

Important information regarding the reopening of Ysgol Derwen

Dear Parents

We hope that you and your families continue to stay safe. Can we once again thank you for the support that you are giving to your child during this very difficult time. The photos, videos and messages we have received through our online platforms have been outstanding.

You will, undoubtedly, be aware of the announcement made this week by Kirsty Williams, the Welsh Government Minister for Education, that schools will be reopening for all age groups in Wales on June 29th. It is important at this time that, I share with you some of the detail of what the return will mean for the children of Ysgol Derwen and for you as their parents. School staff are looking forward to welcoming the children back and crucially seeing them all again. We know that the staff at school have all missed the children immensely and that the children have missed their friends.

The return to school at the end of June is to provide the opportunity for all pupils, in the words of the Minister, to "Check In, Catch Up and Prepare" for the Summer and Autumn term and to make sure pupils, staff and parents are prepared mentally, emotionally and practically - for the new "normal" in September. However due to the restrictions, opportunities for all pupils to 'Catch-Up' with friends and staff will be limited.

Your child's safety and wellbeing are our priority and we are waiting for the detailed guidance that will help us to plan and prepare for this next phase. Welsh Government has announced that this further guidance will be published next week, including information on managing facilities and logistical arrangements, including buildings, resources, cleaning and transport. However, we have already started our initial planning and considerations, prioritising wellbeing of learners, staff and families. We understand that you will have many questions and we are working closely with the Local Authority and the regional consortium so that we can provide you with the information you need to prepare for this next phase. These next few weeks will be very busy as we work to complete our risk assessments and prepare the school site however, please be reassured, keeping you and your children informed remains our priority.

By the middle of next week you will be receiving a brief questionnaire with regard to whether you intend to send your child back to school from the 29th June or not. You will know that the staff here will have done everything within their control to ensure the school environment is as safe as we can make it. It is important however that you have full understanding of the environment your child will be returning to and the experiences we have had in running the Childcare Hub in Ysgol Estyn in terms of children and social distancing.

1. Work undertaken by pupils will continue on digital platforms, whether your child is at home or in school. Every child in the school will have equal opportunity to undertake the same work.
2. Classroom environments will be totally different. All pupils will be sitting at a desk, 2m apart. Staff will not be able to approach your children and staff and children will only be allowed to interact from 2m.
3. Break times are likely to involve opportunity for exercise but again in small numbers and at least 2m apart.
4. There will be no interaction between year groups. Pupils will remain in their allocated room with the same pupils (maximum of 7 per room) and will stay with these children for the duration of their day. This is to minimise cross contamination between groups of pupils and staff. Their class teacher is unlikely to be teaching them as each staff member will remain in the same room throughout the weeks, once again to minimise cross contamination.
5. The school is likely to only be open for 4 days Monday - Thursday. This will allow a deep clean every Thursday evening and the school sealed for 72 hours to reduce the risk of infection.
6. Your child will not be in school all week and may not be in school every week. Your child will be allocated a time eg Monday 9:30- 2:15pm These times will be non negotiable. We also cannot guarantee that siblings from different classes will be in school at the same time.
7. All staff and possible children are likely to be wearing some form of PPE, likely to include masks and /or aprons.
8. Movement around school will be kept to a minimum. No parents will be allowed on the school site at any time. You will be allocated a time to arrive and a time to pick up. If you miss your dropping off time then you will have to wait until every other child has been taken to their class base as strict movement around must be adhered to.

9. Kinnerton Kids Club and Little Acorns will not be providing childcare during this period due to lack of capacity due to social distancing and the school needing all available space to accommodate pupils.

Our experience from working in the Childcare Hub for the last few months

- A. Most children aged 8+ understand social distancing and with reminders can observe a two metre distance well.
- B. Most children under 8 CANNOT understand social distancing and despite reminders continue to interact at less than 2m distance. This increases the risk of infection dramatically.
- C. Children are naturally anxious and can over think things. Seeing the school looking totally different, with hand washing stations, temperature taking and tables placed 2m apart is unfamiliar to the children in a school setting and does add to their anxiety and impacts on their wellbeing. You know Ysgol Derwen and its staff well enough and they will work hard to ensure the negative affect on their wellbeing is kept to a minimum, however it has been very difficult to keep children's spirits high during the last 12 weeks in the Hub.

As a school, we have worked with our colleagues in the other consortium primary schools and we will follow all government guidelines (not arriving with schools until 10th June). We have acted upon all advice given and have worked with an external health and safety company to ensure that our schools are as safe as they can be and meet all the requirements the government will stipulate. Several staff will not be available to work due to shielding or other underlying reasons. This also limits the number of pupils we can safely supervise.

The choice of whether to send your child to school from the 29th June is yours. You must make a decision based on what you think is safe for your child and we will respect that decision to the full. Whilst we can make the school environment as safe as we can, we have no control of the current situation on the community of North Wales as a whole at the moment which currently has one of the highest percentage of new cases of Covid19 in the country.

We recognise that this information sheet may come across as negative and a little frightening, for that we apologise. The information however is factual and we feel that as parents making such a difficult decision you need to be able to see facts from which decisions can be made.

As school senior managers, we did not see an opening to all pupils from the 29th June on the horizon and have been taken by surprise by that if we are honest. The first time we knew about that was Wednesday 3rd June in the Education Ministers news conference. Whilst we have been active in working towards opening schools whilst providing educational opportunities via Google Classroom, we will not have complete guidance until 10th June giving us just 12 working days to ensure our schools are ready and to create a timetable for pupils returning hence the need for us to have some idea of how many pupils we will need to cater for. Welsh Government have stated up to one third of pupils at a time will be able to attend school but with our class sizes we cannot fit one third of our pupils in school with 2m distancing and are also not likely to have enough staff available to cater for these numbers. Your child's time in school from June 29th is likely to be brief, possibly 4 days in total given these practical school based issues. We are currently considering our options as to what is best to ensure your child's and staff safety and well being.

Importantly in Wednesday's announcement it highlighted that allowances will be made for families' individual circumstances and the Welsh Government will respect your decisions whether you choose for your children to return to school between now and the end of July. That is for you, each individual family to decide what is your choice but we are here to listen and help support you should you feel you need further assurances.

Finally please accept our apologies for the difficult situation this places you all as parents in. We hope you understand the need for such a blunt information sheet and hope you understand the very difficult situation the school, its staff and governors are placed in trying to meet the expectations that Welsh Government have placed on our schools so swiftly and with so little time to adjust to the totally different expectations the Education Minister has placed on schools in Wales in comparison to other nations.

Thank you for your patience and understanding during this difficult time . Can I also kindly ask that you do not send individual emails at the moment regarding the return to school as I may not be able to reply due to the volume of information which is reaching me on an hourly basis.

Yours sincerely

Mr R Jones
Head teacher

Summary of and link to The Education Minister's announcement 03/06/20
Check in, Catch Up, Prepare for Summer and September".

<https://gov.wales/check-catch-prepare-summer-and-september-all-schools-wales-enter-next-phase>

What

- Schools will start the next phase on 29 June, with the term extended by a week, therefore ending on 27 July.
- Autumn half-term break will be expanded to two weeks.
- Childcare providers will also increase the numbers of children in attendance from 9 June.

How

- In each school there will be a phased approach.
- Year groups will be split into cohorts with staggered starts, lessons 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.
- Much smaller classes will provide secure dedicated time with teachers and classmates.
- This time will include online and personalised classroom experience, getting children and teachers ready for a similar experience in September.

Why

- We are creating the opportunity for children to Check in, Catch Up and Prepare before the start of September.
- Since the decision to close schools for statutory provision, our understanding of the virus and its longer-term impacts has continued to develop.
- We know that we are going to have to live with it for some time.
- We know that it will remain our biggest challenge for the foreseeable future.
- We know that the classroom experience will be different for a long time to come.

What next

- Next week, the Welsh Government will publish guidance to support childcare, 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.