



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Education
Room 428
Parliament Buildings

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To: Members of the Education Committee

From: Aoibhinn Treanor, Committee Clerk

Date: 29 June 2021

Subject: Youth engagement on life, learning, mental health and wellbeing in lockdown

Tabled, displayed and in oral briefing tomorrow are the views, art and writings of young people in the Committee's 'My life and Learning in Lockdown' youth engagement.

Briefing the Committee on the youth engagement process will be:

Louise Close – Assembly Engagement Office

Marina McConville – Assembly Education Service

Background

Zoom event: 16-18 y'olds

The Committee invited youth engagement on pandemic experience and mental health and wellbeing in particular, in the following terms:

“COVID-19 LOCKDOWN AND RESTART

IMPACT ON EMOTIONAL WELLBEING AND MENTAL HEALTH

INFORMAL ZOOM BRIEFING EVENT

THURSDAY 3 JUNE 2021

6.30PM TO 8.30PM

The Committee for Education has received correspondence and a number of written reports and surveys in respect of the adverse impact of lockdown and restart on the impact on the emotional health and wellbeing of children and young people. The Interim Mental Health Champion also briefed the Committee about this. Members were greatly concerned

by what they learned in this regard. The Committee is also considering the Department's recently published Emotional Health and Wellbeing in Education Framework.

In order to inform its deliberations, the Committee wishes to hear the views and opinions of young people on the impact of lockdown and restart on the provision of emotional wellbeing and mental health support support for children and young people. The Committee also wishes to explore with young people how matters may be improved both in the immediate term and in a post-covid landscape. The Committee commends young people for the role they have played in keeping everyone else safe, and invites the young people to share some personal reflections if they wish to do so.

Owing to public health considerations at the time of writing, a face-to-face meeting with stakeholders cannot be arranged. The Committee would therefore like to invite you to an informal briefing event on Zoom."

The Committee agreed suggested questions on personal feedback and recommendations in advance of the event, and these were followed in two events for 16-18 y'olds and a series of focus groups with the Education Service.

Refugee Week Zoom Event: British Red Cross, Extern and Barnardos contacted the team to offer to facilitate an event with the same questions for refugee children, to coincide with Refugee Week 14-20 June.

Education Service Facilitated Focus Groups:

Marina McConville selected and facilitated focus groups with a range of schools and has written a detailed paper on the learning from this exercise, which she will present at the Committee's meeting. Some children from a music club wrote lyrics to set to known tunes. A group which had already produced artwork about covid supplied their images to the Education Service. The Education Service outreach comprised a questionnaire to Irish-Medium pupils; and focus groups with primary and secondary, mainstream and special schools, users of braille, Deaf children and young people.

Art Project

An art project was also opened to all school age children and young people to contribute their visual art, poems or prose. Many of these are displayed today in the Senate and in the Engagement Service powerpoint presentation.

Communications

The Assembly's Communications Service which advises on Committee Communications, press releases, media operational notices and social media, assisted with a communications plan to promote the various aspects of the project thoughtfully, chronologically and using a range of media and registers. With their assistance we pushed out some inspiring ads on facebook and twitter for the art project in particular.

Participation of Members and Officials

Members of the Committee, the Committee team and the Education, Engagement and Communications teams worked together to bring together the various elements of the engagement and drew on new virtual technologies to make the connection with young people meaningful despite its remote nature.

Key Themes

Members may wish to ask officials about the key themes that arose in the zoom events, art and focus groups.

Next steps

Based on the personal experience and recommendations of the young people and tomorrow's discussion, the Committee will wish to consider key themes for its report to the Assembly and primary legislative timetable permitting, the terms of a Committee motion to the House.

Aoibhinn Treanor

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