**Return to School – Frequently asked Questions**

**The following frequently asked questions have been developed to answer the majority of your queries at this time. There are sections for parents/carers, pupils and school staff.**

The Minister for Education in Wales (Kirsty Williams) announced on 3 June 2020 that all children would have the opportunity to 'Check-in, Catch-up, Prepare' for summer and September. The next phase will start on 29 June 2020 and last for 3 weeks, with the summer holidays now starting on 21 July 2020.

The following frequently asked questions have been developed to answer the majority of your queries at this time. They will be added to and amended as we move closer to 29 June.

If you have a question that isn't answered here, please email mark.horton@torfaen.gov.uk and we will provide you with a timely response. Should you have any queries about your child's school please contact the school directly.

For your further information, additional guidance was issued by Welsh Government on 10th June. The link is here:

[https://gov.wales/keep-education-safe-guidance-learning-over-summer-term](https://eur03.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fgov.wales%2Fkeep-education-safe-guidance-learning-over-summer-term&data=02%7C01%7CMark.Horton%40torfaen.gov.uk%7Cc9754bbd490b405617fa08d80d4ed01c%7C2c4d0079c52c4bb3b3cad8eaf1b6b7d5%7C0%7C0%7C637273979427889182&sdata=2ToVHbaVd8ikL7sKDMKWMXzpwzOx2oERjGvvvlfF8Cc%3D&reserved=0)

**FOR PARENTS/CARERS**

**A - Return to School**

**Are all schools and special needs resource bases (SNRBs) opening for learners on 29 June 2020?**

Yes, all schools will re-open for check-in, catch-up and preparation for September. Your child's school will contact you with full details of their plans now the Welsh Government have published their guidance and the school have had time to plan accordingly.

**Will the Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) be open for learners on 29 June 2020?**

Yes. We anticipate the PRU will open, following the same Welsh Government guidance as other Torfaen schools. Risk assessments will be undertaken ahead of 29th June.

**Will Year 11 pupils be returning to school?**

There is no expectation for secondary schools to include Year 11 pupils in their provision. Individual schools may wish to ‘catch up’ regarding transition etc. but this is an individual school decision.

**Will schools be open to Nursery and Reception children?**

Schools will be making arrangements for Reception children to go into school but Nursery children will not be returning until after the Autumn (details to be announced at a later date).

**How do I let my school know that my child/children will start back on 29 June 2020?**

Schools will be contacting parents and carers directly to confirm the arrangements for individual children returning to school. Parents and carers will be asked if they intend to send their children back from 29 June and schools will use that information to plan for the re-opening.

**When is the last day before the summer holidays?**

The last day will be Monday 20 July with the summer holidays starting on Tuesday 21 July.

**Will I be fined if I don't send my child back to school before the summer?**

During this time parents will not be fined for keeping their child / children at home. These children will continue to be supported by their schools in different ways.

**If I want to send my child to school and the school does not have enough staff, what can I do?**

If a school does not have enough staff to operate safely, it may have to close because of health and safety reasons. Safety will be the school's first priority. Parents and carers will be contacted directly by their child’s school if this becomes necessary.

**Where can I get more information before deciding if my child will return to school?**

The latest Welsh Government guidance is available here:

[https://gov.wales/keep-education-safe-guidance-learning-over-summer-term](https://eur03.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fgov.wales%2Fkeep-education-safe-guidance-learning-over-summer-term&data=02%7C01%7CMark.Horton%40torfaen.gov.uk%7Cc9754bbd490b405617fa08d80d4ed01c%7C2c4d0079c52c4bb3b3cad8eaf1b6b7d5%7C0%7C0%7C637273979427889182&sdata=2ToVHbaVd8ikL7sKDMKWMXzpwzOx2oERjGvvvlfF8Cc%3D&reserved=0)

Further information will be provided as and when it becomes available.

**Will my child be with their own teacher?**

This is possible but not guaranteed. Your child will have an assigned teacher from the available teaching staff who will also be fixed with the group and will not change other than in exceptional circumstances.

**How will my child adjust back to learning in the more structured way of school after a more relaxed home timetable?**

Due to the nature of children’s return in June (small groups, more focus on social emotional teaching etc.) the structure is likely to sit between home schooling and ‘normal school’ so will be a good mid-point for the children to get used to.

**Will learners have to wear uniform?**

The Local Authority has strongly advised schools that they should relax the requirement to wear uniform for the 4 week period. This is because people are being advised to change and wash clothes daily, and because of the extra burden it might put on some parents whose children may have outgrown this year’s uniform. Schools will be informing their parents and carers directly on this issue.

**What will the structure of the school day look like?**

The school day is likely to be structured slightly differently to usual – to accommodate smaller groups of children and support children who have had an extended period out of education.

**Will the “Hub” schools be stay open from 29 June and for the summer holidays for children of key workers?**

As operations increase over the summer term, children currently attending the key worker childcare provision will move back to their own school for that support alongside the other provision they are putting in place. Families who have not needed to access the childcare provision since it was put in place in March 2020 and up to Welsh Government’s announcement on Wednesday 10 June 2020 will need to make alternative arrangements for childcare if they plan to return to work. There will be an exception during term time only applied for parents who are school based staff (e.g. teaching assistants and teachers) and are returning to school, on the basis we need them to return to work or we would not be able to re-open the schools.

Those schools which have been providing key worker childcare since March 2020 may not be able to open until the 30th June or 1st July, to allow for setting up and cleaning. Schools will advise parents where this is the case.

From 29 June key worker childcare provision in individual schools will only be available for their normal school hours i.e. not 8am to 6pm.

We will confirm our plans for the summer holiday period in due course. There is no expectation that schools continue hubs provision during the summer holidays. Local authorities may make alternative provision but it is not expected that this will be managed by school staff.

**B – Health and Safety**

**Will staff and pupils all need to wear PPE to attend?**

It is important to remember that physical distancing, hand hygiene and respiratory hygiene (catching a cough or sneeze in a tissue or covering the mouth and nose with an elbow or sleeve) remain strongly evidenced to be the most effective ways to prevent the spread of coronavirus.

Hand hygiene is critical before and after all direct contact with a child or young person, and after cleaning equipment and the environment.

There is therefore no need to use personal protective equipment (PPE) when undertaking routine educational activities in classroom/school settings.

The use of PPE by staff within education settings should be based on a clear assessment of risk, taking into account each individual setting and the needs of the individual learners and staff. Schools, settings and local authorities already have risk assessments processes in place which should be used to identify the need for the use of PPE. Following any risk assessment, where the need for PPE has been identified, it should be readily available and provided.

**Should children wear PPE to school?**

Every school has a thorough risk assessment in place and new measures to reduce the risk to everyone on site. The key to reducing risk to pupils and staff in school is to have good social distancing, frequent hand washing and effective cleaning processes in place. Although masks can be useful in other contexts we have no advice that they will be helpful in schools. Pupils do not need to wear a mask to school at this time.

**What is the acceptable number of pupils and staff on site?**

Every school will be different due to numbers on roll, attendance and timetable, however the maximum on any school site will be one third of the pupils.

**How many pupils can a class have and maintain social distancing?**

In each school there will be a phased approach. Year groups will be split into cohorts with staggered starts and breaks. It is expected that this will mean, at most, a third of pupils present at any one time, though schools may need time to reach this level of operation.

There will be much smaller classes, providing secure dedicated time with teachers and classmates. This time will include online and personalised classroom experience and getting children and teachers ready for a similar experience in September.

**Will all schools have hand sanitizers in place?**

There will be hand gel in reception areas but soap and water still remains the best way to wash our hands and this will be available for all pupils and staff.

**How will you support pupils and staff with underlying health issues (or if they have family members) that increase their vulnerability?**

Children and teachers who are shielding or at more risk, including some pregnant staff, are not expected to return this term. This also applies for pupils and teachers who live with relatives who are shielding.

**What is the procedure if a member of my household begins to show symptoms – can I send my child to school?**

If you live with others and you are the first in the household to have symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19), then you must stay at home for **at least 7 days**, but all other household members who remain well must stay at home and not leave the house for **14 days**.

The 14-day period starts from the day when the first person in the house became ill.

For anyone else in the household who starts displaying symptoms, they need to stay at home for **at least 7 days** from when the symptoms appeared, regardless of what day they are on in the original 14 day isolation period.

**What will happen if a pupil goes home from school feeling ill and the illness is subsequently diagnosed as Coronavirus – how will parents be advised of this and what actions will follow?**

We ask all parents and carers to keep the school informed of any changes to your family’s medical state. If someone in your household has a confirmed case and they may have been in contact with others in school, those in their class / group and whoever they may have come into contact with will be sent home and asked to self-isolate for 14 days. The other household members of that class or group do not need to self-isolate unless the child or staff member develops symptoms.

**How will social distancing work with young children?**

The schools will be operating on reduced numbers (maximum of a third of all pupils). Children will be grouped in small groups with play/learning zones being established. Whilst every effort will be made to ensure social distancing is maintained it cannot be guaranteed.

**How will social distancing work with my child who receives one-to-one support?**

Schools will have risk assessed all of the children who currently receive 1:1, and part of this will have involved a conversation with home. Each child is different and the actions school takes will be personalised.

**How will schools manage the end of the school day? Will all children leave at once? How will social distancing be encouraged on the journey home?**

Every school is different, some have many entrances and exits to enable this to be done quite easily, whilst others may have only one or two entrances and exits.

On their risk assessments schools will have determined one-way systems, staggered starts and ends to the school day to ensure social distancing. Parents should seek the advice of school staff about what arrangements are in place in their school.

**How will schools discourage parents and carers from congregating at the beginning and end of the school day?**

Schools will ensure that parents/carers will know the arrival and departure times and expectations of which gates and routes to use. Many schools will have one-way systems where this is possible. Parents/carers will be reminded not to congregate but should also be aware of the social distancing requirements for the general public as well.

**How often will frequently-used equipment/sites be cleaned?**

Buildings must be cleaned regularly. Hard surfaces should be cleaned with warm soapy water or the normal cleaning products used. Particular attention should be given to clean ‘high-touch’ areas and surfaces. These areas should be cleaned at least once a day and more frequently in high use areas based on local assessment, including bathrooms, railings, tables, toys, equipment door handles, push pads, taps and hand sanitiser dispensers.

Rooms should be cleaned before different groups use a room.

Cleaning staff should maintain social distancing from each other and from staff and learners at all times.

Tissues should be placed in a separate waste bin and disposed of safely. All rubbish should be removed daily.

**C – Early Years**

**What registered and/or funded childcare is available?**

Further information on what is available in Torfaen is available as follows:

**Family Information Service** - The Torfaen Family Information Service (FIS) provides free, quality, impartial information on a wide range of Childcare, Children's, Family Support and Family related issues and where relevant a signposting service. For information about funded childcare, and information about open registered childcare provision across Torfaen visit: [www.torfaenfis.org.uk](http://www.torfaenfis.org.uk)  or email: fis@torfaen.gov.uk contact telephone number: Freephone 0800 0196 330.

**D – Home to School Transport**

**Will transport be provided? What about pupils who travel on public transport?**

We consulted with parents/carers regarding transport (closed Wednesday 17th June) and are now making the necessary arrangements for those who need transport. Parents/carers will be contacted in due course with the details for their child(ren).

**Are ALN/vulnerable learners who normally are provided with transport expected to find their own way to school or will transport be provided?**

Current planning involves provision of transport for identified individuals on a case by case basis, unless there is a safe alternative means of travel available.

Welsh medium schools and schools with identified ALN learners will be sent a list to enable individual schools to assess which pupils cannot get to school without LA transport.

**E – Well Being and Behaviour**

**What will happen if learners break social distancing rules, does this become a behavioural issue?**

The operation of a school or setting will have an important impact on learners’ physical, mental and emotional and social well-being. When planning to increase operations, schools and staff will consider how this has an impact on well-being.

For example, staff should positively reinforce behaviours around social distancing and hygiene as opposed to stigmatising mistakes. Likewise, the timetable and layout should ensure that there are appropriate opportunities for breaks and time outdoors.

Schools and settings will be alert to identify and support learners who exhibit signs of distress. Pastoral care and bereavement support should be planned for and put in place.

**My child wants to go back to school but feels anxious, what help will the school give?**

Staff in schools and settings will be very much aware of the needs of their colleagues, their learners and families who may be under additional emotional, financial and psychological pressure at this time. Learners are more likely to be anxious and their health and well-being more likely to be impacted by changes of routine and the implications of lockdown. Over time, learners and staff are also more likely to encounter instances of serious illness and bereavement.

Local authorities are already working with schools and settings to consider how best to support the ongoing well-being needs of all learners at this time.

For the safety and well-being of all those involved, it is also crucial that services are delivered in a way that is consistent with the expert scientific advice provided.

While staff, learners and parents/carers may feel apprehensive about the risks, it is important to remember that provision will be made far safer through adherence to guidelines. Social distancing, hygiene and self-isolation of those showing symptoms, or living with someone showing symptoms, will minimise the risk of transmission of infection. The ‘Test, Trace, Protect’ strategy is critical to supporting this.

**What about pupils with complex needs?**

Risk assessments should already exist for learners with more complex needs, including those with emotional and behavioural needs. These risk assessments will require to be updated as a matter of priority in light of changes to provision such as environment and staffing, while also remaining mindful of the additional distress learners may be experiencing due to COVID-19. If risk assessments are not in place, then they must be undertaken in accordance with this guidance and local risk assessment guidance.

**F - School Meals and Free School Meals**

**Will school meals be provided in schools?**

School meals will not be provided. Children will need to bring a packed lunch, including a drink, which they will have at their desk or outside of the weather is good and it can be safely arranged.

**Will pupils eligible for free school meals be provided with lunch?**

Parents and carers of children who receive free school meals will continue to receive direct payments and will need to send their child(ren) to school with a packed lunch, including a drink.

**FOR PUPILS/STUDENTS**

**(Questions that may be asked by pupils about the re-opening of their school.)**

**What can I do to keep safe?**

The most important things all of us can do is to keep good hygiene. During the day you need to wash your hands regularly and your school will have plenty of soap for this. Also trap any coughs and sneezes in a tissue or your elbow.

**Will I have to keep 2m away from other children?**

Everyone is doing a great job of keeping 2m apart at the moment. This may be difficult to start with when you return to school but as you practise and get used to it, it will get easier. Teachers won’t tell you off if you get too close to other pupils but they will remind you about social distancing.

**What can I bring to school?**

Please don’t bring anything apart from your lunchbox. **Don’t** bring a pencil case, toys, mobile phones or books. If you have school reading books at home leave them at home for now. Don’t bring work you have done at home during lockdown until your school asks you. Don’t bring anything to share with other children like birthday cakes or snacks.

**Do I need to wear school uniform?**

This will vary from school to school, but we guess you have grown a lot over the last 12 weeks and it will be difficult for your parents to buy new uniform because some shops are closed. Your school will let your parents know what you can wear to school.

**Do I need to wear a mask to school?**

You do not need to wear a mask to school. What really matters is that you wash your hands frequently during the day, and that you follow what your teachers say about social distancing. We will also make sure that that your school is kept really clean every day.

**Will we be doing school work?**

You will be doing some school work but teachers will also spend time catching up with pupils and making sure everyone is o.k. There will also be lessons on good hygiene and other things you will all do differently in school now because of coronavirus.

**What will the class look like?**

Tables will be spaced apart to help us keep 2m away from others. There may be arrows on the floor to show a safe path around the classroom and there lines by the doors that are 2m apart. Some of you might have seen this at the supermarket.

Equipment that is difficult to clean quickly will be taken out of class or moved away from your desks – things like soft toys, cushions and costumes.

Pupils won’t be able to work in groups so will be completing more tasks on their own.

There will be fewer children in your class. Every year will be spilt into smaller groups.

**What will break times be like?**

Classes are likely to have break at different times. This will mean more space on the yard and field. It is unlikely that games where pupils are in contact like tag, football or rugby will be allowed in the normal way but schools will come up with clever ways to ensure you can still have fun. Pupils may be able to have some play equipment out, as long as they are things that can clean easily before the next person uses them.

**What will happen at lunchtime?**

Pupils will be eating in class, or outside if the weather is warm and dry.

**What should I do if I feel sick?**

It is really important you tell an adult straight away if you feel ill. This is to help keep you and your friends safe.

**Will we be able to play at break time with our friends? Can we play outside?**

Every class will have break time separately. Pupils will be able to go outside but there will be some games like tag and rugby that can’t be played. You may not be able to play with some of your friends, especially if they are in a different group to you.

**ALL SCHOOL BASED STAFF (TEACHING, NON-TEACHING AND SUPPORT)**

**I’m a teacher who’s shielding. Am I expected to return to work at the end of June?**

You are not expected to return to work if you are shielding. You will have received a letter from the Chief Medical Officer (by 15 June) that can be can be shared with your employer as proof that you will not be able to go to work while you are shielding.

**What support is there for schools before they re-open on 29 June 2020?**

All schools have received the model risk assessment and are supported by a member of the Education Service Senior Management Team, a Health & Safety Officer, HR support and by a range of other relevant professionals. This is in addition to the operational guidance published by Welsh Government.

**Will staff need to wear PPE?**

The use of PPE by staff within education settings should be based on a clear assessment of risk, taking into account each individual setting and the needs of the individual learner. Schools, settings and local authorities already have risk assessments processes in place which should be used to identify the need for the use of PPE. Following any risk assessment, where the need for PPE has been identified, it should be readily available and provided.

**Where do we store all the equipment/furniture/soft furnishings we’ve got to take out of the classrooms?**

Aside from outside the guidance from Welsh Government advocates protective bubbles of learners and staff occupying the same space throughout the day to minimise contamination. This will mean halls are pretty much no go areas, including at lunch and break times, and could be available for storage. If there are no other obvious spare rooms within the school, and with the smaller numbers of pupils expected in each classroom, items could be cordoned off/covered in their existing spaces.

**How will vulnerable learners be supported in schools from 29 June?**

There are two groups of vulnerable learners; those defined by Social Care who have been accessing the hubs to date and those who the school class as vulnerable.

All mainstream schools are required to continue with the same offer for the vulnerable children defined by Social care as they have made decisions as the corporate parent.

For children who have been receiving an offer via Outreach at Crownbridge, they will now need to have an offer provided for them in their own mainstream school.

Schools will also be identifying their vulnerable groups including those with ALN in addition to the above.

**What is the expectation regarding existing hub schools reopening on the 29 June?**

Due to the requirement to both clean and reorganise classrooms, schools that have been providing hub provision should look to reopen no later than Wednesday 1st July. During this ‘shutdown’ period individual schools will need to notify parents/cares that there will be no provision during this period and learners will not be reassigned to other provision.

**Can learners move between ‘bubbles’?**

The expectation is that pupil contact should be minimised by working in a single dedicated ‘bubble’ or group. For example children attending as part of key worker provision should remain in the same bubble. However, all children should be afforded every opportunity to attend school and meet the purpose as laid out in the WG guidance regarding their learning. This may mean that a pupil could be part of two bubbles during any week as they move from childcare provision to working with their peers as part of the planned continuity in learning.

**Guidance states that a school can set up in-house childcare provision for its own staff’s children if they are unable to attend their normal school. Is this legal? They would not be covered by insurance?**

A school may look to provide ‘in house’ childcare arrangements for its own staff as long as the child in question is of statutory school age. The expectation however is that most children will return to their own schools for support when it is required.

**Should schools invite new reception parents in this term?**

No. Schools may wish to liaise with parents through phone calls, virtual tours and bespoke video messages from key staff, but this will be up to individual schools to decide the best way forward.

**If a child is being defiant, grabbing and touching faces and ignoring any rules should they be asked to stay at home?**

All children should be afforded every opportunity to attend school as per WG guidance. However, schools will have previously identified pupils with complex needs and/or behavioural issues as part of their ongoing everyday provision and if necessary have written a formal risk assessment.

If a pupil is considered by the school to pose a significant risk to themselves or others through their attendance during these challenging times then the school should discuss their concerns with the parents/carers and come to an agreement about the benefits of continuing provision through distance learning until such time as the risk is reduced.

**If we send a pupil home or not conforming to instruction around social distancing is it exclusion?**

It would be hoped that pupils, especially secondary age pupils will understand the importance of appropriate behaviour in reducing the risk around infection. However, should the need arise to send a pupil home for flagrant breaches of the schools guidance then it falls under the existing regulations around exclusions from school.

**Will guidance be issued on how teachers should respond if a fight breaks out between pupils?**

Hopefully, through detailed knowledge and consideration of identified pupils with particular needs and attitudes to behaviour in conjunction with social distancing, any instances of fighting between pupils would be avoided. However, if one should occur schools still have a duty of care regarding pupil’s welfare, but any staff intervention must be made with full consideration of all available guidance. Guidance in respect of manual handling will follow once further clarity has been obtained.

**PPE -Will a central order be made?**

The Local Authority is in the process of procuring PPE for all schools to cover their planned needs. This will include any specific provision identified through discussions with the ALN team

**A child has formal shielding letter but the parent wants to send the child to school. Should they be told to keep the child at home?**

Response from DECLO is that parents can choose to send their child as the risk is very low but it needs to be made clear to parents that this is at their own risk

**Parent has formal shielding letter but wants to send child to school. Should she be advised to keep pupil at home?**

There is no issue with the parent sending the child to school. It is a parental decision based upon their medical condition and acceptance of the likely risk.

**Can children in different bubbles use the same toilets?**

Yes, but access will need to be managed to maintain social distancing.

**What about Staff wearing face masks at times other than first aid personal care?**

The advice is that staff in education do not need to wear facemasks other than where specific issues as identified in the guidance. However, if staff anxiety is deemed to be of concern then Headteachers should not object.

**What should they do about Soft furnishings/chairs, should they be stored and not used?**

Government advice is that school should remove unnecessary items from classrooms and other learning environments where there is space to store it elsewhere. In particular, they should remove soft furnishings, soft toys and toys that are hard to clean (such as those with intricate parts).

**Can schools keep Inset days at the end of term?**

Schools that have planned INSET days in their calendar should reschedule these and take these before Friday the 26th June.

**When will the cleaning regime take place and how will this work?**

Neighbourhood Services has committed to provide schools with a handbook which will confirm the cleaning regime that is being put into place. Schools should expect to receive this in w/c 15/6.

**How will schools record attendance following reopening?**

The following guidance tells schools how to record attendance moving forward:

https://gov.wales/recording-attendance-schools-and-settings-29-june-coronavirus

https://llyw.cymru/cofnodi-presenoldeb-mewn-ysgolion-lleoliadau-o-29-mehefin-coronafeirws

**Are schools expected to social distance during fire drills?**

In a genuine fire alarm the need to safely evacuate the building due to fire would override any consideration regarding the likely impact of not adhering to social distancing. However, in the case of ‘drills’ it would be prudent to ensure social distancing as in this case the risk of transmission of the virus outweighs risk to pupils safety.