



## **RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**MUNICIPAL YEAR 20/21**

**CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**21<sup>ST</sup> JULY 2021**

**SUMMER TERM UPDATE IN RELATION TO EDUCATION'S LATEST POSITION IN  
RESPONSE TO COVID-19**

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND INCLUSION SERVICES**

### **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To provide members of the Children and Young People's Committee with some contextual information on the most recent changes in Education during the summer term in response to the changing COVID-19 position.

### **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that Members:

- 2.1 Consider the verbal update from the Director of Education and Inclusion Services on the Council's most recent responses to Ministerial announcements in relation to the COVID-19 situation.
- 2.2 Consider whether they wish the Director of Education and Inclusion Services to report on further information in any future meetings.

### **3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 To provide Members with an update on the actions taken by the Council as a result of announcements made by the First Minister and the Education Minister and the associated gradual easing of lockdown measures.
- 3.2 To update Members of the current COVID-19 processes and practices in Rhondda Cynon Taf schools and to ensure that they are kept abreast of all developments.

#### **4. BACKGROUND**

- 4.1 The First Minister confirmed (on the 1<sup>st</sup> of April) that all learners would return to school settings on Monday the 12<sup>th</sup> of April, immediately following the Easter break.
- 4.2 Preventative measures have continued to be implemented in school settings since they returned at full occupancy.
- 4.3 Updated operational guidance was circulated to all schools in readiness for the post-Easter return of all learners, with all schools required to update their risk assessments and business continuity plans accordingly.

#### **5. EDUCATIONAL PROVISION**

The local authority continues to work very closely with all of our schools and provides advice and guidance to school staff as well as regular updates to parents/carers (see section 6 below).

Operational guidance continues to be provided in relation to the safe re-opening of schools and this is regularly updated to reflect the latest advice and announcements from Welsh Government.

Guidance is also updated and shared in relation to the offer of lateral flow testing for all school staff and all learners in Year 10 and above.

##### **5.1 Remote learning**

Remote learning allows pupils to continue accessing the curriculum beyond the classroom. It allows them to learn through a guided study programme set by their teachers.

Schools across Rhondda Cynon Taf implemented a variety of remote learning options with support from the Council's school improvement officers and colleagues at the Central South Consortium throughout the various lockdown periods and are very adept at ensuring continuum of education via remote means when required to do so. Welsh Government's Hwb digital platform for learning and teaching also provides a wealth of educational resources for schools, parents/carers and learners.

Although all learners returned to school settings from the 12<sup>th</sup> of April, remote learning is still made available to learners who need to self-isolate due to COVID-19.

##### **5.2 Digitally Excluded Learners (DELs)**

From the start of the pandemic, digitally excluded learners who did not have access to an appropriate internet-connected device and/or internet connection have been supported to engage in online learning activities from home. The local authority frequently communicates with schools to identify families facing such difficulties

and have sourced ICT equipment and Mifi devices to enable learners to access education.

The audit of digitally excluded learners was refreshed this academic year to identify any new families that had moved into the area or were experiencing challenges in accessing education remotely.

A total of 2,868 devices were provided to DELs in the 2019/2020 academic year and a further 2,570 were provided to newly identified DELs in NCY 1 to 13 between January 2021 and March 2021.

Schools have been informed that DELs who are returning to their school in September 2021 can keep their devices for use at home for on-line learning. Any DELs that are leaving their school at the end of term have been asked to return their device to the school.

In July 2021, a total of 4,456 Chromebooks provided by Welsh Government were allocated to schools in accordance with their number of learners eligible for free school meals.

### 5.3 Examinations

Following Welsh Government's announcement on the 8<sup>th</sup> January of 2021, that schools were to remain closed to the majority of learners until at least the 29<sup>th</sup> of January 2021, a decision was made to cancel the spring term assessments (for GCSE, AS and A level learners) that were planned to take place between the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February and the 23<sup>rd</sup> of April.

The Design and Delivery Advisory Group Design and Delivery Advisory Group (DDAG) (comprised of headteachers and college principals) set up to support 'wellbeing, fairness and progression' for learners in 2021, developed revised proposals which were accepted by the Education Minister. In summary, these were: -

- Learners undertaking GCSE, AS and A levels approved by Qualifications Wales would have their qualifications awarded through a Centre-Determined Grade (CDG) model – this means that grades have been determined by their school or college based on an assessment of the learner's work. This has been a holistic approach underpinned by evidence of attainment in areas a learner has covered.

Schools and colleges have been able to use a range of evidence to determine the grades to be awarded to their learners, which has included Non-Examination Assessment elements, mock-exams, and classwork. In addition, the WJEC has offered a set of adapted past papers for each qualification which enabled schools to continue to assess learning within their teaching plans, providing extra support for teachers and learners. All evidence used to identify grades has been the learner's own work, but there have been no formal external assessments.

Qualifications Wales worked with the WJEC, supported by the DDAG, to provide an assessment framework to support schools and colleges in developing their own assessment plans, which demonstrated sufficient coverage of key concepts to allow learners to progress, and detail for how the centre has determined a learner's grade. These assessment plans were quality assured by the WJEC and all RCT schools' plans were accepted as appropriate.

- The deadlines and controls around Non-Examination Assessment were removed, and no moderation was undertaken by the WJEC. However, where possible schools and colleges have supported learners to undertake some of their Non-Examination Assessment to continue to build learning and skills.

Qualifications Wales published a timeline for learners. A learner's school or college was directed to discuss the provisional Centre Determined Grades that had been decided for the learner in each of their subjects before the end of June. All schools have undertaken this activity.

### **Vocational Qualifications**

The Minister's policy decision did not relate to vocational qualifications. The awarding of vocational and technical qualifications in 2021 differed depending on the type of qualification.

A summary document can be accessed at:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/964614/Infographic\\_-\\_how\\_vocational\\_and\\_technical\\_qualifications\\_will\\_be\\_awarded\\_in\\_2021.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/964614/Infographic_-_how_vocational_and_technical_qualifications_will_be_awarded_in_2021.pdf)

Qualifications Wales agreed to a three-stage appeals process following the dissemination of provisional grades to learners:

**Stage 1** – By June schools and colleges will share provisional centre determined grades with their learners. A learner can ask their school or college to review provisional grades and/or check for any errors before they are submitted to WJEC.

**Stage 2** – After results day in August, a learner can appeal to WJEC that the grade judgement that their school or college has made is unreasonable and/or a procedural error has been made.

**Stage 3** - Following completion of the Stage 2 appeal, learners can request an Exam Procedures Review Service (EPRS) review from Qualifications Wales to check whether WJEC has followed their procedures correctly.

Final qualification grades will not be issued to learners until the results days, which are the 10<sup>th</sup> of August for AS and A levels and the 12<sup>th</sup> of August for GCSEs.

#### 5.4 **Business Continuity Plans**

All schools have Business Continuity Plans in place that detail the school-based actions that will be taken to mitigate risks and to ensure that it is possible to ensure continuity in delivering education safely. These have been shared with the local authority and are reviewed by officers. Schools are requested to revisit, update and submit their Business Continuity Plans to the local authority on a regular basis.

Business continuity planning is critical to ensuring that schools are able to quickly respond to any challenges and are able to maintain effective delivery of education to all learners throughout various stages of the impact of the pandemic at school, local and national level. Education and Inclusion Services provided schools with detailed guidance and template documentation to assist with this planning. This guidance is updated to reflect the changing national position.

#### 5.5 **Health and Safety**

All schools have undertaken a COVID-19 specific Health and Safety Risk Assessment in consultation with their governing bodies and staff. Education and Inclusion Services have provided schools with comprehensive and regularly updated guidance documentation (*'Guidance for the Safe Re-Opening of Schools' version 11 – updated July 2021*) which contains template documentation to assist schools in writing their risk assessments which schools must revisit, update and submit to the local authority on a regular basis for review by Health and Safety Officers who also offer assistance and guidance, as requested.

#### 5.6 **Managing Confirmed Cases**

Schools continue to work very closely with the Test, Trace, Protect (TTP) Service and are key in identifying close contacts of confirmed cases, thereby enabling those contacts to isolate for a 10-day period and prevent the spread of the virus. The local authority has provided schools with template letters to issue to parents as part of this process. Schools have also been provided with flow charts and process maps to summarise the actions needing to be taken in various scenarios.

Any learner required to self-isolate as a result of being a confirmed case themselves, or a close contact of a confirmed case is provided with remote learning to ensure continuation of their education.

The number of cases of COVID-19 in our schools has started to rise. Between the 26<sup>th</sup> of June 2021 and the 2<sup>nd</sup> of July 2021 there were 28 confirmed cases in 18 school settings. According to the information recorded by schools on SIMS during that week, there were 523 isolations of close contacts of confirmed cases.

#### 5.7 **Lateral Flow Testing**

Welsh Government continue to provide all schools and childcare/play settings with Lateral Flow Tests. This twice weekly self-administered testing is undertaken at home and can help to regularly and quickly identify positive asymptomatic cases

and ask them to self-isolate before coming into schools and childcare/play settings. Test kits are made available to all school staff and pupils in Year 10 and above (subject to written consent having been provided). Staff in all CIW (Care Inspectorate Wales) childcare/play settings have been provided with test kits directly from Welsh Government. Test kits for childminders and unregistered childcare/play settings have been distributed by the RCT childcare team.

Anyone testing positive using a lateral flow test should undertake a PCR test within a 24-hour period of their positive lateral flow test.

Schools and childcare/play settings are aware that testing is to supplement other preventative measures and that maintaining contact groups, wearing face masks, ensuring adequate ventilation, hand washing, cleaning and social distancing etc. must all still be implemented. Along with all of these current preventative measures put in place by schools and settings, testing will help reduce the likelihood of adults unwittingly spreading the virus to others in the setting.

Local Health Boards are also making COVID-19 PCR testing available to people with a wider range of symptoms such as fatigue, muscle ache or pain, a sore throat, a headache, a runny nose, nausea, vomiting or diarrhoea. Individuals with these wider symptoms are also asked to consider taking a PCR test and self-isolate while they await the result.

## 5.8 Attendance

Following consultation, the Welsh Government has revoked the School Performance and Absence Targets (Wales) Regulations 2011 (in force from the 7<sup>th</sup> of August 2020). As a result, schools are not required to set targets for future years or report on those previously set for 2019/20 onwards. The annual attendance data collection for attendance has also been suspended for the 2020/21 academic year for primary and secondary phase.

Due to Welsh Government deciding not to reinstate Fixed Penalty Notices/Prosecutions, the Attendance and Wellbeing Service continue to operate Wellbeing Response Visits into the summer term. The Attendance and Wellbeing Service liaise with schools on a three day rota and schools advise of pupils who have unauthorised absences from school and request a Wellbeing Response visit from the Attendance and Wellbeing team which aims to discover the reason for the absence and provide any support/assurances as required to reintegrate pupils back into school. From the start of the academic year to the Summer half term break, this resulted in 9,395 wellbeing visits to homes.

If a learner is unable to attend the physical setting of the school due to self-isolation, the school will continue to engage regularly with the learner remotely.

Attendance rates for the autumn term (from the 14<sup>th</sup> of September 2020 following the staggered start) were 89.8% in primary and 85.6% in secondary.

For the first half of the spring term, only key worker and vulnerable children provision was available on school sites. Attendance figures increased from 2.48% of the whole school population (964 pupils) at the start of term to a high of 6.84% (2,654 pupils) during the final week before half-term.

For the second half of the spring term, attendance increased significantly with the return of the foundation phase and later the whole of primary settings as well as isolated days for some secondary year groups. This increase was from 17.86% of the whole school population (6,929 pupils) on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February to 72.04% (27,954 pupils) on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March.

Attendance for statutory year groups for the spring term was 94.0% in primary and 89.6% in secondary. In the first half of the Summer Term, this had declined slightly. At primary level attendance was 93.6% and at secondary level it was 88.0%.

## 5.9 Partnership Working

Education and Inclusion Services work closely and meet regularly with Welsh Government, Central South Consortium and many departments within the local authority (in particular, Public Health and Protection; Children's Services) as well as many other partners, to share up to date information and facilitate opportunities for discussion, questions and problem solving. The Senior Management Team of Education and Inclusion Services meet regularly with headteachers and trade union representatives.

## 5.10 Free School Meal Provision

The Council has seen a significant growth in the number of learners eligible for free school meals (eFSM). The data is summarised as follows:

Month	Jan-20	Feb-20	Mar-20	Apr-20	May-20	Jun-20	Jul-20	Aug-20
eFSM	8367	8619	8698	8764	8960	9051	9089	9089
Total	38561	39004	38997	38991	38989	38985	38832	38832
%	21.70%	22.10%	22.30%	22.48%	22.98%	23.22%	23.41%	23.41%

Month	Sep-20	Oct-20	Nov-20	Dec-20	Jan-21	Feb-21	Mar-21
eFSM	9284	9328	9439	9546	9513	9689	9816
Total	36771	38755	38757	38806	38750	39231	39211
%	23.71%	24.07%	24.35%	24.60%	24.55%	24.70%	25.03%

Month	Apr-21	May-21	Jun-21
eFSM	9953	10028	10121
Total	39325	39293	39331
%	25.31%	25.52%	25.73%

Free school meals are provided at school on days that an eligible learner attends the school setting. Where an eligible free school meals learner is unable to attend school due to them needing to self-isolate due to COVID-19, BACS payments of £3.90 per day are made to their parent/carer.

The Welsh Government has also provided funding (at a rate of £19.50 per learner per week) to make free school meal provision available during school holidays throughout the 2021 to 2022 financial year.

BACS payments were also made to the parents/carers of eligible learners in years 11 and 13 for the period that they are not required to attend school premises during the second half of the summer term 2021. These payments will continue until the end of the 2021 school summer holiday period.

### **5.11 Breakfast Club Provision**

Breakfast club provision continues with a reduced capacity following a health and safety review undertaken prior to the schools returning in September 2020. This review took into account the size of school halls, staffing provision and the need to maintain contact groups. Demand for places has been high but prioritisation cannot be given to any specific groups (e.g., previously unsuccessful applicants, vulnerable groups or key workers) as this provision is intended to provide a healthy breakfast to all learners and is not an emergency childcare provision. The regulatory framework does not allow certain groups to be prioritised above others. Places are allocated on a 'first come - first served' basis in relation to online applications. In the event of regular non-attendance by a pupil (excluding self-isolation and sickness absences), places are re-allocated to pupils on the waiting list.

As places are restricted, parents/carers were encouraged to only apply if their child required access to a free, healthy breakfast before the start of the school day. Despite the robust approaches adopted to keep everyone safe, Rhondda Cynon Taf still allocated 3,137 breakfast club places for the summer term.

A further application process was recently undertaken for the autumn term (period from the 2nd of September to the 17<sup>th</sup> of December 2021). The Council has continued to allocate all available places based on the previously agreed application processes and capacity calculations, to ensure that social distancing and effective hygiene and preventative measures can be maintained. All applicants have remained within year groups and this has ensured that risks can be mitigated.

### **5.12 Childcare Settings**

Following months of very few positive notifications, and none since the end of May, there has been an increase in positive notifications recently. In the two-week period the 23<sup>rd</sup> of June to the 6<sup>th</sup> of July 2021, there have been five positive lateral flow (LFD) notifications and seven positive PCR notifications. (Three of these were confirmation of the LFD results.)



Nearly all childcare settings are now open. Some out of school settings are still unable to return to their usual venues, due to venue restrictions but are operating from alternative premises.

The childcare sector continues to adapt well to continuing protective measures and are implementing all Welsh Government guidance to ensure the safety of their staff and childcare. Demand for childcare does not seem to be back to pre-COVID levels. Feedback suggests that several childcare settings are struggling financially with a drop in the number of children attending. Partial or full closures due to positive cases is also still impacting on the sustainability of settings.

## **6. SUPPORTING PAPERS AND INFORMATION**

6.1 As general information for the committee, the following table reflects the key guidance documents sent to stakeholders since Easter 2021 with attached links to the Council website where appropriate:

<b>Document</b>		<b>Date of issue/ circulation</b>
<b>1.</b>	<b>Schools – correspondence/information</b>	
	Outdoor activities – WG guidance - AND RCT FAQs v12.	12/04/21
	Circulation of Welsh Government letter regarding lateral flow testing offer extended to pupils in Year 7 and above.	13/04/21
	Headteacher in Wales, Education Support – wellbeing support for headteachers – links.	13/04/21
	Outdoor activities – follow up e-mail regarding cleaning between groups.	14/04/21
	Additional (wider) symptoms – PCR test recommended but no requirement to self-isolate whilst awaiting results – clarification for schools regarding original message for parents.	29/04/21
	Circulation of Welsh Government guidance update regarding educational visits.	04/05/21
	LFT delivery guidance and re-ordering information.	06/05/21
	LFT – updates regarding Welsh Government assets; online ordering system established; peripatetic staff test collection point changing.	08/06/21
	Welsh Government letter regarding end of term events and wider symptom testing.	11/06/21

	Guidance updates – transition; end of term events; ventilation.	18/06/21
	Cwm Taf Morgannwg UHB summary paper – testing and isolation requirements.	08/07/21
	Welsh Government letter outlining plans for September 2021 and updated operational guidance for September 2021.	09/07/21
	Reminder of links for uploading confirmed Covid cases.	09/07/21
	Letter from the Chief Medical Officer regarding flu vaccinations being extended to more children.	13/07/21
<b>2.</b>	<b>Frequently Asked Questions – for parents/carers: Covering a number of issues including – school safety measures; cleaning; transport; catering and free school meals; confirmed cases of COVID-19. These FAQs are published on the Council’s website and updated regularly –</b> <a href="http://www.rctcbc.gov.uk/schoolreturnfaqs">www.rctcbc.gov.uk/schoolreturnfaqs</a>	
	FAQs for parents/carers – versions 12a, 13, 13a, 14	29/03/21 – 14/07/21
<b>3.</b>	<b>Parents/carers – correspondence</b>	
	Lateral Flow Testing (LFT) Guidance for Learners – v1	19/04/21
	Additional (wider) symptoms – PCR test recommended but no requirement to self-isolate whilst awaiting results	26/04/21
<b>4.</b>	<b>Parents/carers – social media – summer term The below videos/captions were published several times via the Council’s social media channels (Facebook and Twitter)</b>	
	Updated social media graphics – reflecting the return of ALL year groups to school settings post Easter	From 12/04/21
<b>5.</b>	<b>Lateral Flow Testing (LFT) guidance</b>	
	Lateral Flow Testing (LFT) Guidance for Schools in RCT – v3	19/04/21
	Lateral Flow Testing (LFT) Guidance for Learners – v1	19/04/21

	Template letter for schools for parents/carers whose children are a potential close contact of someone testing positive on an LFT	18/06/21
	Lateral Flow Testing (LFT) Guidance for Schools in RCT – v4	08/07/21
<b>10.</b>	<b>Reopening Schools - Guidance document issued to headteachers: Regularly updated to reflect changes in the local and national position and to reflect updated guidance from the Welsh Government</b>	
	Coronavirus (COVID-19): Guidance for the safe re-opening of schools VERSION 9 – updated May 2021	18/05/21
	Coronavirus (COVID-19): Guidance for the safe re-opening of schools VERSION 10 – updated July 2021	08/07/21
	Coronavirus (COVID-19): Guidance for the safe re-opening of schools VERSION 11 – updated July 2021 (in readiness for September 2021)	14/07/21

## **7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 An Equality Impact Assessment is not currently required - the contents of the report are for information purposes only.

## **8. CONSULTATION**

- 8.1 There is no requirement to undertake any consultation. The Director of Education and Inclusion Services provides regular and detailed COVID-19 updates to Scrutiny Committee meetings.

## **9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)**

- 9.1 There are no financial implications aligned to this report.

## **10. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED**

- 10.1 There are no legal implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

## **11. LINKS TO THE COUNCIL'S CORPORATE PLAN/OTHER CORPORATE PRIORITIES/SIP**

- 11.1 This is an information report presenting the Cabinet report which outlines how the Council is responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **12. CONCLUSION**

- 12.1 Whilst it is proposed that Scrutiny is presented with regular updates on the Education Directorate's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the situation relating to schools and education is often very fluid and fast-moving. In view of this, a termly update will be provided to encapsulate all of the key changes and the wide-ranging documentation sent to schools to ensure that they are kept abreast of national and local changes.

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

**AS AMENDED BY**

**THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985**

**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE COMMITTEE**

**21<sup>st</sup> JULY 2021**

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