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Our Ref./Ein Cyf. LP/CG/LM-M

Your Ref./Eich Cyf.

Contact:/Cysylltwch â: Lynn Phillips

Date:/ Dyddiad: 16th December 2021



Dear Parent/Carer,

## Re: Return for Learners - January 2022

The Welsh Government has today given an update for education and school based provision in relation to the return after the Christmas break. As always, the top priority for the Blaenau Gwent CBC and all our schools is to consider safety and minimise disruption to learning for our children and young people. Once again, the Council are working closely with our Headteachers here in the County Borough to agree a common approach, where possible.

During the past year, we have worked jointly with schools and with colleagues in Environmental Health and Health & Safety to provide COVID safe learning environments, and have adhered to the latest national guidelines on self-isolation requirements. In a few schools, there have been difficult decisions to move classes to blended learning, but importantly, this has been kept to a minimum and our schools have done an outstanding job in maintaining high quality learning in very dynamic circumstances.

The emerging situation with the new Omicron variant is an increasing concern and means the Welsh Government and public health officials are continuing to look at ways to reduce the transmission of this fast spreading variant by way of further restrictions where necessary and have introduced a much enhanced vaccination booster programme across Wales.

On returning in January, schools across Wales have been advised to operate at the 'very high' risk level within the Schools Infection Control Framework, however, in the Aneurin Bevan Health Board (Gwent area) a regional decision was made in October that resulted in Blaenau Gwent's schools functioning at this level since then. Some minor adjustments were made to school safety measures at that time to support the decision. We are very aware that this is an ever changing situation, however, the main principles currently outlined by the Welsh Government for January are:

- A slightly delayed return for pupils to site with term now officially starting on Thursday, 6<sup>th</sup> January 2022. This is to allow all schools two planning days to ensure school sites are ready for a safe return and also to make sure teachers are well prepared for remote and blended learning should the need arise amid this uncertain public health situation.



The Council welcomes correspondence in Welsh and English and we will communicate with you in the language of your choice, as long as you let us know which you prefer. Corresponding in Welsh will not lead to any delay.

Mae'r Cyngor yn croesawu gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg a Saesneg a byddwn yn cyfathrebu gyda chi yn eich dewis iaith, dim ond i chi rhoi gwybod i ni pa un sydd well gennych. Ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn creu unrhyw oedi.

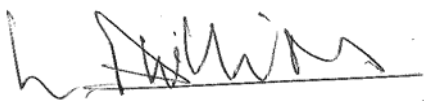


- Some schools who have planned INSET days can take these in addition as training has been arranged. These schools may have a different start date and you will be advised by your school accordingly.
- During the two planning days an element of already planned online learning will take place and schools will be in touch about this on a localised basis.
- An increase in the frequency of secondary pupils and school based staff taking Lateral Flow tests to three times a week (in Blaenau Gwent we are recommending these be carried out on a Sunday, Wednesday & Friday).
- The potential for flexibility regarding a return to staggered start and finish times for pupils. This will be a matter for individual schools following a review of their risk assessments and you will be advised accordingly. We are also recommending that school sporting events, which involve pupils from different schools participating are postponed for now.
- For any periods that children in receipt of Free School Meals cannot attend school due to closure or blended learning then families will be able to once again access direct payments. The Education Transformation team will be providing more detailed information on this for eligible families.

You can expect your child's school to be in touch with the details of the arrangements for the new term including start and finish times; transport and any catering/lunch arrangements. Home to School Transport will be available for those who normally access it from the 6<sup>th</sup> January and full COVID-19 safety controls will continue to be in place. Please continue to be vigilant for any symptoms and please do not let your child/children return to school in January if they are displaying any symptoms, or have been told to self-isolate by the Test Trace Protect Service. It is unfortunate that we find ourselves in this position again so close to Christmas, but we must continue to do all we can to keep pupils, staff and the wider community safe and well.

Once again, I would like to end by repeating my thanks to you all during this particularly dynamic academic year and hope that you all enjoy the Christmas break with your close ones.

**Best Wishes and please stay safe,**



**Lynn Phillips**  
**Corporate Director for Education**  
**Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council**