



9 July 2020

Annwyl gyfai!l

During this crisis I have said that you will always hear news about education in Wales from me first. I'm writing to you to update you on our plans, including the decision on all pupils being able to return to school in September.

Summer and Autumn terms

I can confirm today that the autumn term in Wales will start on Tuesday, September 1. Schools that can accommodate all pupils that week can do so.

However, I recognise that some schools may require a short period to focus on priority year groups such as those new to secondary schools, those sitting exams next summer or those in reception classes.

The first fortnight will allow schools to do this or allow time for extra planning and reorganisation.

In the interests of all of our children and young people, all schools will be open to all pupils by Monday, September 14 at the very latest.

I will be publishing operational and learning guidance next week to support schools during this transition. We will work with unions and Local Authorities during the summer to update further. Of course, where challenges continue to exist the Welsh Government will work constructively with schools to resolve them.

My priority is getting back to some sense of normality, within the restrictions that the ongoing pandemic places on us to keep everyone safe. This includes mitigating against learning loss, in particular for those most disadvantaged.

I am making £29m available to 'recruit, recover and raise standards' in Welsh schools in response to the impact still felt from the pandemic.

With this funding, we will recruit the equivalent of 600 extra teachers and 300 teaching assistants throughout the next school year.

Support will be targeted at Years 11, 12 and 13, as well as disadvantaged and vulnerable learners of all ages.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

The support package, provided at a school level, could include extra coaching support, personalised learning programmes and additional time and resources for exam year pupils.

We will work with partners during the summer to finalise the details of these plans.

During the summer we have made £2.6m available to enable local authorities to provide childcare and play opportunities for children and young people aged five to 16.

This will support vulnerable and more disadvantaged children to re-engage with education, giving them the opportunity to take part in activities, which they may have missed out on while not at school, including socialising with their peers and physical activity.

We will also continue to fund free school meals for all eligible children over the summer holidays.

Reducing unnecessary workload and providing time and space for recovery

I will do all I can to give you the time and space to support your learners, and to recover from the traumatic events of the past months.

During the crisis I have committed to reducing unnecessary workload for schools and the system. I have therefore taken the decision to suspend the National School Categorisation System for the 2020/21 academic year. This means that schools will not be assessed or placed in a colour-coded support category for the forthcoming academic year, and no support category will be published on My Local School in January 2021.

We have already temporarily relaxed requirements to undertake national tests and assessments and to report the outcomes, as well as requirements to undertake moderation. We have also dis-applied the national curriculum for the summer term.

All statutory data collections that would have been due to take place before the school summer holidays which had not started have also been cancelled. We are also currently progressing regulatory amendments to relax or dis-apply a number of school reporting requirements for 2019/20.

Normal arrangements for reporting of Key Stage 4 and legacy sixth form performance measures have been suspended for 2019/20 and 2020/21. Qualification awards data will not be used to report on attainment outcomes at a school, local authority or regional consortium level and will not be used to hold schools to account for their learners' outcomes.

Estyn has also halted its inspection arrangements until further notice. Together, these steps will help bring certainty to schools about arrangements now and in the autumn.

All schools will be required to still undertake effective self-evaluation to support continuous improvement. More generally on school improvement support, I do intend to consult, where appropriate, on future new approaches.

Broad and balanced curriculum focusing on well being

Monday was an important milestone in the history of education in Wales. The Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Bill and Explanatory Memorandum were been laid before Senedd Cymru.

The Bill is the legal vehicle for introducing the new Curriculum for Wales Framework, with implementation of the new curriculum starting from September 2022. The intention is to provide a broad and balanced curriculum that enables all learners to develop in the ways described in the four purposes.

We are working closely with local authorities, regional consortia and Estyn to develop expectations and suggested approaches for schools in preparing for the new curriculum and will publish these at the beginning of the autumn term to help schools prepare over the next two years. This will be part of our longer term recovery from Covid-19.

A copy of the Bill and supporting documentation is available [here](#).

I would like to thank you for all you have done to keep children and young people learning over the past few months. The pandemic has put extraordinary pressures on us all, and you have responded heroically.

I do not underestimate the work and planning that went in to welcome back pupils last week to check in, catch up and prepare for September.

I know many of you have worked through your holidays to keep schools and hubs open during holidays and weekends for vulnerable and critical worker children.

Thank you for all that you, and your staff, do on behalf of children across our country.

Diolch o galon.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kirsty Williams'.

Kirsty Williams AS/MS
Y Gweinidog Addysg
Minister for Education