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Cyfarwyddwr Corfforaethol - Addysg a Gwasanaethau Corfforaethol
Corporate Director - Education and Corporate Services

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Dear Parents/Carers

I hope you and your families are well.

As you may be aware, Caerphilly County Borough Council announced on Friday that the school term will end on the original date set (Friday, 17th July) and not have an additional week as suggested in the press recently. This decision was taken because the week would have been voluntary for staff, so we could not be sure how many schools could open safely. We know you need to plan and it was important to offer a clear, concise and consistent message across the county borough as a whole.

It is important to acknowledge that headteachers and staff have worked very hard to open this summer and were keen to open for as long as they could. They are busy with their plans to ensure that as many children as possible have as many sessions as possible.

We know that some children are looking forward to returning to school for “check-in, catch up and prepare” sessions. We know that headteachers and staff will do everything they can to ensure that they have positive experiences. Some children are waiting a little longer to return and schools will continue to support them in their learning until the end of the term.

Returning to school

The local authority departments have been working with headteachers to agree the following:-

1. Risk Assessments. All schools will have completed risk assessments for their sites prior to opening. These processes have been supported by our Health and Safety team.

2. **Catering** services will be suspended and all pupils will be required to bring their own packed lunch and drink container. Milk will not be provided this term, but a breakfast bar will be distributed to all pupils. Those in receipt of free school meals will continue to receive home deliveries which will also include a sandwich pack.
3. **Cleaning** - There will be an enhanced school clean at the end or beginning of the school day, with an interim clean during the day. A mobile cleaning team is on call for emergencies.
4. **Bus Transport.** Due to social distancing requirements, available transport provision is extremely limited. As a result, wherever possible parents are being asked to arrange their own transport. However, if your child is eligible for transport and you have no alternative method of transport, the Transport department are in the process of confirming arrangements with schools, where this is possible. If you require transport you must inform your child's school immediately.
5. **Taxi Transport.** It is not possible to achieve the minimum social distancing requirements in 4 seat taxis. As a result, the Council has made the decision that unless a child is considered vulnerable, these taxis will not be used. The Council will work with schools to identify these vulnerable pupils and where possible, offer an alternative form of transport. The provision of escorts on larger 6 to 8 seat taxi contracts will be considered on a case by case basis, as the addition of an escort may mean that the social distancing requirements cannot be met. If you require transport you must inform your child's school immediately.

For the 3 week period, school crossing patrols will not be available.

6. **Updated policies** - policies have been updated, as appropriate, in advance of schools opening, e.g. First Aid.

7. **Social distancing.** Schools have been prepared and reconfigured to ensure appropriate social distancing practices. Please speak to your children about the need to follow these rules, both in school and outside school, in a way that is appropriate to their age.

I understand that some of you will be apprehensive about an imminent return to school, especially as we know it will be very different. Please do check out the video of Richard Owen, Executive Headteacher of Idris Davies 3-18 School, talking about what parents and pupils can expect when returning to schools in Caerphilly for check in and catch up next week. I am sure after viewing the video you will feel a lot better and reassured that we have got this covered and your child/children will be safe and happy in the school environment.

<https://youtu.be/mY5slCnmbTs>

Your headteachers have to manage a maximum of 30% of pupils on site at one time, so they have to plan very carefully with their newly designed environments. Schools have one way systems in place, sanitising stations and many of the features we have become used to over recent weeks.

We would, therefore, appreciate your co-operation and only attend on the days and times allocated, in order to maintain social distancing.

Children must not attend if they have a shielding letter or if they have any symptoms. Should children develop symptoms during the school day, you will be contacted to collect your child.

I will be writing this week to those of you who are key workers, in order to advise you of the options available through the summer and beyond.

The pandemic situation has been incredibly difficult for all of us and some have been affected by loss and grief directly. Headteachers and staff, together with the local authority, will continue to offer support and advice wherever possible.

As a Council, we are very proud of how hard staff have worked through this challenging period – often leading as well as directly working shifts in the childcare hubs, in addition to continuing to teach and support their own children.

We are also very grateful for the role that you have played in helping to ensure children continued with home schooling over the past few months – it certainly hasn't been easy!

Thank you for your continued co-operation.

Keri Cole

Chief Education Officer, Caerphilly CBC.