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Contact:/Cysylltwch â: Lynn Phillips

Date:/ Dyddiad: Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> January 2022



Cyngor Bwrdeisdref Sirol

**Blaenau Gwent**

County Borough Council

Dear Parent/Carer,

## Re: School Operations January 2022

With Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> January 2022 marking the official start of term in Blaenau Gwent, and learners returning to schools over the course of the next two days, I am writing to inform you of the latest Welsh Government and operational updates affecting schools. As a result of the increased level of positive COVID cases within the community, and subsequent escalation to Level 2, Welsh Government updated the school guidance to reflect this position.

As always, the main priority for the Local Authority and all of our schools is to consider safety and minimise disruption to learning for our children and young people. The Local Authority continues to work closely with our Headteachers in Blaenau Gwent, to agree a common approach where possible. Welsh Government will continue to work with Local Authorities and schools to monitor the situation, ensuring to adapt guidance and operations accordingly over the course of the next few months.

Throughout the course of the pandemic, Education has worked closely in partnership with schools, support services, colleagues in Environmental Health and Health & Safety, to provide COVID safe teaching and learning environments, whilst also adhering to the latest national guidelines. Recent changes and adaptations to school operations have been implemented in order to ensure compliance with the latest Welsh Government legislation and guidance. Our schools continue to do an outstanding job in maintaining high quality learning under extremely dynamic and challenging circumstances.

Schools across the region have been advised that they will need to continue to operate at the 'very high' risk level within the Schools Infection Control Framework. Blaenau Gwent schools have been functioning at this level since October 2021. We are very aware that this is an ever changing situation, however, the main principles currently outlined by Welsh Government are:

- An increase to the frequency that secondary pupils and school based staff take Lateral Flow tests, from two to three times a week (in Blaenau Gwent we are recommending these are carried out on a Sunday, Wednesday & Friday).



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.



- Face coverings should be worn by staff and visitors in all indoor areas of all educational settings, including classrooms, **where physical distance cannot be maintained**. Face coverings should be worn by secondary aged learners in all indoor areas, including classrooms, **where physical distance cannot be maintained**. In addition, face coverings continue to be recommended for secondary aged learners on home to school transport. It is recognised, however, that there will be some learners and staff who are exempt from wearing face coverings.
- There is a 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, of which you will be advised accordingly.
- During periods where children who are in receipt of Free School Meals cannot attend school due to a move to blended learning, families will be able to once again access direct payments. If you are already in receipt of a direct payment you do not need to reapply. The Local Authority will contact you via your school when each new round of applications opens. Please bear in mind that we are currently dealing with an extremely high volume of calls, therefore, we will assess your claim and deal with any enquiries as soon as we are able.
- Primary schools will be provided with a supply of Lateral Flow Test (LFT) kits for pupil use only. These testing kits will be made available in line with the Welsh Government warn and inform process. Warn and inform comes into effect where there are two or more confirmed cases of COVID within a class group over a 7-day period. Welsh Government guidance recommends that where this applies, pupils undertake daily testing for 7 days in order to prevent wider spread. Testing kits can be accessed via schools upon request. LFT kits are not for general distribution and/or wider household use. Where LFT kits are required within the household, they can be obtained from Community Supply Hubs and/or the NHS website.
- Over the course of the next few weeks there may be occasions where schools need to move to blended learning as a result of staff absence. Schools will endeavour to provide continued support for critical worker children and vulnerable children (on a priority basis) during periods of disruption, as soon as it is practicably possible to do so. However, as the demand and pressure on resources during these periods will be significant, we ask that you only request critical worker support from your school if **absolutely essential and you have no other means of childcare**. Further details will be available from your school, should the need for a move to blended learning arise.
- We plan to reinstate the breakfast club service for existing registrants from Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> January 2022 in line with school re-opening. At the very high risk level, one of the suggested interventions in the Welsh Government Framework includes: “consider pausing breakfast club provision”. Blaenau Gwent Council have not paused the provision, but instead took the decision not to extend it. Full breakfast club reintroduction remains a high priority and remain under review. However, prior to extending this

provision, we need to be certain that it does not have a detrimental impact upon the provision of statutory education.



School support services including catering and transport are likely to experience disruption over the course of the coming weeks, resulting in the need to adapt service delivery. The Local Authority and your school will communicate any significant changes and/or adaptations with you as soon as practicably possible.

All activities involving visitors to school sites and off site visits will be subject to risk assessment, and considered on a case by case basis.

Having been at the very high risk level for quite some time, Blaenau Gwent schools are well placed to maintain safe and effective operations. This of course will continue to be reviewed on a regular basis. The core mitigation measures i.e. hands, face, space and ventilation remain unchanged at the very high risk level within the Framework.

Please continue to be vigilant for any symptoms and do not let your child/children attend school if they are symptomatic, or they have been told to self-isolate by the Test Trace Protect Service. We must continue to do all that we can to keep pupils, staff and the wider community safe and well.

**Best Wishes and please stay safe,**

**Claire Gardner**  
**Service Manager – Education Transformation and Business Change**  
**On behalf of Lynn Phillips, Corporate Director for Education**  
**Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council**