



8 January 2021

Dear Headteacher

Wishing you a better new year in the hope you found some time to rest during the break.

Inevitably, and as I noted in my letter to you on 16 December, we have seen a difficult start to 2021 with Wales at alert level 4, and schools and colleges moving to remote learning, due to increased transmission of the new COVID-19 strain.

The First Minister will confirm today that we will bring the decision-making on schools and colleges into line with the Welsh Government's three-week review timetable of 29 January. At that point, unless the rates of community transmission in Wales reduce significantly by 29 January, most students in schools and colleges will continue working remotely until the February half term.

I want to stress – guided by the TAG report, to be published ahead of the First Minister's announcement – that this is not a simple binary choice between closing schools now and reopening them in February. The TAG report is clear on education's contribution to our efforts to deal with this, not because schools are now more unsafe or pose a higher risk for teachers and children.

We are taking this action because the new variant is far more infections and is leading to increased numbers of people falling ill and being hospitalised.

Colleagues will know that the new variance does not mean schools have suddenly become unsafe. They do not pose an increased risk to teachers or students.

We know that time away from school impacts greatly on the most vulnerable in society, causing lifelong harm. This is why schools and colleges will remain open for children of critical workers and vulnerable learners. Because of the vulnerability of the children and young people you care for we would like Special Schools to remain open if possible.

I am hugely grateful to you and your staff for the support you provide some of our most vulnerable children and young people and their parents.

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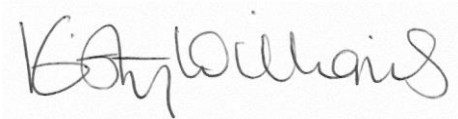
Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

To support you, your staff and your learners:

- School staff who provide intimate personal care for children with complex medical needs will be included as part of the priority list along with social care workers in the vaccine roll out.
- All special schools will have the opportunity to opt into weekly testing of all staff. Training will commence next week to those who want to participate.

We will use the coming weeks to work with you to plan for the future. But again, thanks for your dedication.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Kirsty Williams". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'K'.

Kirsty Williams AS/MS
Y Gweinidog Addysg
Minister for Education