

Statement on the return of schools in January

Following extensive discussions a common approach has been agreed by the Welsh Government and the Welsh Local Government Association for the return to school in January.

With transmission levels continuing to increase across Wales, and uncertainty over what impact that might have on school staffing levels over the Christmas break, there will be some flexibility built in at the beginning of term. However, minimising disruption to our children and young people's education remains a priority and face to face learning should be the default position unless there are clear public health and safety reasons for moving to remote learning.

For most of our learners, the new school term will start on 4th January, although there will be some schools who have planned INSET days in this first week. As schools assess their staffing levels ahead of, and during, the first week, our expectation is that schools will be providing face to face learning for the majority of their pupils by 11th January, leading to a full return in the days before 18th January at the latest.

Where a school has moved to remote learning because of exceptional and specific local circumstances, local authorities and schools will be expected to make arrangements for vulnerable learners and the children of critical workers (including school staff) to attend, as is the case now.

A WLGA spokesperson said:

"The plan to return to schools in January will give some certainty, whilst also allowing for flexibility to take account of local circumstances.

"Teachers, school staff, learners, and parents and carers' response has been remarkable throughout this challenging year. It has not been easy, and we thank them for their continued patience and perseverance to help keep our communities safe.

"To help curb the rapid spread of the virus, we must all continue to do all we can to protect ourselves, each other and our communities."

A Welsh Government spokesperson said

"We all recognise that these are unprecedented times and that we have to be agile in how we respond to the impact the virus has on our communities.

"By agreeing to a flexible approach during the first two weeks of the new school term in January enables our schools to put in place proportionate arrangements which reflect their specific circumstances and is guided by public health and safety considerations.

"We know from our children and young people that they learn best when in the classroom receiving face to face learning so any measures we put in place must look to minimise further disruption to their education."