



19th June 2020

Dear parent / carer,

I recently wrote to you setting out the initial implications of the Minister for Education's announcement about the return to school. This letter will provide you with further information in respect of the recommencement of school-based learning for all pupils and emergency childcare provision for eligible children available in Monmouthshire for the rest of the summer term (until Friday 17 July).

Before I set out the main areas of change and development, I want to thank you for your support, understanding and patience over the past three months of lockdown. In order to return to school in as safe a way as possible we have established with our schools ten principles that have informed our planning and decision-making. They are attached at the end of this letter.

Check in, Catch up and Prepare

Following the Minister for Education's (Kirsty Williams) announcement in respect of the reopening of schools, the local authority has been working closely with all of our schools 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. I am keen to do everything possible to reassure you of the local authority's efforts in supporting the emotional and physical wellbeing of learners. We are working closely with all of our schools and our partners to ensure that guidance and support is in place to assist your child's return to school.

Having spent many mornings in our Hub provision, I have gained a real insight into the closeness of the relationship between children and their teachers and support staff in school. I know that school teachers, school leaders and school support staff will be delighted to see their pupils when they return.

At the outset, it is important to note that, during this period, you, as parents and carers are free to decide whether to send your children to school. If you decide not to you will not be penalised and your children will continue to receive the same home-to-school support they have received so far.

From Monday 29 June, Monmouthshire's schools will accept their own pupils to attend identified sessions at their own school. Not all learners 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.

When your child returns to school, the focus will be on their wellbeing and on how they have engaged with the blended learning they have experienced since the closure of schools on the 20 March 2020. This is an important phase because it is highly likely that there will continue to be significant constraints on the number of children physically attending schools in September. The ability of children to engage in a different type of learning over the coming months will be a critical skill to develop.

The Welsh Government has stated that the total number of pupils in any school at any one time will not exceed one third of the total capacity of that school. Beyond this expectation, other factors may constrain the numbers of children in school: these include the size of the classrooms, the availability of staff to work with children and the requirement to continue to provide for key worker childcare and vulnerable learners.

There is a further expectation in the Welsh Government guidance that children should have an opportunity to 'Check in, catch up and prepare' three times before the end of the summer term. During the period Monday 29 June to Friday 17 July, your child will be invited into their school on **up to** three occasions where local constraints allow.

In our four secondary schools, there is may be a greater focus on supporting pupils' learning in anticipation of the academic demands of the forthcoming school year.

In order to allow full compliance with social distancing requirements we will not be able to offer a catered lunch option in our primary schools from the 22 June. All children will need to bring a packed lunch on the days that they attend school (for either childcare or '*Check in, catch up and prepare*').

I am sure you can imagine that the new social distancing requirements have had a significant impact on our ability to provide home to school transport. Our work with our partners suggests that we will have the ability to provide about ten percent of our normal service. In light of this significant restriction, we will prioritise those learners with additional learning needs and those who are looked after by the local authority.

Emergency childcare support for key workers only

In light of recent ministerial announcements, there will have to be significant changes to our emergency childcare provision which we need to implement as a matter of urgency.

Over the past three months, we have operated childcare provision designed to enable and support the full efforts of the public service response to the COVID-19 crisis. However, as our schools return and open again as schools their function and purpose has to change. On Friday 19 June, Monmouthshire's emergency childcare hubs will close and be replaced by a more limited offer based at every school.

From Monday 22 June (until Friday 17 July), emergency childcare will be provided at your child's own school. It is important to note that from Monday 22 June, emergency childcare will only be available between 8.30am and 4.00pm.

As individual schools will also be accommodating other children on site on a rota basis, as advised by your child's own school, places will be limited and will be capped to comply with social distancing requirements. These may feel like severe changes but if we are to ensure a fair opportunity for all of our learners to '*Check in, catch up and prepare*' then we must manage the demand on these places.

The process for allocating childcare places will work in the following way:

1. All schools have identified their capacity to support key workers, once that cap is reached no additional key worker children will be admitted.
2. The process to register key worker children is via a form on the Monmouthshire County Council website and all key workers MUST register for the three weeks that the schools return by 5pm Tuesday 23 June. (<https://www.monmouthshire.gov.uk/childcare-hubs/>)
3. Once the registers have closed we will not accept any late applications and parents / carers will need to make their own arrangements for those weeks.
4. Once a school's cap has been reached the following over subscription criteria will be applied:
 - a) Key worker children that have used a childcare hub at least twice a week for a minimum of eight weeks for the duration of the provision.
 - b) Two key workers or a single parent key worker who are: health blue light or social services worker who cannot perform critical parts of their role at home.
 - c) Education staff.
 - d) One key worker in the family.

There is a lot of information in this letter and I am aware that some aspects will not please everyone, I would ask you to work with us through this period to prepare for your children's return to school in as safe a way as we can.

Yours faithfully,



Will McLean
Chief Officer, Children and Young People
Monmouthshire County Council

Monmouthshire's Principles for the return to school 2020

These principles provide the framework for schools in Monmouthshire to return in a safe and fair way for all of our children and young people. Your own school will be in contact about their local arrangements. They have been informed by these ten principles.

Principle 1

The primary focus for Monmouthshire and our schools' must be the physical safety and emotional wellbeing of staff and pupils.

Principle 2

Your school will support you, as parents and carers, to understand what is necessary to support schools to keep pupils and staff safe at all times by:

- setting out operational arrangements put in place to minimise the potential transmission of COVID-19;
- clarifying when parents and carers should bring children to school and when they should collect them and;
- reinforcing the message that parents and carers should not bring children to school if they, or a member of their family show symptoms of COVID-19.

Principle 3

These are new and challenging times for everyone, children returning to school will face uncertainty and a new and very different environment. It is therefore vital that we all support children to have the best experience they can. It will be necessary for us all to talk to our children about the new 'school' environment and what they can expect and how we require them to behave.

Principle 4

In order to ensure a safe return, schools must not exceed a third of their potential capacity. Our ability to provide an equitable provision across Monmouthshire depends upon managing the level of demand of key worker children.

The Welsh Government has published its guidance [here](#). The key message is:

Places in schools and childcare will be highly limited and only particularly vulnerable children and the children of critical workers whose work is critical to the COVID-19 response should be attending during this time.

If you are classed as a critical worker but are able to perform the critical parts of your job effectively when working from home, then you should do so.

Even for critical workers, provision will only be made in schools or other settings where there is no safe alternative for your family.

Principle 5

Our schools will deliver '*check in, catch up and prepare*' provision for as many pupils and on as many days as possible, based on the accommodation available on the school site whilst ensuring social distancing.

Principle 6

Wherever possible and appropriate, all pupils should have contact with a familiar face as they catch up, check in and prepare for the next academic year.

Principle 7

Wherever possible, schools will work towards all children having an opportunity to attend their school for face-to-face sessions over the remainder of the summer term in line with Welsh Government guidance.

Principle 8

Where possible and practicable, schools should plan for one session a day rather than multiple sessions (with the exception of those pupils who attend Special Needs Resource Bases who may attend shortened days).

Principle 9

All school-based childcare hubs will close on Friday 19th June. Childcare will continue to be offered by individual schools for their own pupils, (who are vulnerable children or are the children of key workers), between 08:30 and 16:00 for five days a week for the remainder of the summer term Monday 22nd June to Friday 17th July.

Principle 10

For all primary/secondary clusters in Monmouthshire, all transitional activities during the three-week period 29th June to 17th July will be virtual only to minimise the risk of transmission and the mixing of groups.