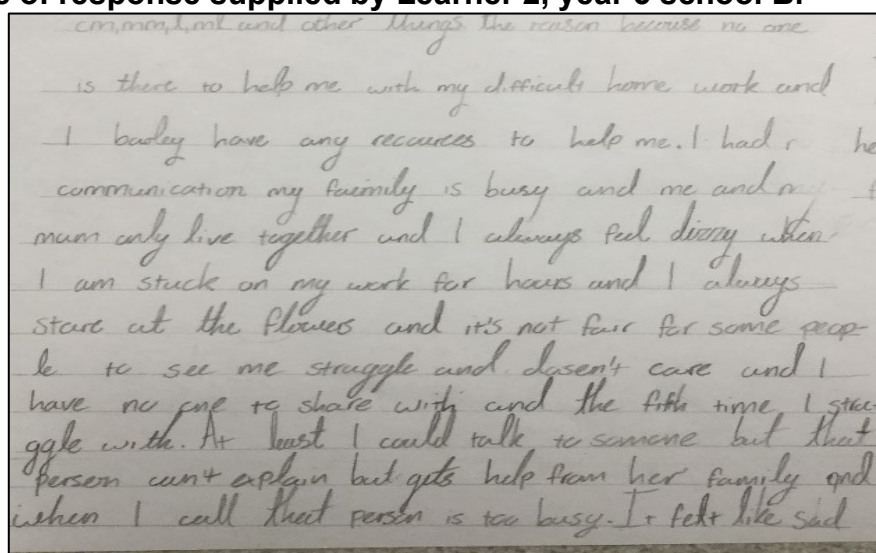
- 7.13** Social interaction may be seen to be integral to supporting learners' learning, however, engaging with peers during on-line learning seems to have been challenging for some younger learners:

'But yeah, it's been a lot nicer for them to be able to see their friends [on-line]. Although, I think it's quite frustrating that they can't really talk to their friends, so they get that interaction and they really seemed to enjoy that, and the younger one. It took a long time for her to actually engage. I think it's quite mentally, quite difficult for her. She's only six, so to be able to engage with the online'. (Parent Interview, School B)

- 7.14** All learner tasks from all schools made reference to social isolation and being apart from friends.

'No one to help with homework, Barely any resources at home to help, Busy family, living alone with mum, Feel dizzy, Stuck on my work for hours, I always stare at the flowers, People see me struggle and don't care, I talked to someone but she gets help from her family, she's too busy, I felt really sad and lonely' (Learner Task, Learner 2. Year 5, School B)

Figure 7.2: Image of response supplied by Learner 2, year 5 school B.



Safeguarding issues and concerns

- 7.15** During the first lockdown safeguarding issues and concerns seems to have prevented the widespread use of live lessons. However, this changed after January

2021, during the second lockdown with more examples in the data of live lessons taking place.

Positive experiences of learning from home

- 7.16** Some learners found it easier to learn at home because there were less distractions or stress.

‘There were some findings that’s boys from year eight, nine and ten. Covid barely affected them, and perhaps had a positive effect on the mental health because they weren’t under stress about thinking about having to go to school every day with all the implications that this normally has. So, these things were also relevant to us. But certainly, in situations where families were able to connect with their children and to cooperate with their children in their education, we feel has been a positive experience within the situation.’ (SLT Interview, School D)

‘I also enjoyed doing my schoolwork at home because I felt like I could concentrate more, and my family was there to help me and it was also quiet so I could focus on my work.’ (Learner Task, School E)

In the lockdown I liked doing the folder work in my own time and I could take my time with it. (Learner Task, School E)

- 7.17** There were examples of some learners increasing in confidence working with their parents.

‘That for her that well she obviously felt pressure in school. [Inaudible] was gone, so some of the things she was sending me, it was beautiful. And she started then videoing herself as well doing tasks and mum would send me the videos. I saw sort of, another side to her, a much more confident, outgoing young lady really that she grew into over that period of time. ’ (SLT Interview, School B)

- 7.18** When children with ALN were able to access the school during lockdown without most of the other children being present some experienced a positive impact:

‘But for children with ALN being in their own little bubble, as, as you know proved really successful for them. [Before] I would watch some of mine and they would just walk around the perimeter of the yard on their own. Probably you know wanting to interact but not knowing how to. But now because it's just us and we all know each other so well, they are screeching, running around sometimes outside, having a whale of a time!’ (SLT Interview, School B)

7.19 Some families benefited from the extra time together and learning in the outdoors.

‘It was a benefit for the whole family to spend time together during lockdown. Parents are usually working all year round. It was good for us to be more involved in his education via home schooling despite the fact that on some occasions it was difficult to get him to concentrate.’ (Parent Interview, School F)

‘Some of the parents and people involved have identified some positives. Families have grown closer according to report. I believe that many parents have a deep understanding of what happens within school now. And of academic expectations. That is more related to the formal learners and the more able pupils. Not quite as relevant to the informal and semiformal. I believe with families a very close relationship has been created between parents and their children. Or whoever is at home with them. I would suggest that many maybe 40% or so all families have been able to think of more creative ways of raising and teaching children. Supervising them and doing more activities in the garden more creative things inside the house, sometimes musical, sometimes in animating, whatever was available. It means then that we have a proportion of parents now have a better idea of how to support their children at home and the meaning of education. And able to say the next few years that I’ve done its and supported my child for 9 months.’ (SLT Interview, School D)

‘It's been nice to spend some quality family time together. The children have also liked seeing their friends and teachers on the online meetings.’ (Parent Survey Response, School A)

‘Family time spent. Cooking at home. Walking with in the local area.’ (Parent Survey Response, School A)

‘Spending more time together as a family.’ (Parent Survey Response, School A)

‘It's positive in that there was more time spent as a family, but this could be stressful due to anxiety /stresses of lockdown.’ (Parent Survey Response, School A)

‘More time as a family... Less distractions.’ (Parent Survey Response, School A)

7.20 There were positive outcomes for some families, who found this period to be an opportunity to strengthen familial bonds and to appreciate time for leisure activities.

‘Due to having been in the fortunate position of being able to be off every day with my son he was able to benefit from 1:1 support, which helped a great deal with his learning as opposed to being in a large school class, which poses many challenges to teachers and to students' learning (e.g. noise, behavioural disruptions by some learners, teachers having to spend more time with struggling students, so many students it is hard for the teacher to notice or really get to know all of their students capabilities and personalities). We were able to get probably the same amount of work done at home in a morning as would normally be done in a whole school day. We could then take the afternoon's off to enjoy outdoor exercise, fresh air and nature, which was great for everyone's mental health.’ (Parental Interview, School B)

‘They helped each other more, worked together more and became closer as brothers. They were able to pace their work to their abilities doing some faster and some slower than would be allowed in class. If they struggled with too much energy to sit and concentrate, they could do something physical, explore the local woodland and then come back to it.’ (Parental Interview, School B)

‘Allowed us more time to learn more practical "life" lessons such as bike riding and shoelace tying.’ (Parent Survey Response, School B)

‘Positives were that my child spent quality time with her baby brother and gave her more chance of independent learning.’ (Parent Survey Response, School B)

‘It was a much-needed break for us as a family, more time together, no rushing around, fairly relaxed. We had been through a difficult year since January!’ (Parent Survey Response, School B)

- 7.21** Conversely, children who had experienced bullying or social anxiety found this to be an opportunity to engage more fully in their learning, with the absence of the pressure of school.

‘Not having to see the bullies at school.’ (Parental Survey Response, School B)

‘My child did not want to engage at all with tasks set for the first few weeks because he associated the work with the bullying he was subjected to at the school. We worked on other things & he eventually felt strong enough mentally to engage in school activities remotely. He didn’t have any issues doing the work apart from the slowness of the j2e platform.’ (Parent Interview, School B)

- 7.22** As exemplified previously, some family dynamics had a detrimental impact, creating stress on family relationships. Schools gained an increased awareness of their learners’ home circumstances and how this impacted their learners.

Home schooling

- 7.23** Parents gained a renewed appreciation of what teaching entails and what schools do to support learners’ learning. One parent said they would not consider home-schooling after their experience during lockdown.

- 7.24** There were parents who had previously contemplated the idea of Home Schooling, but they recognised the broader benefits of a school environment as a result of this experience.

‘It was a nice experience in the same time it was stressful. So, us personally was thinking about home-schooling our kids now we definitely against it because they need their social live with their friends and it's so important for them.’ (Parent Interview, School B)

‘I’m not a teacher’. (Parent Interview, School B)

Summary

- 7.25** The support, routine, play, opportunities for social interaction and leadership on learning offered by schools are integral, as highlighted by numerous stakeholders, to supporting learners' mental health and well-being. As our research had highlighted, the importance of such as pre-requisite for effective learner progress and achievement must be increasingly perceived and appreciated.
- 7.26** The extent of the work undertaken by schools in supporting learners' mental health and well-being during the pandemic should not be underestimated and seems to have presented a significant challenge to already busy professionals who were already increasingly burdened by the breakneck transition to learning from afar, and the numerous strategies adopted to offer such provision.
- 7.27** School and individual staff understanding of learners' home circumstances, and its impact on mental health and well-being, may be seen to be key to supporting effective learning. The importance of such knowledge should, therefore, be increasingly, and routinely, explored during ITE.
- 7.28** Hearteningly, during the pandemic parents, generally, seem to have gained a new/deepened/renewed appreciation of the work undertaken by teachers and teaching staff as a result of their firsthand experiences of what home-schooling entailed.
- 7.29** Numerous strategies were adopted in the safeguarding of learners' mental health and well-being, in addition to the well-being of those parents and guardians who were tasked, increasingly, with the provision of home-schooling. These strategies were, in the most part, well received, yet the provision was found, in some cases, to be lacking. The reactionary nature of provision was particularly noted.
- 7.30** However, not every learner thrives in large group setting. Some children find the school environment challenging and some learners may have benefited from time away from peers, more family time, and less distraction at home.

8. Findings regarding learning and academic progress

Introduction

8.1 One of the main foci of this study was to gather data on the effectiveness of the learning that occurred during the various lockdown periods. Whereas other sections of this report focus on the actual provisions of the schools and the parental and pupil response to that, there were a number of comments regarding the impact directly upon children's learning and upon their engagement and progress in learning. This section seeks to consolidate some of the main perspectives that arose in the participants' responses. These will be categorised under the general sub-themes of:

- Impact of isolation on social learning
- Impact on learners with additional languages
- Reluctance to return to learning
- Independence
- Motivation
- Concentration
- Skills development
- Attainment
- Extra-curricular learning

Impact of isolation on social learning

8.2 The inevitable consequence of school closures during the pandemic was the impact on learning, but the value of social interaction and the impact of learning through social collaboration was a matter highlighted within the data. This was exemplified across the geographical location of the participants and across the range of schools and age ranges.

8.3 The lack of social interaction, and the consequent impact on learning was noted by both teachers and parents, and it was identified that this could have a more significant impact on younger children whose social development is strongly intertwined with their interaction with others.

'Plant heb fod gyda neb arall yn ystod y cyfnod clo ac felly ei sgiliau cymdeithasol wedi cael effaith.' ['The children haven't been with anybody else

during the lockdown, and maybe their social skills have taken a hit as a result.'](Teacher/LSA Survey Response, School L)

'No. I think when children go to school and see our friends. They improve knowledge. I think it affects the small children more because they need time to play with their friends and they so young for online learning (Parent Interview, School B)

- 8.4** However, it was not just limited to young children, as one final year secondary pupil implied strongly that the interaction and support received from working with peers was an aspect that was missed.

'Lack of support from peers, feeling alone in work.' (Pupil Year 13, Task, School J)

- 8.5** There was a general recognition that parental support, where provided, went some way to address the issues caused by the disruption of social learning, which many parents recognised as an essential part of learning, but this was limited in nature.

'Positives-my daughter struggled with maths, so we were really able to focus on that area in particular and she has really progressed. I think she really benefitted from one-to-one support also. Because of the progress she has made I think it has made her more confident in her abilities now she is back in the classroom. Negatives-she is an only child and really missed the company of other children.' (Parent Interview, School B)

- 8.6** The special school context reiterated this same impact due to the lack of social learning and highlighted the importance of routines in daily social life and how this caused significant difficulties and discomfort to pupils. The following vignette encapsulated some of the main effects, both negative and positive.

Figure 8.1: Vignette offering a snapshot of the experiences regarding learning and academic progress.

'The main effects have been in the disruption to the children's routines. Most parents feel that the established routines that we offer the children, right from when they come into the school, until they leave us is a really important part of what we provide and support with their learning. The social part of their development is hugely important, something that you don't see and realise in mainstream schooling. I think that this is the biggest change that we've had to deal with and have had to plan carefully to mitigate the effects of disruptions to routines that might have an impact on the children,

felt across the whole curriculum. And we're talking now about effects on the young children coming into the school when they learn about socialising, going to the toilet, taking care of themselves as they grow older. And then some of the older pupils, who have built up their confidence in the environment we provide. Some of the effects on these pupils. They are able to see stories in the news about effects on wellbeing and mental health and some find it hard to understand and react to this. It's more difficult to predict outcomes and how each individual child can and will respond to disruptions to their routines. Breaks to their normal days. You see it in how some have been allowed to let the work go. Spending a long time doing other things. Gaming and that. Then you have those whose needs are so profound that they come to rely on routines or on technology. How this has helped to develop their voice. And then the break. This kind of stuff isn't cheap and can't just be at home. So, you get that double effect of this. We've tried to supply some of the resources and technology, but it can't be everything, you know, for practical reasons more than anything.' (SLT Interview School E)

- 8.7** In addition, the return to the school environment was not a simple fix to the aspect of social learning and some did find the return to routines and to an adapted social interaction context difficult to understand and to manage.

'I teach some of the younger pupils and they've all found it difficult, although they probably aren't as aware of what's going on and it isn't affecting them in that way as much as the older learners. [...] So, mine are a little bit younger, but with other issues, like not being able to have such close contact with each other or others in the school. You know teaching in this type of school is very different. So much depends on social development, but also, they're really close with the classroom assistants. How do you explain to the little ones that they aren't supposed to get too close to each other or their teacher or the classroom assistant? I've also got a little girl with hearing impairment. The masks make it so much harder for her and this is the time when she can make strides with developing these skills very early on. But it's more difficult for her now. That is something that you know at home and even here at school. A different type of effect that I would think that other teachers have to think about.' (Teacher Focus Group, School G)

- 8.8** This was equally true for children in the mainstream also, as conveyed by one parent.

‘Routine and consistency is very important for my child to develop further in life skills. Disrupting this has a negative effect on his learning and his behaviour.’ (Parent Survey Response, School F)

Impact on learners with additional languages

- 8.9** Whilst all pupils were generally regarded to have been disadvantaged by the closure of schools, those who learn in their second language were particularly identified by both staff and parents. This was noted to be true for both those groups of children who had both English and Welsh as an additional language, particularly where there was a limited ability to support within the home.

Figure 8.2: Vignette offering a snapshot of the experiences regarding learning and academic progress.

Senior Leaders and Teachers were of the opinion that those pupils who were learning English as an additional language were unduly affected by the closures particularly since they would not hear the target language spoken on a regular basis and would have little opportunity to use and practice that language.

‘In my opinion the groups of learners that have been affected the most by the impacts of COVID-19 are firstly EAL students. The reason for this is that this group of pupils are not having the regularly exposure to the English/Welsh language. (SLT Interview, School B)

‘These children have not had the consistent consolidation of skills to help them remember and progress. EAL children have heard and used less English. (Teacher/LSA Survey Response, School B)

‘Disadvantage caused by using English/Welsh as an additional language.’ (Teacher/LSA Survey Response, School K)

There was also one reference which implied the parent’s lack of confidence in providing that language support accurately and correctly.

‘English is not my mother tongue and my accents is different.’ (Parent Survey Response, School K)

The location and nature of the geographical areas represented by the participant schools may be a factor contributing to the limited number of contributions relating to EAL, but it may be implied, in the context of the following contributions, that this would have been a significant impact throughout Wales.

- 8.10** One of the main identified difficulties caused by the school closure was the consequent lack of exposure to the target language. This was clearly expressed in

the context of Welsh language learning, but the principles, it is suggested, can also be implied to the context of EAL.

‘Colli eu Cymraeg’; ‘Dysgwyr heb ffynhonnell siarad Cymraeg adref’; [‘Losing their Welsh’; ‘Learners without a source of Welsh speaking at home’]
(Teacher/LSA Survey Response, School H)

‘Nifer helaeth o ddisgyblion yn dod o deuluoedd di-Gymraeg nid oeddent yn clywed yr iaith yn ddyddiol.’ [‘A significant number of pupils come from non-Welsh-speaking families where they would not hear the language on a daily basis.’] (Teacher/LSA Survey Response, School K)

‘Roedd plant o deuluoedd Cymraeg o fantais gan ei bont yn medru sgwrsio i’r plant y Gymraeg.’ [‘Children from Welsh families were advantaged since they could converse with the children in Welsh.’] (Teacher/LSA Survey Response, School L)

- 8.11** On a related note, the isolation meant that the usual opportunities for practice and language exposure in schools was missed.

‘Anfantais’ enfawr o ran Cymraeg ydy nad ydy dysgwyr wedi cael cyfle i siarad Cymraeg o gwbl mewn rhai sefyllfaoedd pan nad ydynt yn yr ysgol - yr ysgol ydy’r unig le maen nhw’n clywed y Gymraeg yn cael ei siarad. [‘The great ‘disadvantage’ regarding the Welsh is that learners have not had the opportunity to speak Welsh in certain circumstances when they are not in school – the school is the only place where they hear the Welsh being spoken.’] (Teacher/LSA Survey Response, School H)

- 8.12** The level of home support was identified as a crucial factor in the achievement of learners in their target language, where there were some varying views regarding the desire to and level of support. One teacher expressed the view that support from the home was lacking in this context – ‘diffyg cefnogaeth y Gymraeg adref.’ (Teacher/LSA Survey Response, School J) whereas parental contributions suggested that the desire to support was there, but that the ability to do so effectively was missing.

‘My daughter was on the Welsh side, so I struggled to help her with work as I don’t speak Welsh’ (Parent Survey Response, School H)

‘Could understand some but not all [because of Welsh].’ (Parent Survey Response, School H)

‘75 percent was ok but as it got more in depth my Welsh wasn't up to grade to help my sons.’ (Parent Survey Response, School K)

‘Some task instructions provided only in Welsh, difficult for English speaking parents!’ (Parent Survey Response, School L)

‘Some foster carers are struggling to support learning in Welsh which is not a language they speak.’ (Parent Survey Response, School J)

8.13 The schools did seek to provide guidance and support for pupils in various ways in order to enable them to continue to progress with their language skills and this received a mixed response.

‘Ceisio rhoi gwaith lle roedden nhw'n gallu gwyllo neu wrando ar y Gymraeg yn cael ei defnyddio e.e. ateb cwestiynau wrth wyllo rhaglen Iaith ar Daith.’ [Sought to give them work where they could watch or listen to the Welsh being used e.g., questions whilst watching the Iaith ar Daith programme.]
(Teacher/LSA Survey Response, School H)

Figure 8.3: Vignette offering a snapshot of the experiences regarding learning and academic progress.

Difficulties were faced by parent on numerous levels:

‘We've also got a bit of a Welsh language barrier. So, he's in Welsh speaking school and he's pretty much fluid in Welsh, and they've always learnt through the medium of language. But we're not Welsh at home. So, obviously, they'll get some Welsh work, which is difficult for me to support with the older one who's dyslexic, because he can't read it - being dyslexic - and I can't read it because it's in Welsh. They'll send him a whole piece of A4 paper of Welsh reading to do, and he can't do it and I can't do it either. There's no point sending it to us! Send us something that he can do! It said you're not allowed to use Google Translate. Well, if he's dyslexic and I, I can't speak the language, then the work isn't gonna get done unless I can use Google Translate. He had to basically read an advertisement which was in English, and the questions he was then being asked were in Welsh. So, I wasn't clear whether we should be answering in Welsh or English. It was things like what's the name of the driving school. And it was Casey's Cars.... Well, you know, that's the name of the school, so I'm not going to write it in Welsh because it's Casey's Cars. Anyway, the work he completed got sent back by the teacher, and she'd said to him, you need to redo this

all again and it needs to be in Welsh. So, I obviously refused and said, you know, we've got enough work to do, he has done the work, and maybe it wasn't in Welsh but next time we'll make sure that we're looking out to be sure that it is in Welsh.' (Parent Interview, School K)

- 8.14** Parents shared how they took active steps to attempt to support their children in their continued learning of Welsh but did not always feel that the schools had succeeded in doing enough to support them.

'It was harder because of the Welsh stream. They were just saying, you know, keep speaking Welsh. Try watching S4C so they're having that communication. I had to resource through Welsh parents and ask what they were doing. A friend of mine, she's Welsh, and I would send what Welsh books I've got to her, through photos of the book, and she would translate it into audio. There was something on Facebook and a YouTube channel that a lady was doing with audio books. So, I managed to find that. But yeah, the School haven't been very resourceful. It has been difficult and very hard.'

(Parent Interview, School H)

'As a non-Welsh speaking home was that we would have preferred, in some way, for our son to be able to keep up his Welsh so that he didn't fall behind in that area, because we couldn't really help him. So, I had to kind of undertake a lot of that on my own, you know, through buying books and, you know, trying to get him to read them. There were a couple of books that were sent home with him from school, a couple of reading books, but, you know, he very quickly went through those and needed something else. So, I had to buy some books, and I also spent a fair amount of time just sitting him down in front of BBC iPlayer with S4C and just watching cartoons, and just getting him to spending half an hour a day just watching cartoons in Welsh so that he could hear it on a daily basis. But the school just didn't help out with that practically not at all. I had to really take the initiative to make sure that happened. (Parent Interview, School L)

'[Parents] just down the road from us, and after the first couple of lessons, they just withdrew their kids from lessons because they thought they were just completely hopeless. And they are a non-Welsh speaking family. And I think

their main complaint was that they weren't getting any support from the school to help them with the Welsh. And so that's a complaint I've heard from other people, and they basically said, look, if you can't help us better and helping our children to learn Welsh at home, well, then we're just not going to participate in the lesson. Maybe occasionally it would only be in Welsh, but for the most part it was okay.' (Parent Interview, School L)

- 8.15** Parents felt that as time went by, and as the provision from the schools adapted more readily to online provision, then the support for this aspect also developed.

'They could have done a better job. They did a good job in the second lockdown in a lot of aspects, but they could have done a better job in supporting families who are not Welsh speaking.' (Parent Interview, School L)

'Second lockdown things were just a lot better because they were doing online learning.' (Parent Interview, School L)

'He got to hear Welsh every day in his online lessons, which were for half an hour in the morning, and 15 minutes in the afternoon, five days a week. So that was good for him to hearing and get the chance to speak Welsh. They'd be posted on the HWB website for the whole week on a Monday morning, and they would post all the with a description in Welsh and in English... all we had to do was read the attachment.' (Parent Interview, School L)

- 8.16** Concerns were raised, however, about the longer term impact of the closures on the pupils' abilities to continue with their education through the medium of Welsh.

'My main concern was about their loss of Welsh. This seems to have returned. But has opened up the question as to how far they should continue in the Welsh stream through their education.' (Parent Interview, School H)

'I am concerned that my children will not be at the expected level and will re-adjust to a Welsh speaking environment.' (Parent Survey Response, School L)

Reluctance to return to learning

- 8.17** It is worth noting that some participants shared how the school closures had affected particular learners in terms of their willingness to re-engage with their

schooling for a variety of reasons. Some were due to strategic reasons, whilst others were based on pupil or parental anxiety regarding the health and safety of returning.

‘Yn enwedig rhai o’r ffermwyr sy gyda ni o gwmpas yma. Achos bo nhw di bod adre, a pan mae nhw adre ma’ nhw’n gweithio allan ar y fferm o 5yb tan 8yh. A ma cael nhw nol mewn i weithio yn anodd. Roedden nhw’n dweud – ‘I don’t see the point of this now. I know what I’ll be doing next year, since I’ve been doing it for the last six months, and you’re now trying to make me do this.’ So, ma hynna di bod yn tough gyda’r grŵp yna. [This was particularly noted amongst some of the children of farmers that we have here. Because they had been at home for such a long time, and because they’d had to work when they were home – from 5a.m. to 8p.m. – getting them back into education was difficult. They were telling us – ‘I don’t see the point of this now. I know what I’ll be doing next year since I’ve been doing it for the last six months, and now you’re trying to make me do this.’ So, re engaging them was a tough task.] (SLT Interview, School H)

‘Ni di cael rhai sydd heb ddod mewn o gwbl oherwydd bod nhw’n anxious, a/neu le mae’r rhieni’n anxious hefyd. Ma rhai wedyn sydd yn dod mewn, ond yn struglo pryd ma nhw mewn, a ni’n disgwyl gweld lot mwy o hynna.’ [We’ve had some learners who have completely refused to come back in to school, either because they or their parents/guardians suffer from anxiety surrounding covid. Some do come in but really do struggle when they’re on campus, and we expect to see a lot more of that in the future.] (SLT Interview, School H)

- 8.18** Others, although returned to school, did not enjoy the experience and this would have an impact on a pupil’s ability to learn effectively.

‘Whilst school is essential for learning and socialising this year has been far from ideal for many. But for me keeping my son at home and shielding him from masses of change and indeed the virus itself was the right thing to do. However, since starting back in September he says daily ‘no school today’. He’s not enjoying going back. School isn’t what it was.’ (Parent Interview, School D)

Independence

- 8.19** There was evidence to suggest that the school lockdown had some positive influences on particular pupils, and this was recorded by all participant types. The inability to attend school for some children gave them the opportunity to develop their work more independently and autonomously which was regarded as a positive outcome for those pupils.

‘The children which have been identified as higher ability have continued independently with their own learning, and I think parents have pushed them into looking into this and into that [...] being more resourceful in finding the answers themselves, rather than having a teacher right on standby, is something which I’ve definitely, definitely, seen improve’ (SLT Interview, School I)

‘He is more confident and working well using his own initiative rather than relying on others to help or guide.’ (Parent Interview School I)

‘Y rhai sy’n hoff o weithio’n annibynol, yn hapus i balu ymlaen gyda’i gwaith a dilyn y cyfarwyddiadau’n rhwydd.’ [‘Those who like working independently are happy to plough on with their work and follow the instructions easily’]
(Teacher/LSA Survey Response, School L)

‘Students who are incredibly self-motivated enjoyed managing their own learning at home and they said that they got through more in one lesson than normal in some cases.’ (Teacher/LSA Survey Response, School H)

‘Learning independently became more natural.’ (Pupil Task, Year 11, School K)

‘You can work more independently and at your own pace.’ (Pupil Task, School K)

- 8.20** It was not always those who were recognised as more intelligent and self-motivated who benefitted from increased independence. There were suggestions that other, more unexpectedly, blossomed with the increased freedom.

‘Children who you may sometimes have regarded as “grey children” i.e., students who were distinctly middle of the class did extremely well. I contacted numerous parents to tell them their child was doing very well indeed. Perhaps

it was the lack of distractions or the fact they were made to be more independent or parental supports, but some children really thrived under the new working conditions.’ (Teacher/LSA Survey Response, School H)

- 8.21** However, this new-found freedom was not found to be beneficial for all. Those who felt the need for further guidance and support may not have adapted as well to the more independent nature of learning and this may well have affected younger children in particular.

‘[He] lacks confidence and needs the teacher reassurance. He did lack confidence thinking he could not manage to complete his tasks. But I put that down to the child relying on his teachers too much for support.’ (Parent Interview, School K)

‘No. She’s found the isolation from other children, lack of structure, patience and understanding tough. As a parent there is only so much, we can do and provide. The teachers have a better knowledge of what they need to work on and how to encourage them to do it. Being at home is difficult due to the distractions and the fact the home is not only their safe space but, also a place where they can wind down and relax. Trying to make this a place of learning is confusing and stressful for a 4-year-old.’ (Parent Survey Response, School A)

Motivation

- 8.22** A number of participants noted how student motivation was affected by the school closures and that, often, in a negative way. It must be noted that this was the findings of school staff and parents generally, rather than the comments of the pupils themselves. Some of the comments reflected on the general difficulties of maintaining motivation whilst working from home, with one parent (Parent Survey, School I) noting the general difficulties of motivation and concentration and expressing guilt at not completing the work. School staff also noted their perceptions of the difficulties.

‘Colli awydd.’ [Losing incentive.] (Teacher/LSA Survey Response, School K)

- 8.23** A senior leader noted the impact on a specific group of learners.

‘[Those] identified as lower achievers... might have switched off a little bit. And we are finding that there are gaps in their knowledge.’ (SLT Interview, School)

- 8.24** School staff tended to convey their views in terms of the lack of endeavour or effort on behalf of the pupils.

‘Nifer o ddysgwyr heb ymdrechu i ddysgu o adref felly wedi rhoi eu hunain dan anfantais fel yma.’ [‘A number of learners haven’t made an effort to learn from home so have put themselves at a disadvantage thus.’] (Teacher/LSA Survey Response, School H)

‘Diffyg ymroddiad ac ymdrech tuag at waith; Disgyblaeth.’ [A lack of commitment and effort towards the work; Discipline.] (Teacher/LSA Survey Response, School H)

‘Disgyblion yn Llai Paros i ymateb ag ymroi i gweithgareddau amrywiol.’ [‘Pupils less willing to respond and commit to various activities.’] (Teacher/LSA Survey Response, School L)

- 8.25** Others saw that there were external and additional factors that may be contributing to the decreasing motivation levels.

‘Colli diddordeb yn y pwnc, dygswyr yn gweld llai o ddiben yn y pwnc, anodd ennyn brwdfrydedd dysgwyr at y gwaith.’ [Losing interest in the subject, learners seeing less value in the subject, difficult to engender learners’ motivation to the work.’] (Teacher/LSA Survey Response, School H)

‘Nid ydynt wedi gwneud unrhyw fath o waith ysgol ers cyn y cyfnod clo ac oherwydd hyn y maent wedi gweld gwaith yn y dosbarth yn anoddach.’ [‘They haven’t done any kind of schoolwork since before the lockdown period and because of this they find the work in the classroom more difficult.’] (Teacher/LSA Survey Response, School L)

- 8.26** Some of the more specific factors that were identified in impacting children’s motivation were the nature of the technologies used and the interactions with parents, factors that are dealt with in more detail elsewhere in this report.

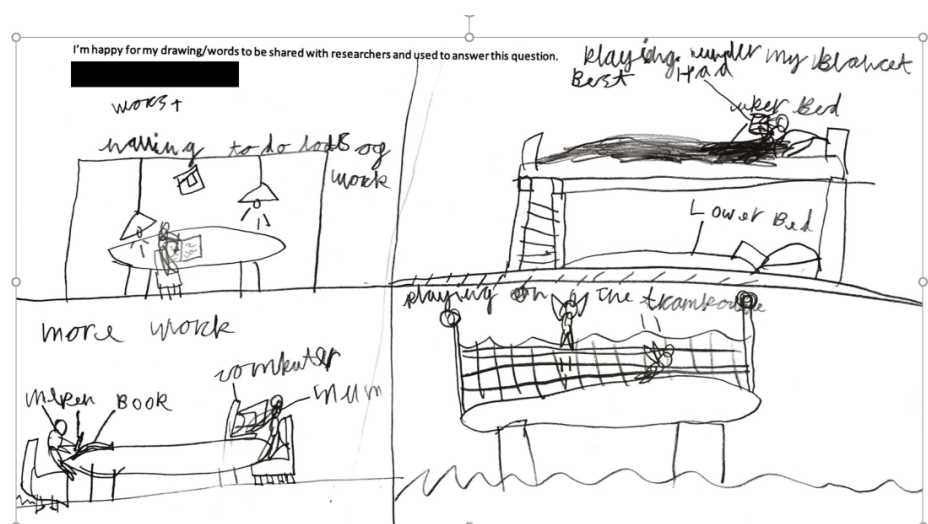
‘Some children might not have technology that would allow them to access home learning. Some children work better practically and are unable to

process the learning in a more formal way.’ (Teacher/LSA Survey Response, School A)

‘Mae fy mhlentyn wedi wir laru ar eistedd ar ben ei hun yn syllu ar gyfrifiadur yn trio cadw ei brwdfrydedd a’i hegni’n mynd tuag at ddysgu. Dwi’n meddwl fod y sefyllfa n galed iawn arni hi a bobl ifanc eraill, a’r pwysau yn drwm arnyn nhw.’ [My child is totally fed up with sitting on her own staring at a computer and trying to keep her enthusiasm and energy going towards the learning. I think the situation is very difficult for her and other young people, and the pressure is great on them.] (Parent Interview, School H)

‘She didn’t find it hard as such but is less enthusiastic doing the activities at home for her parents than she is in the school setting with her peers.’ (Parent Survey Response, School A)

Figure 8.4: Image by Learner 3, year 3, School B: ‘Best and worst things about lockdown (1): playing (best) inside and outside images // working (worst) ‘having to do lots of work’, ‘more work’ – image of child with parent on laptop, child with pen / paper.’



8.27 It was encouraging to hear that some specific activities did motivate and engage the learners in their work, with exciting consequences.

‘In the lockdown I got picked to be in a project with special needs pupils like me. I wrote a song, and it was played on the radio.’ (Pupil Task, School D)

Concentration

- 8.28** Pupils, when asked about the two worst things about learning at home due to the school closures, mentioned the difficulties in concentrating on the work when at home. They seemed to feel that there were more distractions in the home environment than in the school. A primary pupil from School I commented that ‘I can’t concentrate as well at home’ although he liked being at home and enjoyed the greater freedom there.

‘It was hard to concentrate and keep focus.’ (Pupil Task, Year 11 School J)

‘Sometimes concentration, due to pets, family etc.’ (Pupil Task, School K)

‘Struggle to pay attention and engage in the lessons.’ (Pupil Task, School K)

- 8.29** Some teachers noted the impact of this on the return to school and to online learning and the concentration and engagement in more structured lessons.

‘[loss of] ability to concentrate for long periods of time.’ (Teacher/LSA Survey Response, School H)

‘Ar y dechrau roedd diffyg canolbwyntio yn broblem gyda y rhan fwyaf o ddisgyblion yn fy nosbarth.’ [At the beginning, the lack of concentration was a problem for the majority of pupils in my class.] (Teacher/LSA Survey Response, School L)

- 8.30** But some parents felt that there could be increased concentration in the home environment or increased flexibility in order to adapt and approach learning in an alternative manner.

‘Less distracting than in school as no disruptive children causing chaos and stopping the rest of the learners who want to actually learn and not mess about.’ (Parent Interview, School J)

‘Some days are more positive than others. If I see that things aren't going well. We'll chat, have a break maybe go for a walk or play a game then come back to it.’ (Parent Survey Response, School A)

Figure 8.5: Vignette offering a snapshot of the experiences regarding learning and academic progress.

Variety in the response between siblings shows some of the difficulties faced by parents when seeking to ensure the engagement and concentration of their children with the schoolwork.

‘Our youngest child struggled with almost all of the work set by the school. Not because it was too difficult, but I think, especially at the beginning, she felt very anxious about not being in school/things being different to normal and she didn't like the boundary between school/home life being blurred. She was too young to have ever had homework, so it felt to strange for her to do work at home. She refused to engage with any school related activity for the majority of the lockdown. Our son is older and coped much better. He enjoyed doing schoolwork mostly. We also found they both had very short attention spans, perhaps due to not being in the school environment/too many distractions at home - so the shorter activities were best.’ (Parent Interview, School B)

Skills development

- 8.31** There were various perspectives found on the impact of Covid19 on skills development within children. Some identified this as a deficiency due to the closures whereas others felt that the period offered opportunities for development. Some skills identified as deficient were related to the early years where there is a significant emphasis on essential skill development whilst in young people some subject areas require a greater emphasis on curricular skills.

‘...sgiliau cullell a fforc yn wan ar ol dod nol.’ [‘...knife and fork skills were weak on their return.’] (Teacher/LSA Survey Response, School L)

‘Dirywiad yn sgilaiu darllen, mathemateg syml.’ [‘Decline in the reading and simple mathematics skills.’] (Teacher/LSA Survey Response, School K)

‘Disgyblion yn colli allan ar brofiadau ymarferol mewn pynciau ymarferol a galwadigaethol.’ [‘Pupils missing out on practical experiences in practical and vocational subjects.’] (Teacher/LSA Survey Response, School K)

‘Clear that the year 7's social skills and also self-management skills are not where a year 7 groups would be expected to be. (Teacher/LSA Survey Response, School K)

- 8.32** Parents found that there was an opportunity to emphasise skills development, showing a perspective which took them beyond the tasks set by the school.

‘[Angen] ‘gwahoddiad i’r planrt gwneud pethau offline, fel gosod project, neu gwahodd nhw i ddatblygu prosiect ei hunain, ond fod y project yn rhywbeth ddim ar cyfrifiadur. Oherwydd ma rheoli a arwain dy ddysgu dy hun yn elfen bwysig o dy ddatblygiad hefyd.’ ‘Cyffroi ynglŷn a fod yn creadigol.’ ‘[Need] an invitation for the children to do things offline, like setting a project, or inviting them to develop their own project, but that the project is not on the computer. Because controlling and leading your own learning is an important aspect of your development also.’] (Parent Interview, School H)

‘We could concentrate on practicing his pencil control and number/letter formation much more than school.’ (Parent Survey Response, School F)

‘We could get through a lot of work with 1-2-1 and also concentrate on aspects that the children were struggling with and go over those and really tailor the work. (Parent Interview, School B)

Attainment

- 8.33** There seemed to be a general consensus across participants that the pupils had not attained to the standard that would have been expected during an usual school year, and this was interpreted to have ongoing impact in terms of confidence, anxiety and disillusionment. It would appear that the school staff were aware of the limited attainment but were doing their best to manage an ever-changing situation.

‘You may be providing them ... with a pack which has extension activities, but is it really pushing them to the same level as having a teacher sat in front of them, and being able to really know that pupil and push them to a boundary that they would be able to do in school? That’s harder to do when you’re doing digital learning.’ (SLT Interview, School J)

‘[Those] identified as lower achievers... might have switched off a little bit. And we are finding that there are gaps in their knowledge. (SLT Interview, School I)

‘Pupils are, therefore, feeling quite panicked: ‘Oh my god, I’ve missed so much learning,’ and the pressure of the teacher on top of that can cause quite upset pupils...’ (SLT Interview, School J)

8.34 Other parents expressed their concerns in the survey.

‘Learns more in school than at home.’ (Parent Survey Response, School H)

‘Not progressing at the level they should be.’ (Parent Survey Response, School H)

‘Confidence when returning to a classroom setting. That he has learnt things at home in a different way to how they reach in school.’ (Parent Survey Response, School K)

‘Just treading water.’ (Parent Survey Response, School K)

‘Missed a lot of time school.’ (Parent Survey Response, School H)

8.35 Teachers expressed an awareness that pupils who did not engage in the provision available online were not attaining as well as those who had engaged.

‘Roedd bwlch i weld rhwng y plant wnaeth wneud y gwaith arlein ar rhai na wnaeth y gweithgareddau ar lein.’ [‘A gap could be seen between the children who did the online work and those who did not do the online activities.’] (Teacher/LSA Survey Response, School L)

‘Safon a gallu addysgol wedi dioddef o ran y disgyblion nad oedd yn ymrwymo i waith ar lein.’ [‘Standards and learning abilities suffered for those pupils who did not commit to online work.’] (Teacher/LSA Survey Response, School K)

8.36 Parents also showed an awareness of the limited attainment of their children and expressed concern at the longer-term impact – both in relation to their academic achievement but rather the personal and attitudinal impact on future learning and engagement.

‘I think it was basic educational ticking over. But it was not challenging the brightest pupils- her class was given maths work that was easy for her, and they had done it last year- in order to keep the children who needed more help on the same basic page. On the other hand, there seems to be huge gaps in her science knowledge, and a total gap where experiments and field trips

should have been. She thought her science teacher in year 8 was brilliant, and he'd really inspired her- looking towards A grades- but now she is not bothered about it at all.' (Parent Interview, School K)

'I've been able to see where my eldest daughter needed help. Obviously, there are things in school where they're not noticing children so much. And where children are struggling, the teachers can't see everybody. And I think that this twelve months out of that education will make that even worse... There'll be a whole now where they won't be able to see what how that child child has progressed and what he needs to learn and if they're failing in any way. I think it's going to be a tough job to get kids back to where they need to be, really, and to get to know a child again and get to know how this 12 months has affected them and to know the help they need for them to learn properly again.' (Parent Interview, School J)

'I worry that my daughter is going to have more anxiety when it comes to learning. She already suffers with low self-confidence and panics when she's struggling, that the fact her safe environment is now also an environment of stress is not helping her confidence. This impacts on her will to learn. I also worry that due to her being 4 that she is missing out on vital developmental years of learning that consequently will cause delays in the following years to come of learning disadvantaging her opportunity for a full, fair education.'

(Parent Survey Response, School A)

Extra-curricular learning

- 8.37** One of the positive aspects identified by participants regarding the closure of schools was that children, along with their families were able to engage in extra-curricular learning, sometimes instead of formal learning and at other times in addition to school learning. This extra-curricular learning varied from school to school and from family to family, but for some children, they became involved with the family business or supporting the family in other ways, sometimes to the detriment of their schoolwork. However, some parents saw this as a strong opportunity to develop those practical employability skills which would stand them in

good stead in the future. On occasion, the lockdown brought these matters into a clearer focus for schools.

‘Efallai bod nhw’n gweithio’n OK yn yr ysgol, ond wedyn pryd ma nhw’n mynd adre y disgwyl ydy iddyn nhw weithio ar y fferm neu bod yn rhaid iddyn nhw edrych ar ôl plant. Ma pethau fel na’n dod mewn i’r peth. A ti jest yn ffeindio’r pethau ‘ma allan pryd ma ddisgwyl i weithio trwy dydd ar y we adref, a ma rhaid gofyn ‘pam dwyt ti ddim yna’ a ‘beth yw’r broblem?’ A dim ond wedyn wyt ti’n clywed nhw’n dweud fod rhaid iddyn nhw neud hyn, hyn a hyn.’ [‘They may be working ok in the school, but then, when they go home the expectation is for them to work on the farm or that they have to look after children. Things like that come into it. And you just find out these things when they’re expected to work online all day at home, and you have to ask, ‘why are you not there’ and ‘what is the problem?’ And only then you hear that they have to do this, this and this.’ (SLT Interview, School H)

- 8.38** Some identified that the skills were ones that the children enjoyed and that the parents saw benefits.

‘The farming children who don’t like school loved working on the farm at home. (Teacher/LSA Survey Response, School H)

‘Learnt lot of new practical skills, tractor driving, chopping wood, erecting a wall.’ (Teacher/LSA Survey Response, School H)

- 8.39** Some took advantage of the less structured time to allow their children to develop an entrepreneurial spirit with a strong sense of self improvement, and the benefits of gaining of additional experiences and skills which could serve them well in the future.

‘He set up a fudge making business. Did the costings, sourced, and purchased the ingredients, completed a level 2 online food hygiene course (at his own cost). Found local retailers who was happy to sell on his behalf for a small commission. He made three deliveries in the weeks coming up to Christmas and doubled his initial outlay.’ (Parent Interview, School J)

8.40 Other pupils were noted to have developed practical life skills which were recognised as such by the pupils themselves. Cooking and gardening, generally, seem to be the most popular of those efforts at enriching learners' experiences during lockdown with, again, an emphasis on practical education.

'Being able to learn life skills.' (Pupil Task, School J)

'Doing extra learning activities like baking and painting.' (Pupil Task, Year 1, School I)

'Cooking and Reading.' (Pupil Task, Year 6, School K)

'Plant wedi gallu dysgu sgiliau newydd ni fyddai amser i wneud fel arfer megis coginio, garddio. Hefyd mwy o amser teulu ac yn yr awyr agored.' ['Children have been able to learn new skills that there would not usually be time to do such as cooking, gardening. Also, more family time and in the open air.'
(Parent Survey Response, School K)

'Allowed us more time to learn more practical "life" lessons such as bike riding and shoelace tying.' (Parent Survey Response, School B)

'Positives were that my child spent quality time with her baby brother and gave her more chance of independent learning.' (Parent Survey Response, School B)

8.41 The local environment and the outdoors became a clear focus for extra-curricular learning for many families who seemed to relish the time afforded by the school closures and the flexibility of the curriculum demands to explore the local area, become increasingly aware of nature around them as well as local heritage. It would seem that those ad hoc opportunities offered to learners proved to be a common theme and aimed towards educating and informing learners.

'Time to explore the countryside around us.' (Parent Survey Response, School I)

'Learnt more about local animals, history etc.' (Parent Survey Response, School L)

'Bird feeding and watching.' (Parent Survey Response, School K)

'Learning about tadpoles-frog.' (Parent Survey Response, School H)

‘Did outside learning with chalks on the patio slabs for spellings and drawings as well as cooking and models building like Lego and junk modelling. We also read a lot of books and magazines and did craft together.’ (Parent Interview, School I)

‘Llawer wedi mwynhau bod yr holl deulu adref gyad’i gilydd. Ymarfer corff a cherdded wedi cynnyddu ffitrwydd disgyblion. Llawer wedi dangos diddordeb mewn byd natur - gweithgareddau garddio a thyfu planhigion wedi bod yn weithgaredd poblogaidd. Dealltwriaeth disgyblion o’i cynefin a’u hardal wedi datblygu hefyd. [‘Many enjoyed that the whole family was home to each other. Exercise and walking have increased pupils’ fitness. Many have shown an interest in nature - gardening and growing plant activities have been a popular activity. Pupils’ understanding of their habitat and area has also developed.’] (Teacher/LSA Survey Response, School K)

‘They helped each other more, worked together more and became closer as brothers. They were able to pace their work to their abilities doing some faster and some slower than would be allowed in class. If they struggled with too much energy to sit and concentrate, they could do something physical, explore the local woodland and then come back to it.’ (Parent Interview, School B)

- 8.42** Some of the extra-curricular activities and learning that was identified was not necessarily new or additional activities but the flexibility of time allowed children and parents to commit more time to activities that they had already an interest in. The further development of musical skills seemed to have been a popular activity.

‘Spending more time on the subjects I prefer like music.’ (Pupil Task, Year 6, School K)

‘I got to spend more time playing piano.’ (Pupil Task, Year 2, School L)

‘Plays piano and he played a lot more and he created his own music’ (Parent Survey Response, School H)

‘Spending more time on music.’ (Parent Survey Response, School L)

‘We got a little bit more freedom to do what we wanted to. For me, personally, that means he spends a lot of time playing music. I taught him how to play the piano and he's getting online violin lessons that are provided through the

school that the county provides. So, he's had a lot of, you know, music practise and lessons that he otherwise just wouldn't have had time for after having come home from a full day at school. We wouldn't ask him to do it because he'd be, usually, too tired. So, you know, there's that benefit.' (Parent Interview, School L)

8.43 The provision seems to vary with the abilities of parents.

'Spending more time with my family drawing with mum.' (Pupil Task, School K)

'DIY...Stop motion.' (Parent Survey Response, School H)

'Getting a license for flying a drone.' (Parent Survey Response, School J)

'Mae'r plant wedi cymryd rhan mewn dysgu rhai sgiliau newydd ar lein fel creu podlediad. A mae mab wedi bod yn dysgu chwarae gitâr a'r you tube. Rwyf yn annog fy mhlant i fynd allan i gael awyr iach a ymarfer corff. Er mwyn cadw n iach n feddylol a chorfforol.' ['The children have been involved in learning some new skills online such as creating a podcast. And a son has been learning to play guitar and the you tube. I encourage my children to go out for fresh air and exercise. To stay mentally and physically healthy.'](Parent Interview, School K)

8.44 Some degree of worth and value was attributed to most extra-curricular tasks by parents even where they seemed of a less academic nature.

'Played a lot of online games, though to be fair these have helped him develop excellent communication skills and he converses with young people from lots of different countries. This has expanded his awareness of similarities and differences in cultural approaches to life and the pandemic.' (Parent Interview Response, School H)

'We've been on walks, played a lot on the Switch (helping her English comprehension - she's in the Welsh stream at school) ... I will admit its mostly been playing different games on the Switch, so Animal Crossing, Mario Party 8 (lots of hand eye coordination stuff), old SNES games on the emulator, Just Dance.' (Parent Interview Response, School K)

- 8.45** The opportunity to use the time to enrich the lives of others was notable in some participants' comments. This would have provided personal development as well as a sense of satisfaction and personal achievement.

'Penderfynodd fy mhlentyn gychwyn prosiect i godi arian i elusen a roedd hyn yn rywbeth cadarnhaol iawn a wnaeth ei chysylltu hefo'r gymuned. Cododd dros £1,000 o bunnoedd at argyfwng Yemen - rhywbeth oedd wedi bod yn ei phoeni hi - a dwi'n credu roedd hyn yn dda i'w lles hi. Fel teulu roedden ni'n ei chefnogi gyda'r prosiect a roedd hyn yn beth positif iawn iddi hi ac i ni.' ['My child decided to start a project to raise money for charity and this was something very positive that connected her with the community. She raised over £1,000 pounds for the Yemen crisis - something that had been worrying her - and I think this was good for her well-being. As a family we supported her with the project, and this was a very positive thing for her and for us.'] (Parent Interview Response, School H)

'Writing letter to the care homes and family, making cards for the NHS loads.' (Parent Interview Response, School H)

'Picking up litter from the around the village.' (Parent Interview Response, School L)

Summary

- 8.46** The pandemic highlighted the social implications of education. The importance of such social interactions with each other, with their practitioners were particularly noted in response to the loss of those natural opportunities offered within a school setting.
- 8.47** The social routines of school life were also increasingly appreciated after their loss. They allowed learners to structure their learning and other activities. The importance of such a routine was particularly noted for children with additional needs of various kinds.
- 8.48** The closure of schools for an extended period, and the location of their education within the home, and amongst numerous distractions, had disrupted children's routines and, additionally, in some cases, their engagement with education.

- 8.49** Some pupils flourished with an increased sense of independence, yet others had clearly fallen behind and lost their sense of motivation and concentration, but this was not a consistent picture across all learners.
- 8.50** Some students were noted for their lack of practical, curricular skills development where personal engagement with resources is required.
- 8.51** The role of parents in supporting the educational engagement of their children were also noted. In particular, the pressure of their employability, a decreased appreciation of education's worth, particularly in the form it took during the pandemic, and anxiety were noted as being particularly detrimental to their support of their children.
- 8.52** There was a clear divergence in parental engagement. For those learners who received clear support, the benefits where additional time had been allocated by parents to the pursual of increased extra-curricular learning was clear, and generally regarded as beneficial.
- 8.53** The importance of supporting parents whose main language was not the language of the education for their children was noted as an issue. The need to improve provision for these parents/guardians was noted, as there was a strong sense of frustration to be sensed at their inability to support their children with such tasks. The issue had certainly been brought into clearer focus as a result of the pandemic.
- 8.54** As a result, there was an understanding that the academic attainment and curricular progression of pupils were not on their usual trajectory, but the online provision of schools did benefit those who engaged.

9. Main findings

- 9.1** The findings are caveated in relation to the limitations of data capture and representativeness identified above (see section 2.30 – 2.36).

Introduction

- 9.2** This study sought to consider primarily the experiences of learners across Wales, in both Welsh and English medium educational contexts, in the period of school closures and reopening due to Covid-19. The changing nature of the pandemic, and varying responses over time, mean that the nature of the project has increased to consider the variable responses of stakeholders to changing, and changeable experiences. The broadening of our focus to consider the varying nature of disadvantage experienced by learners during such a period of flux has, in our opinion, only enriched the research. The data clearly identifies a diversity of experiences for learners which, due to the ever-changing context of the pandemic and its subsequent effect on schooling, created a variety of disadvantages for all, with varying challenges increasingly being brought into focus across the temporal breadth of the study's focus.
- 9.3** Despite differing disadvantages being highlighted at different points along our period of study, it is worth noting that the disadvantages identified were rarely new. Rather, the pandemic and its consequences were clearly responsible for bringing those pre-existing disadvantages to a clearer focus in the minds of those stakeholders with whom we engaged.
- 9.4** It would be no exaggeration to note that all students were, to a degree, disadvantaged by the pandemic. Common place events which would have disadvantaged learners in normal circumstances were considered by many stakeholders to be disproportionately more significant during the age of Covid. The implications of the disadvantage were substantially exacerbated in the case of some learners, however for a few learners the pandemic created conditions reported to be beneficial.
- 9.5** Covid-19, and its impact on educational provision, can be noted to have highlighted examples of disadvantage which may well have proven marginal, and of little importance to the educational provision of learners in the near past. Specifically the

significance, highlighted time after time, of the technological requirements for learners, and the associated economic implications of these, were wholly transformed for many stakeholders as a result of the pandemic.

9.6 The main implications of the strategies adopted for the educational provision of learners within the 12 educational institutions included in the research project will be considered below in regard to six key themes. The themes represented:

- Access to technology
- Home learning environment
- School provision
- The availability of specialist support services.
- Mental health and well-being
- Learning and academic progress

9.7 The implications to each of the key themes are highlighted below.

Access to technology

9.8 The use of technology to access education provision during the closure of school sites became the norm. Provision in this area progressed developmentally as stakeholders adapted, investigated, and innovated with various forms of provision. This required a steep learning curve for all involved, yet participants noted, consistently, a readiness to adapt. As the lockdowns progressed, it appeared that individual school provision developed in regard to sophistication and effectiveness. A range of participants recorded that the technological skills and abilities of all stakeholders developed over the period of study, and that both schools and homes were increasingly able to utilise those technologies more effectively in the provision of learning opportunities to pupils. Additionally, pupils, generally, exhibited a resilience to adaptability to the forms of learning offered.

9.9 The inequity of access to technological hardware and broadband capability to allow engagement with learning software and/or school resources were repeatedly reported as significant barriers for some learners.

Home learning environment

- 9.10** The nature of support within the home was highlighted as a key consideration in regard to the educational wellbeing of learners during the pandemic. The importance of parental preparedness to adopt the new expectations placed upon them, both as educational facilitators, and educational supporters, were highlighted as part of the data. The benefits of a willingness and preparedness by parents to support their children were noted. Yet, levels of support were not uniform, and some learners' increasing disassociation from education was noted as a result of decreased levels of support within the home. Factors which contributed to curbing the levels of parental support included work commitments and a sense, which was not sustained across the board, that some parents felt ill prepared as a result of a sense of lack of support for undertaking their new roles as educators and educational supporters. Individual circumstances were highlighted as being particularly significant, and the importance of proactive and tailored support by schools were noted.
- 9.11** Additionally, and despite the best efforts of schools, some parents felt that they were not adequately furnished with the necessary resources which were required for the maintenance of learners and their educational well-being at home, both in terms of technology in some select cases, and with regard to additional educationally supportive resources. The requirement for schools to ensure uniform access to all such resources, and to ensure an awareness on the part of parents of the availability of such support, was highlighted.

School provision

- 9.12** Stakeholders' responses to schools' provision of learning experiences and resources during the lockdown period were mixed. Many parents were happy with the quality and frequency of provision, in addition to the range of innovation, and the introduction of new, technology-based skills. Yet, some parents expressed concern about the provision of what they perceived to be resources that were inferior in quality to those that had been normally offered. Concerns were additionally expressed by some about the impact of this form of provision on pupils' long-term academic progress. Provision varied from school to school, but undoubtedly could

show a great amount of innovation. Parents particularly welcomed the use of digital resources and learning experiences, as well as physical, hard copies as learning materials during the lockdown period, but schools found the production and distribution of physical, hard copies of learning materials to be expensive. The level of pastoral support for pupils and families / carers were also found to vary in regard to need. Yet, all schools undertook to support vulnerable children and families, or pupils and families/carers who had become vulnerable due to the conditions imposed by the lockdowns. Strategies varied, yet the cooperative approach within and between schools, the local authority, and social services in identifying these pupils and parents were particularly noted.

The availability of specialist support services

- 9.13** Many schools, particularly (but not exclusively) those with high proportions of learners with ALN found the period between lockdowns, when the children had returned to school, to be particularly challenging. The combination of having to manage pupils within 'bubbles' and having to deny access to pupils' routines and spaces due to restrictions associated with the pandemic caused difficulties for school leaders, teachers and learning support staff, and, more particularly for learners. These were seen to be exacerbated by difficulties in accessing the types of specialist support services that may have alleviated conditions for the learners. The cooperation between the local authority, social services and schools was considered to be very important during the lockdown period. These agencies generally succeeded in identifying pupils and their families' / carers' needs, and responded to provide support for pupils and their families / carers. Schools and educational practitioners were particularly noted for their role in identifying pupils that may have benefitted from attending Hub schools. Yet, the absence of specialist support services for pupils, particularly those with ALN, may have a long term and detrimental effect on individual pupils' progress in some cases.

Mental health and well-being

- 9.14** The support, routine, play, opportunities for social interaction and leadership on learning offered by schools was highlighted as important in supporting learners'

mental health and well-being by numerous stakeholders. The importance of such as pre-requisite for effective learner progress and achievement must be appreciated. The extent of the work undertaken by schools in supporting learners' mental health and well-being during the pandemic should not be underestimated and presented a significant challenge to already busy professionals who negotiated a breakneck transition to learning from afar in addition to having to formulate numerous strategies to offer increasingly pertinent well-being provision in association with the ever changing situation. School and staff understanding of learners' home circumstances, and its impact on mental health and well-being, was increasingly appreciated as key to supporting effective learning. The importance of such knowledge should, therefore, be increasingly, and routinely, explored during ITE. Numerous strategies were adopted in the safeguarding of learners' mental health and well-being, in addition to the well-being of those parents and guardians who were tasked, increasingly, with the provision of home-schooling. These strategies were, in the most part, well received, yet the provision was found to be lacking in some cases, and to be, generally, reactionary in nature. Additionally, parents, seem to have gained a new/deepened appreciation of the work undertaken by teachers and teaching staff as a result of their first-hand experiences of what home-schooling entailed.

Learning and academic progress

- 9.15** The pandemic highlighted the social implications of education. The importance of such social interactions and the social routines of school life were noted by numerous stakeholders. The importance of such a routine was particularly noted for children with additional needs of various kinds. The closure of schools for an extended period, and the location of their education within the home, and amongst numerous distractions, disrupted children's routines and, additionally, in some cases, their engagement with education. Some, therefore, clearly fall behind and lost their sense of motivation and concentration. Yet, some pupils flourished with an increased sense of independence.
- 9.16** The role of parents in supporting the educational engagement of their children were also noted. In particular, the pressure of their employability, a decreased

appreciation of education's worth, particularly in the form it took during the pandemic, and anxiety were noted as being particularly detrimental to their support of their children. For those learners who received clear support, the benefits where additional time had been allocated by parents to the pursual of increased extra-curricular learning was clear, and generally regarded as beneficial. The importance of supporting parents whose main language was not the language of the education for their children was noted as an issue. The need to improve provision for these parents/guardians was noted, as there was a strong sense of frustration to be sensed at their inability to support their children with such tasks. The issue had certainly been brought into clearer focus as a result of the pandemic.

10. Recommendations

10.1 The recommendations arising from the research project will be considered in regard to six key themes:

- Access to technology
- Home learning environment
- School provision
- The availability of specialist support services.
- Mental health and well-being
- Learning and academic progress

10.2 The recommendations should be considered pertinent across the board, and should be considered by all stakeholders. Yet, we have attempted to highlight the increased significance of some of our recommendations to certain key stakeholders.

10.3 They are colour coded as follows:

School level action	
Local authority / regional consortia	
Welsh government	
Applicable to all // system-level	

Access to technology

10.4 The education system should recognise and seek to preserve and extend the learning about remote provision that has been generated during the pandemic. What has been learnt about remote provision may offer alternative and additional learning opportunities in the future, even when full time attendance within the traditional school setting is possible.

10.5 If online / home-based learning is to continue, in any form or for any reason then issues of inequitable access to technology, support and experience, must be addressed across the system.

- 10.6** Assumptions on the availability of hardware, technical knowledge or connectivity in the home learning environment should never be made. Consideration should be given by schools to the availability of technological resources as well as general resources when evaluating what is available to support remote learning. Sensitivity is needed by schools when working with parents/carers in this regard, and training in the use of relevant hardware and software provided to parents/carers.
- 10.7** Practitioners' confidence and skills in using new educational approaches and technology, developed as a response to the restrictions created by the pandemic, should be maintained and further developed, and deemed essential pedagogical skills. These considerations must also be incorporated into ITE, so all teachers are confident in pedagogical approaches for online delivery.

Home learning environment

- 10.8** Building good home-school relationships should be central to the role of a school within its community. Parental engagement is important in a child's education, but essential during a pandemic. When home learning is being undertaken, parents should be provided with clear, understandable guidance for tasks that require adult support.
- 10.9** Where children learn through the medium of Welsh, support and guidance should be offered to non-Welsh speaking parents so they can support their children's learning, including the provision of guidance notes through the medium of English, and identification of accessible online resources (see also the report: *Accessing Welsh during the Covid-19 pandemic: challenges and support for non-Welsh-speaking households*).
- 10.10** During periods of absence or school closure online 'live' lessons should be recorded and made available to learners to access later if they were unable to join the live lesson.
- 10.11** Many parents noted that learners with autism and additional communicational and behavioural disorders did not comprehend the new role of the home in the provision of education. Targeted and tailored provision should be considered to support such learners.

10.12 Equitable access to education at home should be a cornerstone for future provision. Access to educational essentials should be considered at the beginning of any future lockdown, including papers, pens, colouring pencils, especially for primary aged learners.

School provision

10.13 The opportunities provided by blended learning should be considered alongside a return to more traditional approaches in the post-pandemic period, especially to cater for learners who cannot regularly access school for any reason.

10.14 Mechanisms and safeguards should be devised and put into place, in the event of further or new disruptions to provision, that offer continuity of provision for those pupils transitioning between educational phases, and undertaking or working towards formal assessments, as a matter of priority.

10.15 The role of schools as centres for targeted intervention and support (as demonstrated by the roles played by schools in providing support as Hub schools for vulnerable and disadvantaged pupils during the lockdown periods) should be researched further and considered as a model for future provision and development.

10.16 The financial cost of the schools' responses to the pandemic in the form of alternative provision should be considered and researched further by WG. Planning for future provision, including emergencies that necessitate the closure of schools or disruptions to learning, should take the cost of the resourcing of alternate approaches into account.

The availability of specialist support services

10.17 The cooperation between the local authority, social services and schools in catering for learners with specific ALN, and/or learners whose families experienced significant challenges should be maintained, and budgeted for, in post-pandemic planning and for any future lockdown to ensure families are well supported throughout.

- 10.18** The types of successful practices and cooperation between schools and specialist support services reported by some respondents in the study should be researched further and used as the basis for discussions about future provision.
- 10.19** Plans should be made for alternative forms of provision for those services that rely on close contact with, or proximity to, the child (e.g. physiotherapy and occupational therapy) in the event of future disruptions or school closures.
- 10.20** Planning for future provision in the event of further disruption should include coordination with the Designated Education Clinical Lead Officer (DECLO) and other key professionals for those children who have vulnerabilities related to health and physical conditions.

Mental health and well-being

- 10.21** The extent of the work undertaken by schools in supporting learners' mental health and well-being during the pandemic should not be underestimated. When considering approaches to online learning, the importance of the support, routine, opportunities for social interaction and play, and leadership on learning, offered by schools for learners' mental health and well-being should be recognised
- 10.22** Schools should build on closer home-school relationships, resulting from the pandemic in the support of learners. Schools should be aware of the importance of parental well-being to ensuring the associated well-being of their children and create welcoming inclusive home-school relationships. A clear access point should be highlighted to parents who may struggle with their provision for their children, especially during periods of lockdown.
- 10.23** Schools should evaluate their provision for monitoring the well-being of learners while not at school in the event of future disruption. A particularly valued strategy consisted of live, on camera, registration or wellbeing sessions. However, schools must be equipped with additional support staff to ensure the well-being and engagement of their learners when learning remotely; teaching staff cannot be responsible for contacting learners individually.
- 10.24** Recognition should be given to the fact that not every learner thrives in large group setting. Some children find the school environment challenging and some learners

may have benefited from time away from peers, more family time, and less distraction at home. The value of blended approaches for particular learners, moving forward, should therefore be considered by schools and in ITE.

Learning and academic progress

- 10.25** In an online learning environment, every effort must be made to ensure that learners have access to social interactions with each other, with their practitioners and with the social routines that enable them to structure their learning and other activities. This is particularly true for children who have additional needs of various kinds.
- 10.26** Increased support should be offered to parents/carers whose main language is not the language of education for their children during periods of remote learning at home.
- 10.27** Further research should consider what strategies are effective in achieving learner engagement in online learning for those learners who were disengaged during the pandemic.
- 10.28** The value of additional time, generated by the lockdowns, for increased extra-curricular, informal and out-of-school learning should be recognised.

Overarching implications for future ITE provision

- 10.29** A number of developments which have been instigated as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic have spurred the development of educational provision in Wales. In appreciating this, we note a series of overarching implications for the future of ITE provision in addition to those already noted in the previous recommendations. They are:
- 10.30** All teachers must be taught to be increasingly aware of the impact and influence of the home learning environment, which may include disadvantage that is not readily known, has on the educational well-being and attainment of learners.
- 10.31** The significant impact of appropriate time to engage with learning and suitable space to participate in educational activities must be appreciated by future teachers

in terms of the home and school learning environment and should be considered as part of their ITE provision.

- 10.32** ITE provision must equip future teachers with the necessary guidance, knowledge, and skills for effective online, distance and blended pedagogy as an integral part of their training, rather than a peripheral aspect. The practices of teachers and schools that were found to be beneficial for learners in this study should be made available as exemplars for ITE students as part of their provision.
- 10.33** ITE must ensure that all future teachers have a sound understanding of the ALN code, and the implications of ALN and specific educational needs on the educational progression and general well-being of pupils and thus be well equipped to address those needs.

Appendix

Parent /carer questionnaire:

About this survey:

This survey forms part of a study that explores the impact of the Covid-19 school closures on learners. The aim is to understand the disadvantages and advantages for learners as experienced by different people in the school community. It is part of a Welsh Government-funded national project.

Why have I been asked to take part?

You have been asked to take part because your child/children attend [Name of School], and the school has agreed to participate in the study.

How will I be involved if I take part?

You will be invited to complete an online questionnaire. This should take you about 20 minutes to complete.

The decision to participate is entirely your own and will not impact on your relationships within the school or anyone else. You do not need to provide a reason if you choose not to take part.

If you decide to take part you can stop at any time, without giving a reason. Once you submit the survey however, we cannot remove your responses because they are anonymous.

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

Yes. The questionnaire is anonymously submitted, if you identify yourself we will remove this information before data analysis and reporting. Please note that if evidence of wrongdoing or potential harm is uncovered, the University may have to contact relevant statutory bodies/agencies.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The study will help us understand more about the impact of school closures on learners and learning at schools in Wales. We hope that this will help to improve approaches towards future situations involving similar interruptions. As well as report our findings to Welsh Government the researchers may also use the anonymous data to write reports and journal article(s).

Who is organising and funding the research?

This research has been funded by the Welsh Government. This project has been considered and approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the [Name of University].

Contact for further information:

If you want to know more about this research project, you can contact [Name of main contact and email address].

Please indicate one of the below:

I have read the information about the study and am happy to take part in the survey YES/NO

NO: Thank you for taking the time to read about this project.

YES: Thank you for agreeing to participate in the survey. Firstly we will ask about you and your children and then about their learning during school closures.

Please provide some Information about you and the child/ren you have at [NAME OF SCHOOL]:

What is your age bracket? DROP DOWN MENU

- 16-20

- 21-30
- 31-40
- 41-50
- 51-60
- 60+
- prefer not to say

What is your relationship to your children in the school? DROP DOWN MENU

- Carer/guardian
- Parent
- Other (please state OPEN TEXT)

Please complete the below for each child you have in the school:

Child ONE

Year group at school: DROP DOWN MENU

- N/R
- Y1
- Y2
- Y3
- Y4
- Y5
- Y6
- Y7
- Y8

- Y9
- Y10
- Y11
- Y12
- Y13

Gender: DROP DOWN MENU

- female
- male
- other
- prefer not to say

Does this child have any additional learning needs?

- YES If yes OPEN TEXT, please briefly explain the nature of this additional need
- NO

Child TWO

- Repeat as above

Child THREE

- Repeat as above

Child FOUR

- Repeat as above

5. Was there anything about the tasks set by the school that your child/ren really didn't like or found difficult? Which tasks? Why do you think that was? OPEN TEXT

6. Were there any positives, or benefits, experienced by your children, or other learners, during the school closure period? Can you give examples? OPEN TEXT

7. As parents/carers, what did you think of the learning your child/ren did during the Covid-19 school closure period? OPEN TEXT

8. Do you have any concerns about your child/ren and their learning in the coming months due to the school closures? If so, what are these concerns? OPEN TEXT

9. Do you think the school closure caused by Covid-19 had the same impact on all learners in the school? If not, what differences are you aware of? OPEN TEXT

10. Do you think that supporting learning at home during the school closures was easier to manage for some families than for others? Please explain your answer. OPEN TEXT

We would like to undertake some follow up telephone/online interviews with parents/carers. If you are happy for us to contact you to take part in a follow up telephone/online interview please leave your name and either email or telephone number. This information will not be used for any other purpose. OPEN TEXT

Thank you for taking part in this survey.

SUBMIT

Teacher/Learning support staff Questionnaire

About this survey:

This survey forms part of a study that aims to capture, from the perspective of the school community, the impact of the Covid-19 school closures on learners. The aim is to understand the disadvantages and advantages for learners as experienced by different people in this community. It is part of a Welsh Government-funded national collaborative project that also considers what we can learn for Initial Teacher Education (ITE).

Why have I been asked to take part?

You have been asked to take part as a member of staff in one of the [Name of Partnership] schools that have agreed to participate in the study.

How will I be involved if I take part?

You will be invited to complete an online questionnaire. This should take you about 20 minutes to complete. The decision to participate is entirely your own and will not impact on your professional relationships within the [Name of Partnership] or anyone else in the organisation.

It is your decision and yours alone as to whether or not you take part; you do not need to provide a reason if you choose not to take part. If you decide to take part you remain free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason. Once you submit the survey however, we cannot retract your data since the responses are anonymous.

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

Yes. The questionnaire is anonymously submitted and any identifiers included in your responses will be anonymised prior to data analysis and reporting. Please note that assurances on confidentiality will be strictly adhered to unless evidence of wrongdoing or potential harm is uncovered. In such cases the University may be obliged to contact relevant statutory bodies/agencies.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The study will help us to gain a better idea about the impact of the interruption to normal teaching and learning practices at schools in Wales, caused by the school closures. The data gathered may help to improve approaches towards future situations involving similar interruptions. The data gathered will also be used to inform and enhance provision on Initial Teacher Education programmes, on issues such as school responses to emergency situations and the use of blended learning to support learners' progress.

In addition to informing the Welsh Government-funded study into the impact of the school closures on learners, the anonymised data may also be used as the basis for an academic journal article(s) or other publication.

Who is organising and funding the research?

This research has been funded by the Welsh Government. This project has been considered and approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the [Name of University].

Contact for further information:

If you want to know more about this research project, you can contact [Name of main contact and email address].

Please indicate one of the below:

I have read the information about the study and am happy to take part in the survey YES/NO

NO: Thank you for taking the time to read about this project.

YES: Thank you for agreeing to participate in the survey. Firstly we will ask about your role in school and then we ask you to write about your thoughts about your learners, and the Covid-19 school closures.

Please provide some Information about yourself and your role in your school:

What is your role? DROP DOWN MENU, chose one

- Senior leadership team
- Teacher
- Support staff

Do you have an additional role or responsibility within the school? If so, please describe it briefly OPEN TEXT

What are your main teaching responsibilities? DROP DOWN MENU, chose one

- Class teacher (if yes, then drop down menu, N/R/Y1/Y2/Y3/Y4/Y5/Y6/ Y7-9/Y10-11 tick all that apply)
- Subject teacher (if yes then drop down menu, choose your main curricular subject/ other)
- Supporting learners with ALN (if yes then OPEN TEXT: with which learners/groups of learners do you primarily work?)
- Other OPEN TEXT please state

What gender do you identify as? DROP DOWN MENU

- Female
- Male
- Other
- Prefer not to say

What is your age bracket? DROP DOWN MENU

- 16-20
- 21-30
- 31-40

- 41-50
- 51-60
- 60+
- prefer not to say

The following questions are about the school closures caused by Covid-19 between March and July 2020, and the impact these closures had on learners in your school.

1. Think about the range of learners in your school, and how your school identifies learners that may be disadvantaged. What is the nature of disadvantage(s) that learners in your school experience? OPEN TEXT
2. Do you think that the Covid-19 school closures created new types of 'disadvantage' for specific learners? Please explain your answer. OPEN TEXT
3. Think about how the Covid-19 school closure affected your learners. What are the three most significant impacts of the closures? OPEN TEXT
4. National surveys claim school closure has had different impacts on different groups of learners. In your experience, which groups of learners have been most impacted by the closures? OPEN TEXT
5. In what ways have the learners you mentioned in Q4 been impacted? OPEN TEXT
6. During the School closure period, what seemed to work well for those learners considered to be disadvantaged, and why? OPEN TEXT

7. Were there any benefits experienced by learners in general, or by specific groups of learners, during the school closure period? Can you give examples? How did they benefit? OPEN TEXT

8. Do you think that supporting learning at home during the school closures was easier to manage for some families than for others? Please explain your answer. OPEN TEXT

9. Are there any ongoing concerns and challenges for learners in your school? Are there any groups of learners for whom ongoing challenges are greater? Which groups and why? OPEN TEXT

10. How do you hope to address any ongoing concerns and challenges for learners in the coming months? OPEN TEXT

We would like to undertake some follow up group conversations, these will be held online. If you are happy for us to contact you to take part in a follow up group conversations please leave your name and either email or telephone number. This information will not be used for any other purpose. OPEN TEXT

Thank you for taking part in this survey.

SUBMIT

SLT Semi Structured Interview:

45 mins to an hour maximum interview

Pre-interview information required: **email in advance**

- NoR
- Language category
- %ALN
- %eFMS
- %ethnic minority category children
- Languages used and spoken at home
- Number of teaching staff
- Number of support teaching staff
- Was the school a hub school during the closure period

Warm up question:

- Tell us about your school, general demographic and character/ethos.

1. How have school closures caused by Covid-19 affected learners?

- Look for general statements that will summarise the experiences **of the school as a whole**. There will be opportunity to talk about individual groups later in the interview
- Generally, how did the school, as a community, respond to the school closures?
 - Ask to consider how the school had to react **as an organisation**, and whether it was felt that the school was doing anything that was very different to what it had been doing previously.
 - Getting at the community response to the challenges/ might get at emotional response.
 - (e.g. pull together, quite divisive)

2. Have the school closures caused by Covid-19 had the same impact on all learners in the school? If not, what differences are you aware of?

- Ask to consider the kinds of issues that the school had to think about when prioritising provision, eg different provision for older groups, or for those who were facing (at the time) formal examination or assessments, difficulties in communicating tasks for younger pupils (not so easily summarised in a worksheet), etc.
- Ask to consider whether some groups were more able to access the kind of provision that was offered during the school closures, in comparison to other groups.

3. Can you give some examples of the different experiences of groups of learners?

- How did this affect these groups differently? Are there specific reasons?
- Eg 1
- Eg 2

4. How are 'disadvantaged learners' identified within the school's systems? Did this change during the lockdown period? If so, in what ways?

- School definition of 'disadvantaged learners' **before** the school closures?
- Was the term regularly used to describe the situation of specific pupils?
- Can these individuals be classified within a disadvantaged group, or are they too individual for collective / group classification?
- Did the way that the school defines 'disadvantaged learners' change during this period? (because of the new set of conditions) – ie did a new set of disadvantaged learners emerge because of lockdown, or were they the same group?

5. Do you think that Covid-19 and the school closures created new types of 'disadvantage' for specific learners? Can you explain why?

- Who was worst affected by the school closures?

- Did the experiences of the original group of disadvantaged learners become worse during this period?
- Did the conditions caused by the school closures mean that these groups or individuals seen as disadvantaged, become more disadvantaged?
- If so, how / why?
- Was it dependent on the nature of the disadvantage in the first place, eg families facing economic struggles, made worse by the assumption that all children have access to a device, and made more challenging for larger families where devices (if any) would need to be shared.

6. How did the school provide for and manage children's learning during the Covid-19 closures?

- Strategies used by school to ensure that the pupils' education continued during the lockdown period
- Methods of managing this, eg by contacting the pupils to ask how things were going, etc
- Any specific problems related to this?
- Did the school continue to assess pupils during this period in the same ways, to the same criteria or extent?
- Examples? eg 1. not only planning and delivering online materials, but also hand delivering or posting materials to some pupils, etc

7. Were there any positives, or benefits, experienced by learners in general during the school closure period? Can you give examples?

- Did anything good come from the situation, eg working more closely on school work with families; effect of new types of, and approaches to, learning, eg improvements in digital learning, etc?
- Are these positives specific only to certain groups, or did all learners experience these positives?

8. Are you aware of any specific types of learners or groups of learners who benefitted from learning at home? In what ways did they benefit?

- Who were they?
- What were the benefits – can you offer examples?
- Why did they seem to benefit?

9. During the closure of schools, what seemed to work well for those learners considered to be disadvantaged, and why?

- Eg school refusers, or those who benefit more from small group or individual learning environments, etc
- Any benefit to pupils with ALN (eg increased use of assistive technology)?

10. Are there ongoing concerns and challenges for learners in your view? Are there any groups of learners for whom the ongoing challenges are greater? Which groups and why?

- Consider the long term or ongoing impact on the learners as a whole
- Consider the long term or ongoing impact on groups of learners, eg those considered disadvantaged

11. How do you hope to address any ongoing concerns and challenges for learners?

- Plans discussed by the school for 'catching up'? 'Accelerated learning' programme, etc?
- Consideration of concept of '12 week / 3 month learning loss' (England?)
- Any need to repeat periods / delay progress?
- Impact on preparations for assessment period May / June 2021 (for older, secondary students?)

12. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about the impact of the school closure on your learners, (particularly in relation to disadvantaged learners)?

Teachers' Structured Interview

Protocol

- 40 minutes to an hour discussion
- Agree rules of play for the discussion
- Use the chat function to display the question (not for any discussion, just for displaying the questions)
- Aim for about 10 minutes or so per question, though use judgement if discussion is in full flow!

1. What's changed in terms of the learning experiences from the first lock down to now?

- Examples (try to get year group being talked about)

2. How has the school's response to supporting learn changed?

3. What has changed in your understanding of and provision for 'disadvantage' in learning?

- those with learning disadvantage,
- those with 'new disadvantage' such as digital connectivity issues (e.g. broadband / enough laptops)... how are these children accessing 'live sessions'
- lack of parental support for remote working;
- families experiencing HWB challenges; e.g
- Examples

4. What are the implications of the last year for the future of learning longer term?

Parents' Structured Interview

Protocol

- Individual interviews
- Max 10 per HEI (2 or 3 per school)
- Record via skype, Teams, record function on phones
- Up to 10-15 minutes
- How many children and what ages in the school?

1. What's changed in terms of the learning experiences from the first lock down to now?

- Examples (try to get detail)
- Explore any issues, difficulties, advantages

2. How has the school's response to supporting learn changed?

- Examples (try to get detail)
- Explore any issues, difficulties, advantages

Optional, if felt appropriate for the context of the parent:

3. In light of this year, do you think that learning for school-aged children will look different in the future?

- (What would you like it to look like?)

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