

Transition Back to School - Covid-19 Guidance for Parents

Foreword

- Schools re-opening after the Covid-19 pandemic will be a new and challenging experience for pupils, parents and school staff.
- It is important that we work together to prepare as much as we can for a successful transition.
- We must be aware that the experience will be different for everyone, but there are a few key factors which will be helpful to consider for everyone in preparation for the 'new normal'.

Schools have not been 'Shut'

- Most teachers and support staff have continued to work either in school hubs or providing distance learning from home.
- Staff have continued to work creatively to support learning and well-being and may have been expected to work longer hours, including school holidays.

Schools are all different - but we are all working together!

- Schools are all different and have different challenges and demands to manage in re-opening for pupils. The key priority will be the safety and well-being of all users.
- As a result of different local issues, the number of staff able to return to work and the physical capacity of the school, schools may not be able to run the services that they may previously have run – such as breakfast clubs/ after school clubs etc. Your school will let you know what they will be able to offer.
- In order to keep everyone safe, schools will need to limit the number of visitors. This may mean that parents will not be able to enter schools in the same way that they did prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. It will also mean that there will be different systems for how children enter and exit the school. These are designed to keep everyone safe.

The School Day

The school day will look different to how we have previously experienced it:

- Start and end times may differ. Your school will update you on this as soon as they have completed their planning.
- Children groupings will be different and children may be taught by different staff to those who were working with them previously. Schools will be able to share this information once they know the staff and pupils who will be returning to school.
- Your child may be taught in a different part of the school

- Lunch and break times will be different as we will need to adhere to social distancing
- There will be no large group assembly of children

Preparing for the 'New Normal'

- There will be mixed emotions about returning to school. People may have expectations that this will mean a return to how things were before, but we must acknowledge that this will not be the case.
- People's thoughts, feelings and behaviour may have been changed by their experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic. Routines, structures, learning environments and expectations may be different.
- We need to be kind to ourselves and others: prioritising emotional wellbeing is essential for successful adaptation to the 'new normal'.

Supporting Pupils

- School staff already have skills and expertise in supporting with transitions. We can build upon this knowledge to welcome back the school community and support pupils in returning back to school following this unprecedented time.

Re-establishing Routines and Expectations

- We will need to allow for periods of adjustment and be sensitive to individual differences and experiences.
- Instilling a sense of routine and structure provides predictability and a sense of security for children and adults alike. Schools will strive to develop new routines and structures to ensure a sense of stability for all. Each school will communicate these to staff, parents and pupils through their normal communication channels.

Differences in Learning Experiences

- Thank you to all parents for the support that they have provided to their children during this challenging period!
- Children will have had different experiences of home learning during the period of lock down.
- Learning from home is not the same as learning at school. Schools will need to respond to the different experiences that children have had and celebrate what children *have* learned, while supporting them with what they may have forgotten.

Learning Experiences on Return to School

- Schools will need to focus on re-establishing relationships and reducing any anxieties about returning to school. A starting point could be to explore what skills and personal qualities children have developed whilst being out of school.
- For pupils in Year 10 and 12, in addition to the above, staff will focus on preparing pupils in readiness for work towards future examinations.

Blended learning will be the “new normal” for sometime

- Blended learning is an approach to learning that combines in-class and online learning experiences. Each online and offline session will complement the other by using its particular strengths.
- Swansea Council’s guidance on developing a strong blended approach to learning is designed to help staff maximise pupils’ acquisition of important knowledge, skills and experiences during lockdown.

Relationships

We need to think about ways to re-establish relationships:

- Between teachers and pupils
- Between schools and parents
- Between pupils and their friends and wider peer group
- And amongst colleagues

This will not happen overnight and we need to give ourselves time and be kind to ourselves and each other.

Children of Key Workers

- Children of ‘key workers’ may be experiencing heightened levels of anxiety. They may have been concerned that their family members are putting themselves at risk by going to work. For some children, normal family life and routines may have been disrupted.
- Schools will be aware of these concerns and anxieties and will work with parents to ensure that children are appropriately supported.

Keeping Everyone Safe

- All schools have developed clear risk assessments, rules and routines to support the health and safety of all users on return to school. These will include:
 - Social distancing measures
 - Hand washing and sanitising routines
 - Regular cleansing of high touch areas

- Cough and sneeze etiquette
 - Clear expectations of behaviour towards others
 - Use of PPE where appropriate
- These routines will need to be rigorously upheld by all school users to ensure a safe working environment for everyone.

The School Environment

- Children will not be able to sit close to others. Tables and chairs will be 2M apart. Some furniture will have been removed to make space for the pupils to sit 2M apart
- There may be one way systems in the school to enable children and staff to maintain safe distances in corridors and when moving around the school. Children may be confined to certain parts of the school.
- Children will not be able to use resources like they did before and some things will be put away as we will need to make sure that everything is clean.
- Children will be asked to wash their hands regularly.
- Parents will not be able to have the same access to the school that they have had previously to help us keep the environment as safe as possible.

Keeping Everyone Healthy

- It is extremely important to keep minimising contact with individuals who are unwell by ensuring that those who have coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms, or who have someone in their household who does, do not, under any circumstances, attend school settings.
- Children and staff who develop symptoms should not present themselves at school.
- Children and staff who have been in contact with someone who has coronavirus should self-isolate as per government advice and should not present themselves at school.
- Any children or staff who show signs of symptoms of coronavirus whilst at school will be isolated and asked to go home immediately. A deep cleansing of areas that may have been affected will be undertaken and contact tracing will commence.

Staff and Children Who are Shielding

- If a pupil is in receipt of a letter advising them that they need to shield, they should not return to school
- If a pupil is living with a family member who is in receipt of a letter advising them that they need to shield, there is no expectation for them to return to school
- The Welsh Government has made it clear that there will be no penalties for families who do not send their children to school.

Coping with Loss

- For children who have experienced loss, it will be important that they are supported to understand what has happened and have opportunities to talk.
- Like adults, children respond to grief in different ways, particularly during these times when they may not have had opportunity to say goodbye.
- Key staff in schools have undertaken further training to enable them to support children who may have experienced loss.

Social Anxieties

- Some children will look forward to returning to school but find aspects of being around others frightening and overwhelming.
- Social distancing will have caused increased anxiety for some children and adults in their interaction with others.
- For some time, our experience of other people may have been limited to immediate family.
- Staff will be sensitive to this and will provide support where needed.

Separation Anxieties

- Most children have become accustomed to spending extended periods of time with their parents/ caregivers and immediate family during lockdown.
- Although many children will be eager to regain their freedom and see their friends, it may also be a potential source of anxiety for them.
- Children may struggle when they are initially separated from their parents and may feel a sense of anxiety for some time after. This separation may be particularly difficult for the children of key workers.
- School staff will be aware of these anxieties, and will support pupils sensitively to manage their concerns

Additional Learning Needs

- Children with additional learning needs may have been affected more significantly by the changed circumstances resulting from COVID-19.
- The ability to manage the emotional responses relating to a new and different situation may also have been more difficult.

- Schools will be supportive to enable all pupils and staff to manage the changes that they will experience on return to school.
- Schools will continue to work with professionals and other agencies such as Educational Psychologists, Behaviour Support Specialist teachers etc. to support the needs of pupils with Additional Learning Needs.

Sensory Triggers

- For some, returning to school may trigger heightened sensory difficulties.
- This can be especially problematic for some children including those with Additional Learning Needs.
- Schools will be alert to this and will work to find ways to create calm spaces and activities for all.

Transitions

- Schools and Colleges will work together to ensure that any transitions are managed as smoothly as possible to support pupils during these key points in their education.
- Pupils starting a new setting or phase in education will need a planned transition. Schools and Colleges will work together to enable children to become accustomed both to the new setting and the experience of returning to education. Remember – some schools may already have undertaken many of their transition activities.
- Further guidance on this will be available from your child's school following Welsh Government announcements.

Support for Staff

- School staff will have varied experiences of lockdown which may impact on their resilience when returning to school. They may have suffered bereavement, worked without a break with high levels of stress, or not worked due to health reasons.
- It is essential that the school community take into account differing individual experiences when considering how to support staff. Allowing time to rebuild and reform the school community will be central to its success.
- Governors and Local Authority support services have a role in providing support for head-teachers and senior management teams, on how to support themselves, staff, pupils and parents on the return to school.

Recovery

- Some people will be more affected by the impact of Covid-19 than others.
- Recovery should be underpinned by the principles of nurture.
- A helpful resource on applying principles of nurture after lockdown can be accessed by clicking the picture to the right.

Remember... Keep calm – we are all in this together ...

Gwynedd and Anglesey

Gwynedd and Anglesey's Additional Learning Needs and Inclusion Service's website
www.adyach.cymru

COVID-19 Resources – Supporting Transition and Going Back to School – Gwynedd and Anglesey's Educational Psychology Service

<https://adyach.cymru/en/Parents/Access-to-the-Service/Educational-Psychology-Service/Coronavirus-Educational-Psychology-Service/Supporting-Transition-and-Going-Back-to-School-Educational-Psychology-Service.aspx>

Supporting children through bereavement - Advice for carers and schools – Gwynedd and Anglesey's Educational Psychology Service

<https://adyach.cymru/en/Parents/Access-to-the-Service/Educational-Psychology-Service/Coronavirus-Educational-Psychology-Service/Supporting-children-through-bereavement-Gwynedd-and-Anglesey.pdf>