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Prif Swyddog (Addysg ac Ieuenctid)



Your Ref/Eich Cyl

Our Ref/Ein Cyf CH

Date/Dyddiad

Ask for/Gofynner am Claire Homard

Direct Dial/Rhif Union 01352 704190

Dear Parent/Carer

Thank you for your support, understanding and patience over the past three months. I am grateful to you all for everything you have done to assist your child's learning, your child's school and the local authority at this difficult time.

This letter will provide you with further information in respect of school-based learning for all pupils and emergency childcare provision for eligible children available in Flintshire for the rest of the summer term which will now end as originally planned on 17 July.

This is because Welsh Government and the trade unions have not been able to reach a common position on the proposal to extend the summer term by one week to 24 July, as previously announced by the Education Minister Kirsty Williams. We would have hoped to have seen these issues resolved but in the absence of a national agreement, the Council has had to make a decision to be able to give schools sufficient time to plan properly. There would be no guarantee that schools would have sufficient staff available to deliver the fourth week safely on voluntary basis as staff are not contractually obliged to work in the holidays. The Council has a duty to ensure the safety of its pupils and staff first and foremost.

### **Check in, Catch up and Prepare**

As a result of the Minister for Education's recent announcement in respect of the reopening of schools, the local authority is keen to work with schools and parents/carers to ensure all pupils benefit from an opportunity to check in with their schools, catch up with their peers and teachers, and prepare for the next school year.

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The Council welcomes correspondence in Welsh or English  
Mae'r Cyngor yn croesawu gohebiaeth yn y Gymraeg neu'r Saesneg

From Monday 29 June, Flintshire schools will start to accept their own pupils to attend identified sessions and this information will be shared with you directly by your child/children's school(s).

As a result of the legislation around maintaining social distancing of 2 metres and to ensure the health and safety of all learners and staff, schools will not be operating full time provision for all pupils during this three week period and neither will this be a return to the teaching of the full curriculum. Not all pupils will return at once and, when they do return, the school day might start and end at different times for different learners. This may include different arrangements for siblings of different ages, attending the same school.

Because every school building is different in its size and layout, and because each school will have differing numbers of staff available to return to work, there will not be a standard offer for each child in Flintshire for this 'check in, catch up and prepare' period. Each school, based on its own risk assessments, will be making an offer its pupils of the number and timing of contact sessions. Welsh Government has made it clear to schools and to councils that decisions on how to operate for this short return to school before the summer holidays can be made at a school level. Each school will communicate their specific arrangements directly to parents via their normal methods of keeping in touch.

However, Flintshire County Council has made one key decision that is to be adopted by all primary schools for this period which is that Nursery aged children will **not be** allowed to return to school before the summer holidays. This is because very young children will not be able to maintain safe social distancing. It is also because the close and sometimes intimate care that these very young children need will be difficult to manage in school settings and could put themselves and the staff who care for them potentially at greater risk. The changes to the way schools will be operating may also be unsettling for very young children. Many other councils across Wales have made a similar decision.

Plans to ensure a carefully organised return for nursery children when they will be transitioning into Reception classes in September will be developed in the near future, as will suitable induction opportunities for the new cohort of children due to start Nursery in the autumn term.

It is important to note that, during this period, parents and carers are free to decide whether to send their children to school. Should parents/carers decide not to send their children to school during this summer term, they will not be penalised. If you choose not to send your children to school, they will continue to receive the same home-to-school support they have received so far.

When your child returns to school, there will be a focus upon pupil wellbeing and on an enjoyment of outdoor learning, where and when this is practical, in their particular learning environment. There will be an opportunity to discuss with them how their distance learning has been going and some limited opportunities to engage in some other activities to practice key skills e.g. literacy and numeracy. As this will be strange time for all pupils, regardless of their age, schools are being encouraged by Welsh Government to think carefully about the programme of catch up sessions being offered which will also continue to be supplemented by online learning.

### **Emergency childcare support for key workers and vulnerable children**

In light of the decision to open schools for all learners to touch base before the summer holidays, there will be significant changes to our emergency childcare provision which we need to implement as a matter of some urgency.

On Friday 19 June, Flintshire's emergency childcare hubs will close. From Monday 22 June until Friday 17 July emergency childcare will be provided at your child's own school with the same operating hours as already provided and with the same support for catering and transport. Places will continue to be booked through your child's school.

Please be aware that Welsh Government rules continue to apply for these places e.g. children of key workers or those identified as vulnerable. The number of places available will be limited as schools try to continue offering this provision as well as giving other children the chance to 'check in, catch up and prepare.' Parents are asked to only consider using this emergency childcare if there is no suitable alternative provision for their children and if they meet the Welsh Government definition of key workers.

Parents/carers are advised that the Council is currently not in a position to confirm whether emergency childcare provision will be available during the school summer holiday period (ie between Monday 20 July and Tuesday 1 September). We are waiting further advice from Welsh Government.

### **Separate Childcare and 'Check In' Groups – reducing the risk of transmission**

Based on the Welsh Government guidance, Flintshire's position is that children **should not be switching** between the emergency childcare group and the 'check in/catch up sessions'. This increases the risk of transmitting the virus between different cohorts of pupils. Our advice is that children who have accessed the emergency childcare to date need to be kept in that cohort for rest of the summer term. In reality, this cohort have already had a considerable amount of contact time with familiar staff which has enabled them to 'check in and catch up'.

Pupils arriving for the new 'check in' sessions will be kept separate. If a parent requests that their child accesses the catch up sessions, they cannot then access the childcare provision for the remainder of the summer term. Parents will need to make a choice of one or the other. If an eligible parent chooses for their child to access 'check in and catch up' from 29<sup>th</sup> June rather than the emergency childcare, as long as they are not showing any symptoms of Coronavirus, there is no reason why their child can't join their first designated catch up session but then they only access those designated catch up sessions going forward.

### **Bringing in things from home, provision of meals, wearing uniform**

Welsh Government guidance outlines that bringing items from home should be kept to a minimum and this is one of the reasons why a decision was made by the Council to provide packed lunches for all pupils for this short period before the end of term at no charge.

As water fountains will not be safe for use during this period of time, it is not unreasonable to allow pupils to bring a bottle of water from home but this should be clearly named and not shared with anyone else. Similarly, other essential equipment e.g. pencil case, would be permitted but again, pupils will be discouraged from bringing any other unnecessary items with them.

Pupil will be encouraged to wear school uniform but schools will be flexible, acknowledging that many will have grown out of clothing and shoes and parents will want to wait for the start of the new academic year before investing in new uniform. Clothing should be easily washable. Schools will provide more advice on this matter.

### **Children who may be unwell**

We are asking parents to check that their child is not showing any symptoms of **Coronavirus** or **any other illness** before sending them into school.

There are clear guidelines for schools to manage pupils who may develop symptoms of Coronavirus during the day and parents/ carers would be contacted immediately.

With the new arrangements in place to manage learners safely, schools will not have the capacity to look after lots of children who become unwell with the usual childhood ailments during the day and make calls for pupils to be collected. For this reason we are asking parents/carers to make the decision in the morning whether or not they should attend rather than send them in and 'see how they go'. This will help to keep the numbers of poorly pupils to an absolute minimum.

### **Pupils entitled to Free School Meals**

Since 18 May Flintshire has made direct payments to all those parents eligible for free school meals who supplied us with their bank account details. These payments will continue for the three week period when schools reopen and through the summer holidays.

A return to more normal arrangements for the payment of school meals and the provision of free school meals is being developed for September and will be communicated nearer the time.

We are keen to do everything possible to reassure you of our collective efforts in the Council and in our schools to support the emotional and physical wellbeing of learners during the weeks ahead. All schools have received significant support and guidance materials to enable them to plan for reopening and to operate safely.

We look forward to seeing as many children as possible before the end of the summer term. If you have further questions regarding the provision for your children, these should now be directed to the schools they attend.

Yours sincerely

*Claire Homard*

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**Chief Officer, Education & Youth**