

Written evidence submitted by Professor Helen Lomax

1. Title

Children researching their everyday lives, education & relationships during the coronavirus pandemic (CHEER) by Professor Helen Lomax and Dr Kate Smith, University of Huddersfield.

2. About the authors of the submission

Helen Lomax is Professor of Childhood Studies in the School of Education and Professional Development and Dr Kate Smith is a Research Fellow in child and family wellbeing in the School of Human and Health Sciences. They developed the Corona Chronicles research project where children research their everyday lives, education and relationships during the coronavirus pandemic ([CHEER](#)).

3. Summary of submission evidence

Evidence from children about what is supportive of their mental and physical wellbeing **during school closure outside of the structure and oversight of in-person education** suggests this is supported by:

- **3.1 Time with family:** Children valued time spent with their families during school closure – playing board games, baking, eating lunch together, gardening, walking and cycling were all important ways that children spent time with family members they lived with which made them feel happy;
- **3.2 Digital media to connect with family and friends:** Children used digital media to maintain important contact with family and friends – sources of support which made them feel connected to others and not ‘alone’ and enabled them to manage their feelings of isolation, anxiety and confusion;
- **3.3 Resources for learning:** Children engaged in a wide variety of learning, describing school work made accessible by their teachers and self-directed learning (including reading a range of fiction and non-fiction) as well as resources (‘the craft drawer’; IT) which enabled them to craft, develop digital skills, cook, garden and take care of nature.

- **3.4 Access to green space and connection to nature:** Spending time outside with family on walks, cycling, growing vegetables and plants for pollinating insects was vitally important to children. Children shared pictures and narratives about seeing wild native animals and birds and how this made them feel happy.

4. Body of evidence

The evidence presented responds to the following areas requested by the Select

Committee:

- Support for pupils and families during (school) closures;
- Children’s and young people’s mental health outside of the structure and oversight of in-person education.

4.1 Scope of the evidence

The evidence is drawn from phase 1 of our longitudinal research undertaken with children aged 9-11 (year 5-6) attending primary schools, including in disadvantaged localities in Yorkshire and Humber.

4.2 The research has three phases:

- Phase 1 undertaken during July-August is complete and so is included here.
- Phase 2 (Oct.- Nov. 2020) and
- Phase 3 (Jan-March 2021) which includes photo-elicitation interviews with children and teachers and art workshops (in which children are generating key messages for parents, teachers and policy-makers about what has supported them and what has challenged their mental and physical health and learning) is underway and will be shared using digital animation. Evidence is therefore forthcoming and not included in this submission.

4.3 Phase 1 activity and data

During phase 1, 12 children (aged 9-10) researched with us, at a distance, using creative visual arts (animation, collage, comic strips, drawing, craft, model-making, digital photography, video and filmmaking) to ‘chronicle’ their experiences over a period of six weeks in England during July-August 2020.

4.4 The data set comprises children’s week-by-week reflections on: Things they had noticed, their relationships, learning, physical activity, the environment and ‘giving’ as important dimensions of wellbeing (The Children’s Society, 2014; [NHS](#)).

4.5 Data consists of over 100 visual and textual data from the participating children in which they describe their experiences, including what they experienced as supportive of their learning and mental and physical wellbeing during school closure and pandemic.

5. Summary and conclusions

Children are experts in their own lives (UNCRC, 1989) and have a right to express their views about the impact of school closure and policies that impact their lives.

5.1 Involve and include children: Children need to be consulted about policies using methods appropriate to them.

5.2 What children find supportive of their mental health and learning is contingent on the familiar and material resources available to them – e.g. access to green space, learning resources and parental time varies across childhood making consultation with children, including those living with disadvantage is essential.

5.2 Methods for involving and including children

In times of global crisis, creating safe, including online spaces can serve to facilitate conversations between adults (researchers, policy-makers) so that children’s voices can be included in policies designed to support their learning and wellbeing.

References

Lomax, H and Smith, K. *CHEER digital resources*: <https://pure.hud.ac.uk/en/datasets/cheer-digital-resources> <https://doi.org/10.34696/es1k-0976>

NHS *5 Steps to mental wellbeing* <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/improve-mental-wellbeing/>

The Children's Society (2014) *Ways to wellbeing: Exploring the links between children's activities & subjective wellbeing* <http://www.childrensociety.org.uk/ways-to-well-being>

United Nations (1989) *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Geneva.

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