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Dear Parents/Carers

I write to share with you the latest information about the phased re-opening of all Monmouthshire schools. The Minister for Education in Wales (Kirsty Williams) announced on 3 June 2020 that all children would have the opportunity to 'Check in, Catch up, Prepare' for the remainder of the summer and for the new school year in September. The next phase will start on 29 June 2020 with term extended by a week and will end on 27 July 2020.

This is an anxious time for everyone. Whilst there has been a fall in COVID-19 cases nationally, we also know that for some of our families lockdown has been a challenging period. Some in our community have experienced loss and grief, others will have encountered financial challenges and we have all experienced change and uncertainty. This next stage will see us begin to move forward gradually in a managed way so that we do not see an increase in cases locally but in a way that allows our children and young people to engage with their schools before the summer holidays.

I know that many of you may feel uncertain and have many questions about your child(ren)'s individual circumstances. I want to be clear that at every stage the safety of children, staff and their families is our absolute priority. We want to help deal with those questions and address your concerns.

At this stage in our preparations and planning, I want to reassure you that no pupils who are in receipt of a shielding letter due to their medical vulnerability or who live in a household with someone who is in receipt of a shielding letter should return to school.

Across the county, our school leadership teams will be carrying out risk assessments to help them identify the approach that is right in your child's school. As a council, we acknowledge that not all schools will be able to meet the Welsh Government's ambitions immediately. Capacity in schools will vary and many schools will need to introduce a phased re-integration. This might affect the year groups that can attend and the days available.

Schools will work very differently in the short term i.e. the rest of this summer term and I also want to stress that at this stage I anticipate a different method of school

operation in September. Class sizes will be small and in line with the social distancing arrangements that schools will implement. The day will look and feel very different to how children will have experienced it previously, break times and lunch times may be staggered, school start and finish times may be different and 'traditional' lessons will no longer take place. We will be working closely with schools leaders and governors to try to ensure consistency in terms of principles and approach.

The provision of transport is particularly challenging as we apply strict safety and social distancing arrangements on all vehicles. I will provide further details in due course.

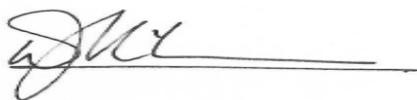
We recognise that the new pattern of school opening may create difficulties for some working parents. We are creating a set of frequently asked questions (FAQs) for the council website in the near future and I will write again to let you know when these are available. The Minister has been clear that the existing provision for key worker children and vulnerable learners will continue.

I am sure we all agree that it will be good for children to return to school but it has to be when schools and parents are confident that this is safe. Monmouthshire Council continues to work closely with all our schools who, I am sure that you will agree, have performed a fantastic job under very difficult conditions.

I will write to you again once we have had further guidance from Welsh Government. There is lots to consider, as I am sure you appreciate and there will be more information for you as soon as possible.

Thank you in anticipation of your continued support.

Yours faithfully

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

Will McLean
Chief Officer – Children & Young People