

Update from the Chief Executive – 3 June

Dear Colleague

As anticipated, the Education Minister, Kirsty Williams, has just announced Welsh Government's plans for the reopening of schools in Wales, so I wanted to ensure you are all aware of the key details, as I am mindful many of you are parents and we have many staff who will be directly affected by this decision.

Our schools will open their doors on Monday 29 June for pupils to return on a phased basis. Year groups will be split into cohorts with staggered starts, lessons and breaks. This means that, at most, around a third of pupils will be present in the classroom at any one time, although individual schools may need time to reach this level of operation.

The current term will also be extended by a week, meaning that the normal summer holidays will start slightly later on Monday 27 July.

It is important to note, that the school experience will not be as it was before. The immediate focus will be upon "Check-in, Catch-up & Preparation" in readiness for September. The focus is very much upon the wellbeing of the children in these initial stages and not upon academic work.

You will be aware that over recent months both myself and the Leader have been working closely with WG officials, Ministers and other council Leaders to help support the reopening of our schools. I very much welcome this sensible approach, which will help safeguard the health and wellbeing of staff and pupils, as well as ensuring learning can resume as quickly and safely as possible. This whole approach has been underpinned by robust scientific and medical evidence, and if the medical situation changes (i.e. if the "R" infection spread rate changes), the position regarding schools will be reviewed immediately. Furthermore, our teaching staff will be given priority in the Track, Trace and Protect testing system that is in place.

You will also know that we have been successfully running childcare hubs in many of our schools throughout the outbreak, so we have significant experience of working within these new conditions and limitations and are well placed to provide safe, well managed learning environments. I would like to assure the whole community that all appropriate steps will be taken to safeguard pupils and this will remain our key priority. Over the next few weeks officers will be working closely with our school staff, as well as Welsh government officials to ensure this transition is seamless, sensible and secure.

The Minister, has made it clear that the return to school at this time is not mandatory, but I hope that the reassurance that we will offer both parents and children, will allow them to make a positive decision confidently. In this regard, head teacher's over the next few weeks, will contact parents directly to share with them how the return to individual schools will take place and at this time, parents will be able to share any questions or queries they may have.

The Welsh Government will shortly publish guidance to support schools, as well as further and higher education institutions. This will include information on managing their facilities and logistical arrangements, including buildings, resources, cleaning and transport.

Further Education Colleges are ensuring that appropriate measures are being taken to re-open for face-to-face learning from 15 June. They will prioritise those students requiring licence to practice assessments and vulnerable learners.

We have a great Education service here in county borough, and I know that our exceptional

staff will do everything they can to make this transition a positive experience for all parties concerned.

Take care and regards

Christina

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