

Good morning,

I hope you are all keeping safe during these challenging times.

I am sure many of you will have been following the news regarding the new variant of Covid which is currently sweeping across the country. Despite the fact that we returned to relatively normal face-to-face learning at the beginning of September, Covid is still causing huge disruption to schools nationally with cases amongst pupils going up and staff absences leading to classes/schools having to close.

We have had our challenges throughout this term, especially when we had an outbreak in October, but you know we have made every effort to mitigate the impact of COVID and to provide continuity of learning at Ysgol Derwen.

Many local authorities across Wales have been announcing this week that they will be closing early for Christmas with children moving onto blended learning for the last few days of term.

I have just had notification from Flintshire County Council that all schools in Flintshire will now also close for the majority of pupils on Friday December 17th.

Please see statement from Flintshire CC below*

Ysgol Derwen will remain open on Monday December 20th and Tuesday December 21st for key worker children and vulnerable children only. If you have no alternative childcare available on these two days and you think you will require key worker provision, please notify the school by Thursday December 16th so that we can put all arrangements in place by Monday. Key worker provision will be provided between 8.30am to 3.45pm for the last two days of term.

Little Acorns Breakfast and After School Club along with Nursery Plus will close on Friday December 17th.

The list of critical workers can be found in the following guidance:

<https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fgov.wales%2Fidentifying-children-critical-workers-guidance&data=04%7C01%7CKiheaD%40Hwbcymru.net%7Cbfb1b9609e644b944e9108d9bee73193%7C4f3f0e52b734416494091b601d147993%7C0%7C0%7C637750722747283573%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzliLCJBTiI6IjEhaWwiLCJXVCi6Mn0%3D%7C3000&sdata=99IGKjynUHEy%2BGCLbHEw8%2FcM69IiN3fTGT%2BOtrFje%2Fk%3D&reserved=0>

We would request that you only use this provision if no alternative childcare arrangements can be made.

We are also mindful that any positive cases that may be identified this week, especially of the new variant, would result in individuals having to isolate over the Christmas period, including Christmas Day. I am aware that many of you will be concerned about the Christmas period and hoping that you will be able to share it with your extended households. We have had a few requests from parents about pupils not attending Ysgol Derwen for the rest of this term so as to try and keep Covid free for Christmas. We do have a small number of positive cases in the school at the moment but we have had this situation all term. Hopefully things will remain stable for the last few days but we all know how quickly the situation can change following out outbreak earlier this term. If you are planning to keep your child/children home to isolate in readiness for the Christmas period, please notify the school so we can update our records. These requests will be authorised.

I would also like to thank all of the school staff who have worked tirelessly to implement rigorous and robust safety measures and to do as much as they can throughout this term to provide quality, happy learning experiences. The children and staff have worked extremely hard all term and this time in the run up to the festive period is traditionally a time for all to enjoy as the children get more

and more excited about Christmas. Thankfully we have already had our Christmas lunch and today the children are again filling the school with joy in their Christmas clothes for our lunchtime party menu. We also hope to have a very special guest visiting the school this afternoon!!

After such a challenging term the staff had planned for two days of festive fun next week with Christmas art and craft on Monday and games and a film on Tuesday. This is very difficult to replicate in blended learning especially as the staff will be in school looking after key worker children. We will do our best to get some festive tasks out to the children by Friday for them to complete at home for the last two days of term.

We are also very glad that all our Christmas concerts have been filmed and are ready to be shared with parents and families. We plan to release all Christmas Concerts on Google Classroom on Friday December 17th.

Your continued support and understanding in this situation and throughout the term is greatly appreciated.

I sincerely hope that you will enjoy a safe, family Christmas and that we can all look forward to an improving situation in January.

Kind regards

R Jones

***Statement From Flintshire County Council 14/12/21**

Flintshire's rates of Covid-19 infection have been rising consistently over the last few weeks. On Friday 10th December, the incident rate reached 558.6 per 100K and whilst below the Betsi Cadwalader University Health Board average of 611.2, it is above the all Wales average of 501.9 per 100k.

Coronavirus infection rates are impacting on many schools and rapidly increasing workforce absence due to Covid-19 and other factors is now having a knock-on effect, with many Headteachers

reporting that they are having difficulty in maintaining adequate staffing levels. Some Flintshire schools have already had to close classes or year groups to safely manage. The availability of supply staff is virtually non-existent, not only in Flintshire but across Wales, and this is adding to the pressures.

These factors and the emergence of the new variant of concern in the UK have prompted the Council to advise all schools to reintroduce blended learning from Monday, 20 December to Wednesday 22 December when the autumn term officially ends. Some schools have used training days or the Platinum Jubilee Bank Holiday entitlement to finish on 21st December whilst others were finishing on the 22nd December.

Claire Homard, Chief Officer for Education and Youth said

“This decision – which has the backing of head teachers – will allow staff to use a blended approach to deliver education, whilst also providing head teachers with the discretion to invite groups of learners to attend school for face-to-face learning where required particularly in examination year groups in secondary schools.

Children of key workers and vulnerable children will be permitted to attend school for the last few days of term (as determined by their school calendar) if no alternative arrangements can be made. Further information regarding arrangements will be issued directly by head teachers to parents. This decision has not been taken lightly. The Council expects the workforce situation to deteriorate as the week progresses so has made this decision now to give parents and carers as much time as possible to make arrangements.”

Council Leader, Councillor Ian Roberts said,

“Flintshire County Council will do what we believe is necessary to safeguard our children, our staff and our communities. Coronavirus cases have increased considerably and, as a result, staff absence in schools has increased. This does not just include teachers but a wide range of support staff too.

Our young people will continue their education and will switch to blended learning for the last few days of term. We share the concerns of government around the Omicron variant and are aware that many parents and staff are extremely worried. We must consider people’s wellbeing after a very difficult year.

“Our education team continues to work closely with head teachers and all staff in schools and I would like to thank our school staff, governing bodies and parents for their continued work and care during a very difficult time.”

In the meantime it is vital that we all take the simple but necessary precautions so please remember to:

- **wear a mask when needed**
- **get tested and self-isolate if required**
- **get vaccinated**
- **allow fresh air into indoor spaces**
- **take regular LFD tests at home**