



17<sup>th</sup> December 2021

Dear Parents and Carers,

Following the Welsh Government's announcement yesterday regarding the return to school in January I now write to set out the implications for our schools in Monmouthshire. Inevitably, any changes at this time will have an impact on your children and on our schools. However, as always, we will work with our schools to ensure that any impact is kept to a minimum.

In recognition of the current levels of uncertainty regarding the impact of the Omicron variant the Welsh Government have taken the decision that schools will need to plan to operate at the 'very high', risk category, whilst we learn more about this latest variant. This will have an influence on operational arrangements in our schools and leaders will need to develop robust plans to ensure that any impact on learners is kept to a minimum, whatever the circumstances.

In the past, some schools operated staggered start and finish times as a mitigation strategy. In support of this, the Minister has issued a Coronavirus Act 2020 Notice to allow the reintroduction of such arrangements where necessary and this may be the situation in your child's school. Your school will communicate this to you at the earliest opportunity in the new year.

As part of the planning process, the Welsh Government expects the temporary measures issued in November 2021, for use face coverings in communal areas and classrooms where physical distancing cannot be easily maintained, should be continued for all staff (in all schools) and secondary aged learners until further notice. Furthermore, staff and learners should continue to regularly test using Lateral Flow Testing during term time. From the start of the new term, Lateral Flow Testing should be increased to three times a week.

We expect our learners to return to school on 6<sup>th</sup> January. In some schools there will be an INSET day in the first week and your school will advise you of this directly. Other schools had already identified INSET days at the start of the term but have rearranged them, your school will communicate these changes at a later date. I am conscious that the additional two closure days may present some challenges to you as a parent/carer. However, I hope that this advanced notice will give you sufficient time to make alternative arrangements for your children for these two days.

I would like to conclude simply by thanking you for all your support during what has been a challenging term for our schools. I hope you have a restful and enjoyable Christmas.

Yours sincerely,

**Will McLean**  
**Chief Officer Children & Young People**