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Dyddiad / Date: 16-12-21 E-bost / E-mail : CwestiwnECS@sirgar.gov.uk / QuestionECS@carmarthenshire.gov.uk

Dear Parent/Guardian,

Firstly, I want to thank you for your continued support and cooperation during an extremely challenging term. Our collective priority as schools and the Local Authority continues to be to minimise the disruption to education, and ensure where possible learners continue to receive in person learning, as well as protecting our learners and our school staff.

We know that during this school term there has been disruption due to staff and learner absence resulting in some schools having to make the difficult decision to move certain classes/year groups to remote learning for short periods. In recognition of this, and the current levels of uncertainty regarding the impact of Omicron, the Welsh Government wants to ensure that schools have time to plan and prepare for the return to school in January.

Jeremy Miles, Minister for Education and Welsh Language has therefore decided that all schools will have two planning days at the start of the new spring term. In Carmarthenshire these will be held on the **4th and 5th of January 2022**. **Our learners will therefore return to school on Thursday, January 6th, 2022**. These planning days will allow school leaders to-

- Assess staffing capacity
- Put the necessary measures in place to support the return of learners.
- Consider appropriate interventions as noted in our Local Decision Framework.
- Allow schools to consider whether it is appropriate to operate staggered start and finish times as part of their risk assessment process.
- Plan for learners to safely sit their January exams and revisit contingency plans to ensure exam years are prioritised for onsite provision should there be a need to restrict in person learning at any time.
- Ensure that they have robust plans in place to move to remote learning- this could be for individual classes/year groups or possibly for the whole school.
- Consider what arrangements might need to be in place for vulnerable learners and the children of critical workers during any periods of disruption.
- Consider the operation of other services on the school site, such as after school clubs run by external providers.

Our schools will use the second planning day to put in place any changes they consider proportionate and communicate these changes and the importance of testing to all staff, parents/carers and learners before the start of the Spring term.

Gareth Morgans, BAdd/BEd; MGw/MSc

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You are welcome to contact me in Welsh or English

Welsh Government is rolling forward their advice on face coverings into the new term-

- **Face coverings should be worn by staff and visitors in all indoor areas of all settings, including classrooms, where physical distance cannot be maintained. Face coverings also should be worn by secondary aged learners in all indoor areas, including classrooms, where physical distance cannot be maintained.**
- It is recommended **that secondary age learners continue to wear face coverings on school transport.**

In addition, they advise that it is very important that staff and learners continue regular Lateral Flow Testing. Our strong expectation is that all staff and learners of secondary age should test using Lateral Flow Tests **three times in the week before returning to school** and to then continue testing regularly **three** times a week after the start of term in January.

Vaccination and testing continue to provide the best protection against this virus. Everyone should prioritise getting their vaccination or booster dose when offered and all schools are asked to allow for that in their planning.

The Local Authority and school leaders recognise these planning days may impact on the date that parents and carers were expecting their children to return to school in the new year. Where that is the case, on the second day, we have asked schools to consider what provision may need to be put in place for vulnerable children and the children of critical workers. **In the first instance, parents should explore all alternative options and only request such provision if it is absolutely necessary.** If you require any support, please contact your school.

Children and young people eligible for free school meals will receive funding for the two planning days. School kitchens will not be providing food until Thursday, January 6th.

It is essential that no one with COVID-19 symptoms attends school and that they should book a PCR test and isolate until the result is received. Please observe the latest guidance about symptoms for Omicron and we request that our Headteachers are not placed in a difficult position in having to refuse pupils with any symptoms attending the school.

I would like to end by repeating my thanks to you for your support over the most challenging of times. I hope you and your family have a well-earned Christmas break.

Diolch o galon,

Gareth Morgans

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