

Dear Parent(s)/Carer(s),

Welsh Government and the Welsh Local Government Association have issued a joint statement regarding the return to school following the Christmas break and in light of this, I would like to provide you with an update on the agreed arrangements for the return to school in January.

As always, we remain committed to ensuring our schools are safe environments for staff and pupils in what continues to be very challenging times and we are working closely with our head teachers to manage risk as effectively as possible. With positive cases continuing to rise, we are not able to predict what the situation will be on January 4th. As a result, it has been agreed that schools will be able to use Monday the 4th and Tuesday the 5th of January to undertake all necessary risk assessments to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all learners when they return. During these 2 days, schools will be closed to all learners.

From Wednesday 6th January, I am hoping that schools will be able to safely re-open for face-to-face teaching, subject to appropriate staffing levels and risk assessments. If schools are unable to safely re-open, or can only partially re-open, children will be able to access remote learning until such time that they are able to return to school.

In the event schools are unable to reopen by the 6th of January, we will continue to offer support for our critical worker families within the following groups:

- Blue light workers, including NHS, Police and Fire Service staff
- Health and Social care staff, including care workers
- Front line childcare or education staff

Access to this provision should continue to be seen as a last resort in order to ensure that we mitigate all risks and keep everyone safe and only if there are no alternative arrangements possible.

The national picture with regard to COVID-19 continues to change at an incredible pace. Headteachers will write to you as soon as they possibly can at the beginning of term to let you know the individual arrangements for their schools.

We also ask that you continue to remain diligent over the forthcoming break and continue to keep Wales safe by maintaining social distancing, limiting contact with others, washing hands regularly, self-isolating if you or anyone in your home develops symptoms, and getting a test if you develop a high temperature, a new and continuous cough, or a loss or change to your sense of taste or smell.

Thank you for continuing to support our local schools, communities, and each other as we work towards a safe return in 2021. I would like to wish you and your families a safe and restful holiday period.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paula Ham". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Paula" and last name "Ham" clearly distinguishable.

Paula Ham
Director of Learning and Skills