

Kirsty Williams AS/MS
Y Gweinidog Addysg
Minister for Education



Ein cyf/Our ref KW/02344/20

Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Deborah Lawson
General secretary
Voicetheunion
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22nd June 2020

Dear Deborah,

Thank you for your letters of 5 and 17 June regarding my announcement on the increasing of operations of schools in Wales from 29 June to enable all learners to have the opportunity to 'check in, catch up and prepare' at their school.

On the 15 May I published my decision framework for the next phase of education and childcare which set out the measured steps that I would consider ahead of any decision to increase operation. This framework, and the decisions I have made in relation to schools increasing their operations has been shaped and informed by the views of stakeholders, including the Unions, along with being guided by the latest medical advice. As the framework sets out, any decision needed to balance a range of considerations including the impact on: public health, the wellbeing of children, and schools' capacity.

In your meeting with my officials on the 21 May an update was received from Rob Orford, Chief Scientific Adviser. I regularly receive advice from the Technical Advisory Cell (TAC) and I will only take actions which scientific advice suggests are manageable. The scientific advice is clear that we must take advantage of the warm weather during the Summer. That is why I also proposed that schools open for an extra week in July, with the Summer term ending on the 24 July rather than a week earlier. We believe that the additional week would be hugely important in helping schools take a phased approach in supporting children and young people. The current trend shows that cases are reducing and this situation will be monitored using the Test, Trace, Protect system that is now operational.

To support the increasing operation of schools I published operational and learning guidance; <https://gov.wales/keep-education-safe-operational-guidance-schools-and-settings-covid-19> <https://gov.wales/keep-education-safe-guidance-learning-over-summer-term> on 10th June 2020. It covers measures schools and settings can undertake to:

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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.

- plan and organise provision: including determining capacity and checklists for taking the next steps.
- support the health and well-being of staff and learners; helping to keep people safe
- manage their facilities and logistical arrangements: including buildings, resources, cleaning and transport

At the forefront of my decision making process has been the need to minimise risk to the development, learning and well-being of our children. Returning on 29 June provides a real opportunity for learners and staff to work together so they can check-in, catch up and prepare for summer and September. Waiting until September would mean that most children would not have stepped foot in a school for at least 23 weeks and I consider this to be a risk to be avoided. The ability to go back to their setting is an opportunity for both learners and staff to test and 'bed in' operations in advance of the autumn term to prepare for the 'new normal' as it will look from September.

We must also recognise that there is a real possibility of a second wave of coronavirus later in the year. We hope that does not happen, but we have to be prepared, that was why alongside the additional week in July, I set out my plans to extend this Autumn's half-term break by an additional week. Under the revised arrangements the intention was for the half term break to commence on 19 October and end on 30 October.

I have continued to work closely with the WLGA throughout this process and of course, we recognise that decisions over term dates are best taken by Local Authorities and Governing Bodies, as they are better placed to understand their local circumstances. I outlined in my statement on XX June that Local Authorities and Governing Bodies will need to progress the necessary statutory actions in relation to the next phase of schools.

I have welcomed the dedication of our education staff that despite everything have continued to work tirelessly and have responded positively to the announcement sharing the innovative ways they expect the four weeks to operate in their schools.

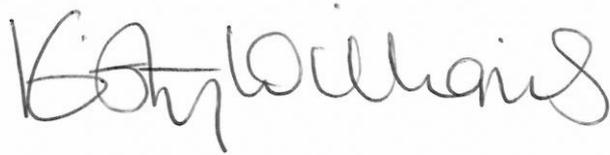
With regards to the provision of childcare for critical workers including the education workforce, this is something we have prioritised over this period. The Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services has confirmed arrangements for the pre-school age children of critical workers and vulnerable children will remain in place until the end of August, though we are likely to close this scheme to new entrants from mid-July. From 29 June the school-age children of critical workers should be returning to their own schools, with local authorities moving away from the hub model they have in place at the moment. Decisions on how that will be managed are being taken locally, based on the capacity within individual schools and the operating models local authorities and schools have in place.

I am in discussions with Ministers about arrangements for school-age children over the summer holiday period. Childcare providers will be increasing their operations from the end of the month and we know some local authorities are considering running local

schemes, possibly utilising the hub model. I have confirmed that where such schemes are running, we would not expect it to be staffed by the education workforce

I recognise that some people will feel apprehensive. The health and wellbeing of learners and staff is – as always – our primary concern. Schools, colleges and other settings are working hard to plan for the return of their learners and to put the appropriate safeguards in place.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kirsty Williams', written in a cursive style.

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