

Dear Parent/Carer,

You will be well aware, the Welsh Government announced on 3rd June that schools are to partially reopen on a 'check in, catch up and prepare' basis. The original announcement stipulated that this would be for a period of four weeks from 29th June. The Council is very grateful for all the hard work being done in schools to prepare for the 29th and to you as parents/carers for your perseverance, cooperation and patience in assisting schools prepare for the reopening.

Over the past weeks there have been on going discussions nationally relating to the week commencing 20th July. It is our understanding that the Welsh Government and the trade unions cannot reach a common position on the fourth week and that on Thursday 18th June, via the BBC website, Welsh Government stated that "schools and councils will have the final say on whether the summer term is extended for an extra week".

We are all acutely aware of the difficulties this uncertainty will be causing you in your decision making as to whether or not your children will attend school this term and any childcare arrangements you would need to make.

This has put schools and the Council in a very difficult position as there is no contractual obligation on staff to work the extra week, and this effectively puts the onus on head teachers and individual staff members which would be unfair and potentially lead to inconsistency across the County Borough as there is no guarantee that all schools will be in a position to adequately staff provision in the fourth week on a voluntary basis.

It is the view of the Council that schools require immediate clarity so that they can plan on a fixed basis to receive as many pupils as possible during this period; parents and young people in order that they can approach the few next weeks with confidence; and for parents to have the opportunity to make alternative childcare arrangements as required in the fourth week. This is not something that can be left to the last minute and the Council is very mindful of its statutory responsibilities both as an employer and in the context of the safeguarding of children and young people.

Our position is that we want all schools, maintained by the local authority, the diocesan authorities and federation schools, to be adopting the same position. We are proud of our partnership approaches as a team, and work as one.

A consistent approach is deemed essential and the Council would have much preferred to have seen these issues resolved on a national basis at the outset, prior to the original announcement.

Taking into account all considerations, it has been decided that the original term dates will be adhered to and that the Council does not propose to ask teaching and other school staff to volunteer and, therefore, schools in the County Borough will close for the summer holidays on 17th July.

It is appreciated that the above decision will result in additional work for headteachers and governing bodies in planning provision for the three week period and that there is a significant possibility that your child's school will need to contact you to inform you of amendments to any arrangements they have currently made. There is a possibility that schools will need to reduce the number of days your child is able to go to school this term.

Can we emphasise that schools are not in any way responsible for the position that they now find themselves in. It is understood that the removal of the fourth week may cause you as parents/carers inconvenience and concerns. We assure you, the decision that schools should not reopen for the week commencing 20th July has not been taken lightly but for the reasons outlined above.

Cllr Mark Pritchard
Leader to the Council

Cllr Phil Wynn
Lead Member for Education

Ian Bancroft
Chief Executive

Ian Roberts
Chief Officer; Education and Early Intervention