



21st October 2020

Dear Parents/Carers

I write to share with you the latest information regarding the provision of education and childcare across Monmouthshire in the forthcoming '*firebreak*' period.

The First Minister for Wales, Mark Drakeford, announced on Monday 19th October that the country would soon be entering into a '*firebreak*'. This is a significant announcement that will see the whole of Wales enter a period of heightened restrictions that will run from 6pm on Friday 23rd October through to 9th November 2020. The experience will feel very similar to the full lockdown that we experienced in March this year, albeit this time the lockdown will be for a 'short, sharp' period designed to slow the spread of Covid-19.

I recognise that this is once again an anxious time for everyone, and I am very aware of the challenges that the last lockdown posed for many of our families. The forthcoming '*firebreak*' will be significantly different to the lockdown in terms of the provision for our children and young people that we are able to maintain. The arrangements across Monmouthshire during the '*firebreak*' period will be that:

- All nurseries and childcare settings are permitted to remain open as per their normal arrangements
- All Primary Schools in the county will re-open as normal after the half term break, returning on 2nd November 2020.
- Our pupil referral service will also re-open after the half term break on the 2nd November

Our four secondary schools will open to children in **year 7 and 8 pupils only** for the week that follows the half term break (week commencing 2nd November). This is necessary to ensure compliance with the requirements of the First Minister's '*firebreak*' announcement.

Students in years 9,10,11,12 and 13 will need to remain at home where they will receive a package of blended learning from their schools. Schools will arrange to support learners who need the support of school and those expected to undertake examinations during the '*firebreak*' period. Our four secondary schools will be liaising with you directly over these arrangements.

The Council will continue to fund Free School Meals for the eligible students in years 9-13 who are unable to attend their school setting for the week commencing 2nd November 2020.

As announced by the First Minister on Monday, the '*firebreak*' period will conclude on 9th November 2020 allowing for the provision across all of our

Monmouthshire schools to return to their current arrangements. For clarity, all children and young people of all ages will be able to return to their school settings on conclusion of the 'firebreak'.

I am sure we all agree that keeping our schools open is hugely important for our children and young people in supporting both their emotional wellbeing, mental health and their educational progress. All of our schools have all performed fantastically under very difficult conditions this term to keep their environments safe for children and staff. I want to take this opportunity to extend my thanks to you as parents / carers for supporting your schools and their necessary processes they have introduced. Pleasingly, our collective efforts have resulted in a very low number of confirmed Covid-19 cases across our schools. To help maintain this position, I am asking for your continued support in the following areas:

- **Please follow the social distancing requirements at school pick up and drop off times.** School staff are working incredibly hard to ensure that your children are safe and social distancing and cleanliness regimes are being carefully managed – please do not undo this work by not socially distancing when dropping off / collecting your child(ren) from school.
- If your child, or any person within your child's household has COVID symptoms, please ensure that they isolate at home and do not attend school until a negative COVID test has been received.
- Should your child, or anyone within your child's household, receive a positive COVID test, please follow all advice concerning household isolation requirements before your child returns to school.
- Under no circumstances should any children return to school before they have had the results of a COVID test.

The pandemic continues to be a huge challenge for everyone. I am hopeful that the steps described in this letter will allow our schools to continue to provide education and support for our children and young people. However, what we achieve in our schools can only be maintained if we observe the regulations outside school too.

Thank you in anticipation of your continued support.

Yours faithfully



Will McLean

Chief Officer – Children & Young People