**Friday 29th January, 2021**

I hope everyone associated with Ysgol Derwen is keeping safe and well during these worrying times.

We have now been in a National lockdown since December 20th with schools closed for face to face teaching for a month. 2021 certainly hasn’t started in the way we were all hoping for!

Up until the Christmas break we managed to keep Ysgol Derwen and the local community relatively safe. I’d only heard of a few people who had Covid and we somehow didn’t have any pupils or staff having positive cases. As a result, we were lucky to keep the school open to all children for the whole term.

The situation since Christmas however seems much worse, highlighted by the daily Government updates and the awful news this week that over 100,000 people in UK have now lost their lives to this awful virus. I now personally know of many people who have contracted the virus, including members of my family, members of the school staff, parents and grandparents of children in school and residents of the village who have had connections to the school in the past. With cases still high in Flintshire we must all do whatever we can to follow the rules, help minimise contacts and in turn help the NHS.

This has by far been the most demanding time in my professional career, trying to run a school and keep the pupils and staff as safe as possible while also trying to protect myself and my family. I know how difficult this lockdown is for all our families who are having to home school while trying to work from home. I have a 13-Year-old daughter who has to be left at home to work on a laptop while I come into school. Trying to help her with her Year 8 Maths and Science over the phone is particularly challenging! Many of my staff are also in a similar situation. So please don’t put too much pressure on yourselves or your children to complete all set tasks. If you are struggling with any aspect of home schooling please contact your child’s class teacher and they will do all they can to support you.

Ysgol Derwen has been open for children of vital key workers since the start of term and those children and staff who are currently attending school daily have been fantastic adapting to yet another change to the organisation of the school day.

The Welsh Government is yet to announce their final plans for the reopening of schools in Wales. No doubt many of you have seen/heard the news from the Education Minister, Kirsty Williams, ahead of the First Minister’s press briefing at lunchtime today. As expected, there will be no return to school before February half term. The position remains constantly under review and the hope is that some phasing in of pupils could start from 22nd February but only if the infection rates continue to fall. There is also the possibility that there could be local flexibility to reflect the variances in infection rates in different parts of Wales.

So, the confirmed position at the current time is that if the transmission of covid continues to decline, pupils will start returning to school in a phased way from 22nd February, beginning with our youngest learners.

Please don’t contact school asking for our plans for reopening as I am finding out any information the same time as everyone else and will be hearing any announcements at lunchtime the same time as the rest of the Nation.

Whenever I get confirmation of the final plans and guidance from the Welsh Government and Local Authority about when we are able to welcome children back to Ysgol Derwen, I will share the details with you and we will continue to do our best to ensure children are making good progress while also trying to keep the community of Higher Kinnerton safe.

**Good Luck Mrs Williams**

Mrs Williams, our Year 1 teacher, has decided the time is right for her to resign from her post at Ysgol Derwen in order to enjoy her retirement and spend quality time with her family. Mrs Williams has been a dedicated teacher at the school for the past 13 years and is well liked by all her colleagues and pupils at the school. Mrs Williams will be missed by everyone associated with Ysgol Derwen and we wish her and her family the very best in her retirement.

Mrs Williams will be leaving her position as our Year 1 teacher on Friday February 12th. No doubt the Covid situation has helped Mrs Williams make this decision and it will be a real shame that the staff and children will not be able to give her a proper send off on her last day at Ysgol Derwen.

Trying to organise recruitment during a global pandemic can be challenging, but we will be able to cover the vacancy using current staff initially up until the Summer break.

Miss Lee will be taking over as class teacher with the Year 1 Class from Monday February 22nd. She is currently working closely (and remotely) with Mrs Williams to ensure a smooth transition for the children and Miss Lee. The children in Year 1 all know Miss Lee, so they will have a friendly face to return to once schools are safe to open again. Miss Lee is a former pupil of Ysgol Derwen and has worked as a Teaching Assistant in the Upper Foundation before leaving to study to become a teacher. She covered our Year 2 Class while Mrs Taylor was on her maternity leave and has been working at the school as part of a job share with Mrs Taylor in the Year 2 Class since September 2020. Miss Lee is very excited to be taking on this role and is looking forward to working with the children and parents of our Year 1 class over the coming months.

Miss Lee’s role as 0.4 teacher for our Year 2 Class will be covered until the end of the Summer Term by Miss Redmond. Miss Redmond covered a long-term absence of one of our staff in the Nursery Class from October 2019 until June 2020. She also currently provides PPA cover for our Year 3 Class and has been used as a regular supply teacher throughout the Autumn Term 2020, especially in the Upper Foundation. She is also currently working with Mrs Taylor to ensure a common approach within the Year 2 Class.

**Remote learning (Nursery to Year 6 )**

All children should by now have their Hwb logins enabling them to access Google Classroom. The pupils will access this platform with their individual logins which the pupils are provided with at the start of the school year. I am also mindful that we all have very different circumstances at home and that it would be insensitive and impractical to have the same expectations for all students, carers and staff. The use of Google Classroom should ensure all pupils are able to access the learning opportunities provided by class teachers equally. If your child can’t remember or has lost their login details, please contact your child’s class teacher for this information.

School staff are very familiar in the use of Google Classroom. Pupils, especially in the Juniors, will also be familiar with Google Classroom due to its use throughout the year at Ysgol Derwen. The complexity of tasks will vary due to experience of pupils and the learning opportunities they have had during their time in school.

What you should expect

• Google Classroom is being used to provide online learning.

• Children will have the opportunity to access three activities each day (1 Maths, 1 English and one other subject)

• Tasks for our Nursery pupils will differ and this will be more practical based.

• Teachers will include videos / voice overs etc. explaining tasks where possible e.g. this could be talking over PowerPoints, telling stories, explaining tasks etc.

• Work will be released the day before to allow parents time to prepare for the following day.

• Tasks that pupils complete will receive feedback from the class teacher. The level of feedback provided should firstly acknowledge the work completed and then identify the strengths, any misconceptions and areas for development. If pupils are asked to improve or correct a piece of work they are expected to carry this out like they would in school.

• Teachers are available throughout the school day to receive work and to offer support or give feedback. Please also bear in mind that the teachers are on a rota to teach children at school up to three days a week. On the days teachers are in school they may not have a chance to check emails or respond as quickly but they will ensure they do respond as soon as they possibly can.

• Work submitted by 3pm on the day it is set will be given feedback that day, any work submitted after that will receive feedback the next day.

Please be considerate if at any point, work for your year group does not appear on time. There may be internet connection issues due to the entire school population of the UK accessing online learning. Wi-Fi at school is also still not very reliable and frequently drops out or is slow, or in the worst-case scenario the teacher or a member of their family may have become ill and be unable to upload work. This is an unprecedented situation and one which is causing much anxiety and upset to everyone. Please bear in mind that the school staff also have the same worries, underlying health issues, elderly parents and grandparents to care for, and their own children at home etc.

**Wellbeing**

Whilst it remains to be important to keep up the academic work set by school it is as equally important to spend quality time with your family enjoying each other’s company and doing ‘normal’ things. Please remember that while they are in school, the children do spend time in transition to lessons, breaktimes, lunchtimes, assemblies etc, so please don’t feel that you have to make your child work for 6 hours a day.

The wellbeing of our pupils is very important to us. We hope that this approach to learning will encourage and motivate many of our learners, but it is very important to recognize that wellbeing is a major priority. It is not healthy for any child or adult to be working for hours per day looking at a screen and probably also be sitting with a poor posture. We do not want our pupils or parents to feel anxious if they are experiencing technical issues or having difficulties accessing materials. School staff will be patient, supportive and understanding. Similarly, it is very important for our pupils to spend time engaging in other purposeful activities such as reading for pleasure, cycling, drawing and family walks.

Finding the right balance during blended/remote learning is essential.

A huge thank you to everyone who has sent positive and supportive messages to your child’s class teachers over the past few weeks. They really do appreciate this during these difficult times.

Thank you for your continued support.

Stay safe

R Jones