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Dear parents and carers,

As the end of the summer term approaches I now write to set out the approach we will be taking in Monmouthshire to ensure that our schools remain safe for all our learners and staff when we return to school in September.

The first thing I want to say is that through the excellent work of all of our schools the return since 24th February 2021 (when our youngest learners returned to school) has been far less disrupted than previous periods of the last eighteen months. I have visited many of our schools during the past months and have been pleased to see your children engaged in effective learning with the controls the schools have put in place not impinging on their enjoyment or ability to engage with their friends.

Inevitably as we approach the summer holidays and as the Welsh Government looks to relax some of the wider societal controls there will be impacts on schools and the way they operate. On Friday 9th July the Minister for Education and the Welsh Language wrote to all schools and local authorities setting out his expectations for operation in September. The operational guidance that has guided schools' operation throughout the pandemic has also been revised, this can be found [here](#).

At the most fundamental level the impact on your children will be limited. The main changes that the Minister has recommended are that face coverings will no longer be routinely recommended for use in classrooms and contact groups or 'bubbles' will no longer be the primary process for identifying contacts of a positive case. This will now be determined through discussions with Monmouthshire's effective Test and Trace team. This is an important development with the intention of minimising large numbers of learners having to self-isolate if there is a positive case.

Some schools have operated staggered starts and finish times to allow easier drop off and pick up, this will no longer be permitted and schools' start and finish times will revert to their pre-pandemic times. As a precautionary action all school based staff will be encouraged to undertake a lateral flow test prior to the return in September.

I am conscious that in some regards these may seem small changes when set against the changes that are currently being announced in other parts of the United Kingdom. However, through working with our schools we believe that minimising the changes for the early part of the autumn term is sensible and the right approach to maintain the safety of learners.

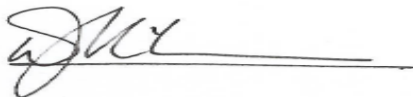
Throughout the pandemic we have sought to work closely with our schools to put in place controls that reflect both the prevailing risk but also the local context and circumstances that each school works in. This approach means that I am unable to set out exactly what September will be like in your school however I can give you an assurance that every school will have reviewed its risk assessment and operational plans to ensure that they align to the guidance and the Minister's expectations.

It is also important to note that I am writing to you in the middle of July and a lot can happen in the next six weeks before the start of term. If there are any material developments in the intervening period that require further changes then I will be in touch.

Finally, I want to take this opportunity to thank all of our schools for the work that they have done in this academic year. 2020/21 is a year completely unlike any other and through the hard work and dedication of staff our schools have delivered remote and face to face teaching to allow our children to develop and learn.

I will end by thanking you for your continued support for all of our learners this year both at home during the months of lock down and while they have been back in school. I hope that you have a good summer.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'W McLean', followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Will McLean
Chief Officer, Children & Young People