

Written evidence submitted by Dr Roger Morgan Project Leader of project gathering school children's views for submission to Parliamentary Inquiries and Public Consultations at Pupils 2 Parliament

# **How schools have been doing during lockdown**



**A report of school pupils' views to the Education Select Committee**

**for their Inquiry into the impact of COVID-19 on education and children's services**



**Submitted by Dr Roger Morgan OBE  
on behalf of the Pupils 2 Parliament project.**

**It is agreed that this submission may be quoted and published.**

**May 2020**



## Summary

1. This submission reports the views of 42 primary school children across three schools on issues arising from the Committee's Terms of Reference, gathered by online survey.
2. 40 of the 42 had been taught school work by parents or carers at home, and 33 had been set work online by their teachers. A small number had found it difficult to do online work because of technical problems.
3. Between half and two thirds of the children thought that working online at home, they had learned as much as, or more than, they usually learned at school. Just under a third thought that they had learned less.
4. Two elements of extra support for working at home proposed by children were to have more explanation of things, and more one-to-one video teaching.
5. Half the children were missing school tests or SATs during lockdown. Most saw school tests as a part of their learning, and were worried about missing them. Only 3 were happy to be missing tests.
6. In terms of the effects of lockdown out of school on children of this age, the top three 'good' things they saw about being out of school were spending more time with their families, more time outside, and having more free time.
7. By far the most frequently reported 'bad thing' was missing being with friends, reported by almost three quarters of the children.
8. This was followed by missing their teachers, and not learning as well as they did at school.
9. Just over two thirds of the children reported themselves as being just as happy out of school as they usually are in school. 6 said they were happier out of school, and 4 that they were less happy than they would be at school.
10. Just over half the children reported looking forward to getting back to school, 13 were not sure, and 5 were not looking forward to it.
11. Changes some wanted to see when school returned included some changes to teaching style, changes in some subjects (including more time outside), more time playing with friends they have missed, and precautions against COVID 19.
12. An annex adds views and perspectives from the 15 parents and carers who, in assisting their children with the technicalities of the online survey, were asked to record their own views alongside their children's.

## Introduction



13. Pupils 2 Parliament is a long-established project enabling school pupils to consider and feed in their views to Parliamentary Committee inquiries, and to national government and national body consultations.
14. The project has been approved by the Clerks of both Houses of Parliament to use the term ‘Parliament’ in its title.
15. School pupils’ views, perspectives, votes and proposals are gathered independently by Pupils 2 Parliament. All views, voting results and proposals come spontaneously from the pupils, with no prompt or ‘lead’ on what they should say or how they should vote. All the views they give are reported without selection, addition or comment.
16. The topic is presented independently and neutrally by Pupils 2 Parliament, based on information in the inquiry terms of reference or the government or national body consultation document. Questions are put neutrally, and are derived directly from that document.
17. Pupils 2 Parliament normally carries out focus group discussions with pupils in their schools. For this inquiry, we consulted children online during the Covid 19 lockdown. Children completed a survey on their own at home, or with the help of a parent or carer working the computer, reading questions out and typing the child’s answers in.
18. Where an adult was supporting the child, the child’s and adult’s answers were separately sought and recorded, enabling adult/child differences.
19. Pupils 2 Parliament submissions provide the particular perspectives of children as citizens, their uniquely fresh-thinking on even complex policy questions, and children’s innate sense of fairness.
20. This submission reports the responses submitted by 42 pupils aged 9 to 11 across 3 schools; St George’s CofE Primary School, Clun, Shropshire, Knighton CinW Primary School, Powys, and Presteigne Primary School, Powys. 15 of those pupils were assisted by a parent or carer. The views of those parents/carers are included in the annex to this submission.
21. The childrens’ views address a number of questions raised in the Committee’s Terms of Reference; implications of school closures for children and their families, support for children and families during those closures, the effect of missing examinations (in this case, SATs rather than formal qualification exams) , messaging from schools regarding online work, and effects of school closures on children’s mental health (and in particular, their happiness).
22. I trust that the views and experiences of children themselves will make an important and thought provoking contribution to this inquiry.

**Being taught at home**

23. All but one of the children had been at home without attending school on any days during lockdown. One pupil had been mostly at home, but attending school for “just a few days”.
24. We asked who, if anyone, had been teaching the children at home things they would usually have learned at school. 40 of the 42 children said they had been taught things at home by their parent or



carer, and 33 that they had learned from school work their teacher had put online for them. One child said they had been looked after some days at school, but not taught normal school work there.

25. 34 of the 42 children said they had done lots of school work online.
26. Of the other 8 children, 5 told us that the school had sent them things to do online, but that they hadn't really got round to doing them yet. Two children said the online work system wasn't working properly, but they had managed to get some school work done. One said they had had to give up trying to do school work online because the system didn't work properly.
27. We asked whether the children thought they were learning more or less online than they would have done at school. Of the 39 children who answered this question, 17 said they were learning about the same amount online as they would have done if they had been in school – and 6 that they were learning more online than they usually did at school. So between half and two thirds of the children thought they were learning as much as, or more, from online school work during school closure than they usually did at school.
28. 13 children (just under a third) thought they were learning less online during school closure than they would have done when attending school as usual, and 3 told us they hadn't really been able to do enough online to say.
29. Finally in this section of the survey, we asked children to tell us if there was anything extra they wished their school could do to help them to learn more at home. Six said there was nothing more they thought their school should be doing; “there is nothing else they can do in my opinion”. One simply wanted their school to keep going with its online work. Another said “I feel like I am getting enough support at home”.
30. Others did suggest changes and extras: 3 wanted more explanation of work given to do at home (explaining how to get to the right answers, rather than just being told whether you were right or wrong), 2 wanted more interactive and virtual video classroom work (an “online classroom with my teacher”), 2 wanted less maths, and 2 wished for more school work they could do outdoors (such as ‘Forest School’ work).
31. Suggested changes and extras from one child each were: a wider range of subjects than mainly maths and English, more practical homework (for example art work and building things), easier online work, and “more fun work”. One child said they wished the school would tell their parents when their breaks should be.
32. One child simply said that online, they “have trouble concentrating on my work”.

### **Missing tests or exams**

33. We asked the children whether they thought they had missed, or were missing, any tests or exams by being out of school.
34. 19 children said they hadn't missed, and wouldn't be missing, any tests or exams. But 21 said they either had missed, or would be missing, a test or exam at school. These included SATs, which are important tests of progress for children at this age. Their views about missing these assessments are I believe relevant to the Inquiry's interest in the impact of cancelled examinations.



35. One said “I am missing my SATS. I would like to do them but if we are off school I can’t do them”. There was the worry that missing tests – even class tests – could mean not learning so well: “I think it means that I will not have an opportunity to learn more”. One said they were “a bit stressed, I won’t be as prepared”, and another said “we might do it when we get back to normal. Missing the tests isn’t very good”. Another said “I want to do it when we go back”.
36. Others weren’t pleased to be missing tests, but accepted it as something that had to happen while schools were closed. “I don’t really mind”, “I am not too worried as I know this can’t be helped”. Two others wrote “I feel ok” about it.
37. One commented that they were not happy to be missing their tests because “I won’t be getting any treats after”.
38. Three children wrote that they were happy to be missing tests. “I feel good”, “happy. Hate doing tests.”
39. Overall, the children saw school tests as a part of their learning, and more were worried about missing them than the few who were happy to miss doing tests.

### **How it feels being away from school**

40. We asked what were the good things, and what were the bad things, about not being at school as usual.
41. The list of good things was:
  - Being able to spend time with my family (from 12 children)
  - Spending more time outside (working on the family farm, being in the garden) (from 4 children)
  - Having extra free time (from 4 children)
  - Having more time to play (from 3 children)
  - Staying in bed later (from 3 children)
  - Not being distracted by other children (from 2 children)
  - Being able to work at my own speed (from 2 children)
  - I can practice cooking at home / cook school dinners with mum (from 2 children)
  - Being able to have what lunch I want (from 2 children)
  - Not having to wait a long time at school before going home
  - Getting work done quicker
  - Not having to rush around so much
  - Choosing my own lessons
  - Having one to one teaching
  - Doing school work with my mum
  - Not having to wear school uniform
  - Not having to do PE
  - I get to eat while doing work
  - I get to work out before school
  - Being able to stay in my pjs all day



- I get more done
- It's less noisy than school
- Not having to go to school on my birthday
- Being able to use my phone to do research
- Getting a new printer
- Less strict
- Good to have a break from school
- "I can convince my mum that I'm done for the day!"

42. One child answered the question about the good things about not being at school by writing "not much really – school is amazing".

43. It is worth quoting in full one child's submission about their life while schools have been closed:

"More break times and food. Pet time. Baking. Doing the bird table. Playing outside in the garden. Doing the sunhouse. Watching telly. Having fun with the dogs. Spending time with my family. Playing games. Setting up a hedgehog camera. Getting more attention from my family. Gardening. Party in garden with my family. Enjoying sunshine. Playing chess. Making cards. Facetiming my friends. Making surprises for my family. Spending time with my gran and my dad. Making cocktails."

44. By far, children's most often quoted good thing about school closure was spending more time with their families.

45. Overwhelmingly, the most frequent bad thing the children told us about being at home and away from school was missing their friends. This came from 31 of the 42 children – almost three quarters, each independently and without suggestion or prompting.

46. Next, from 8 children, was missing their teachers.

47. After this, from 7 children, came not being able to learn as much as they learned at school. "Less Education", "missing out on learning things", "I prefer to learn at school", "I can't learn as well as I would be able to at school", "not learning as I normally would".

48. Other bad things about being out of school listed by children were:

- Missing playground / play time with others (from 3 children)
- Boredom (from 2 children)
- Missing working together
- "Sometimes my mum can't teach me"
- Not getting as much help as usual
- "Teachers explain more than parents"
- Having to do work
- Missing transition days to high school
- It's "not communal"
- Missing all the people at school
- Hard doing work at home
- Missing nice school dinners



- Missing PE
- Missing art
- Missing dancing lessons
- Missing ‘fitness Friday’
- Missing ‘forest school’
- Can’t go on the monkey bars
- Lunch is a bit late
- “I learn everything in a different way to what I’m used to”

49. One child summed up what they missed about being out of school in these words; “I miss my friends, teachers, and the school environment”

### **The effect being out of school on a child’s happiness**

50. How happy a child feels is a key element of mental health. We asked each child to compare how happy they felt while being away from school, with how happy they were when they were in school as usual.

51. 39 children answered this question. 27 said they felt just as happy being at home or at school. 6 said they felt happier being at home than they would be in school. Four said they felt less happy being at home than they would be in school.

52. Therefore, just over two thirds of these children reported themselves as being just as happy at home during school closure as they would be at school – over 8 out of 10 reporting being either just as happy or happier being at home during school closure. But it is important to note that 4 children reported being less happy at home during school closure than they usually are when at school.

### **Going back to school**

53. 22 of the 40 children answering this question said they were looking forward to going back to school when it opens again. 13 said they were not sure about that, and 5 said they were not looking forward to going back to school.

54. We asked the children to give reasons for their answers. The main reason for wanting to go back to school was to be back with their friends. One child wrote “I miss school”, another “I love school”, and another that “I also like being in school most of the time”.

55. Some wrote that they simply wanted to get back to things being normal again; “looking forward to getting back to normal”. One said of their time in lockdown “it takes too long, and life’s too short!”

56. Some wanted to return to learning better at school. One quotation summed it up; “because it is really boring and I am not learning as much as I should”.

57. Reasons for not being sure, or not looking forward to going back to school, were that the child will be older, they are not sure what the class will be like back at school in the future, and not being sure whether they will be going back to their primary school or on to their secondary school. One wrote “I am happy to go back to school but I would like to stay at home”.



58. One child preferred having one-to-one help with a difficult school subject at home; “I am worried about the maths and I like my mum doing the maths with me”. Another was worried about having to do lots of work.
59. One wanted to get back to school, but only when it is definitely safe to go back, wanting to stay at home where it is safe until then. Another comment was “I am worried of the virus”.
60. A strong reason given for not looking forward to going back to school was “because anyone can have COVID 19 and I don’t want to catch it at school”.
61. Finally, we asked whether there was anything they would like to be different about school when they got back. Most didn’t want anything to be different – as one put it, “no, I like it the way it is”.
62. 16 children made proposals for changes after school reopens: to have a school pet, to have harder maths work to do, to do more geography, to do more cooking, and to do more outside learning and have more outside equipment (such as monkey bars or a climbing frame), to spend fewer hours at school (even if that means less playtime), to do more fun learning, not to have to work so hard, to have more comfortable school chairs (ideally ones that swivel for you to turn to look at the whiteboard), better spaced break times, no lining up in the rain at lunch times, and going outside “before after school” time.
63. Having missed time with friends during school closure, one asked for longer playtimes when school reopens so they can play longer with the friends they have missed.
64. Some asked for some differences in teaching: “be more strict, so the work doesn’t take ages”, “have extra time rather than having time limits to do work, that will make us concentrate more and not worry about our time”.
65. Finally, one spoke of changes needed to protect everyone at school from COVID 19: “I want everyone to stand 2 meters away from each other. For the tables to be spread all around the class room and dining hall, or eat your lunch in the class room”.

I am grateful to the Heads and staff of the three schools for enabling this online consultation, to those parents and carers who supported their children in answering this survey, but above all to all the pupils themselves for their views and always fresh thinking.

Roger Morgan  
27<sup>th</sup> May 2020



## ANNEX

### Parents' views

66. For the 15 children who had support from a parent or carer in operating the computer, reading the questions, or entering the answers, we also asked the supporting adult to give their own answers to each question, after helping to record the child's answer. 12 of the 15 had been teaching their children at home.
67. 7 (just over half) thought their children were learning about the same amount or more online than they usually learned at school, 5 that they were learning less, and one said their child hadn't been able to do any school work online. Most praised schools for their support to pupils. Like the children, there were suggestions of more video tuition, more explanation, and for clearer systems.
68. One was concerned at the amount and cost of printing, paper and printer ink needed for online learning - when families were under financial pressure, it was not easy to buy supplies, and it was also not environmentally friendly. They suggested more use of school-supplied workbooks to fill in instead of sitting unhealthily at screens.
69. Some parents / carers found it hard to balance their own work with the quantity of home teaching needed for their children, especially where there was only one parent at home with two or more children of different ages. One commented that home teaching was a pressure on parents / carers, "who at the end of the day are not teachers", and this affected children's daily learning.
70. A particular problem area was maths homework, which a parent or carer may not understand as it is different to what they learned at school themselves, and so feel inadequate to help their child.
71. On children missing school tests and SATs, three were content with this under the circumstances, and one was content as they saw testing as mainly for the school's benefit rather than the child's.



One was pleased as their child finds tests stressful. One commented that the child was missing out on knowing how they were progressing in their education.

72. Like the children, parents and carers saw the main good thing about their child being off school as being able to spend family time together. “Spending time with my [child] that I have never done or will again.” One added that it was good to have their child helping and working together at lambing time on the farm. Another commented that home teaching “makes me want to be a teacher”.
73. Other good things about their child being home off school were: no school run, not having to rush, being less stressed, being able to have a lie in (as the adult was also off work) , making memories/history, sharing activities and their child’s interests, keeping their child safe, walking every day and finding new things together, helping their child to learn one-to-one in a calm atmosphere, and talking to each other.
74. One said “we have spent some quality family time together doing things we wouldn’t normally find the time to do. We’ve turned the situation into a positive, being able to slow down and remember what’s important”.
75. They saw the bad things as: the child missing their school leavers’ disco, hoodies, last sports day, and saying good bye to their younger friends as they left them to move up to High School, missing school trips and fun things, missing exercise, missing their school friends and missing out on personal social interaction and social development (although keeping in touch through WhatsApp), missing learning in a group of peers, the child having low mood because of isolation, the child not having a routine, and domestic distractions at home resulting in differing concentration levels each day.
76. One parent summed up the impact of their child missing out on socialising freely with friends and having valuable education from qualified professionals: “the longer this goes on I fear for psychological effects of it on children”.
77. One parent commented that their children were learning a lot about the family’s way of life, but that they were missing out on learning, and on basics such as their reading books, even though the parent and children did most of the work sent home by school. “I do worry I may not be doing a good enough job to keep them at the level they should be at. I worry they will struggle when they do return to school”. Another said “my children are not learning as much as they should be”. A further concern was that “motivation to perform is not there”.
78. Parents and carers wrote about the stress of combining home teaching with other household, family and work duties; “It’s hard to find enough time to home school 3 children and keep up with all the usual housework and family time”.
79. Parents and carers rated their children’s level of happiness out of school, compared with when they were at school, in line with the ratings given us by children themselves. Two said their children were less happy being at home than at school. They also rated how far their children were looking forward to going back to school much the same as children did.
80. Parents and carers agreed with their children on reasons for the child wanting to return to school - to spend more time with friends, and to learn with their peers. One parent commented that they saw a



benefit and change in their child after they had spent face time with their friends. Another said their child didn't seem themselves without being at school.

81. Others had worries about their child returning to school, worrying about how things will be, and worrying about whether they will be safe.
82. After return to school, one parent told us they would like to see a continuation of home learning lessons to support what is being done in the classroom. Having seen the balance of school work during lockdown, they would like to see a change in the balance of the curriculum to have more science work and less RE back at school. Another wanted to see more varied lessons. Another wanted to see use of the home schooling technology that had been used during lockdown carrying on after reopening of school, for uploading and storing children's work.
83. A further view was that after school reopens, "I think using online learning more would be brilliant, maybe even a reduced timetable to have home learning and outside learning wherever possible".
84. One parent wanted to see clear measures back at school to protect children from COVID 19: "clear plans for social distancing and tresting and tracking of virus people. Screening children on arrival by temperature testing at least".

Roger Morgan

*Pupils 2 Parliament*

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