

# Return to School

## Newsletter No 5

22nd June 2020



Dear Mums and Dads,

Just a week to go now before we re-open schools for pupils. For those of you who have indicated that your child is coming back to school, and for those of you who were unsure, I hope that the following information will begin to reassure you of the processes and procedures that we have in place for our reopening.

When you read these processes, I understand that some of you may find them a little less convenient from those that you have been used to. For instance, staggered starts may be less convenient for some parents who have more than one child to drop off. However, please be reassured that we have followed best practice and advice from our **Health and Safety Department and also from Welsh Government**. Whilst this may appear to be less convenient, all processes have safety rather than convenience at its core, and are designed to promote good social distancing and hygiene routines to inhibit the spread of the Covid 19 virus. I really hope that you will work with us to ensure that our school site is safe for all, parents, pupils and staff alike.

### New Routines

As you read through this letter you will see that we have drawn up new routines for the next three weeks. For our routines to function effectively, it is really important that everyone is on time. We have staggered our start and end to the day to minimise the number of people on our school site at any time. In addition, we have ensured that all pupils use an entry and exit door which is nearest to their classroom. For this to work effectively we need to be able to collect pupils from the yard in a timely manner, so that we can clear the yard for the next set of pupils.

We appreciate that in rare circumstances you may find that you need to be on two yards at the same time. To ease this, teachers will be on the yard 5 minutes before we take the children in. This will allow you to drop one child off and then make your way to the other yard safely, without rushing.

Please do not be late in the morning. Should you be unavoidably late, we will be unable to accept any pupils into the building until all classes have entered the building. If we allow late arrivals to arrive at any time, we will allow inappropriate movement/crossing of pupils within the building corridors. Therefore we will only be able to accept late arrivals into the building via the main entrance after 9.15. Many thanks for your understanding.

We would also kindly ask that you are prompt and on time to pick children up at the end of the day. At the end of the day we have to clear classroom surfaces and clear the building to allow cleaning staff in. If you are late this will have an impact on cleaning rotas and put undue pressure on cleaning staff, who have time limited opportunities to get the building thoroughly cleaned by the end of the day.

When considering the importance of settling children back into routine, I would be very grateful if you could accompany your child to and from school for the next 3 weeks. Our routines will be very different for pupils and it is important that you are able to accompany them to reassure them, and support them to follow good social distancing routines when entering and leaving the premises.

In preparation for returning to school we would ask that you begin to chat to your children about the importance of social distancing and how it will continue to be an expectation when pupils attend school.

### **When Are Children Attending School?**

You will be aware that Welsh Government requires pupils to attend for 3 'check in, catch up, and prepare' sessions before the end of term. To facilitate this each child will have an allotted day to attend over the next three weeks. You will be aware we are now finishing school on the 17th July. Given this last minute change to the end of term we have over the weekend, rewritten our plans and they are nearly ready to share. We are finalising our timetables today, and as soon as they are checked we will send them out via Twitter and See-Saw. We will also notify you which day your child(ren) will attend. Please understand that we are unable to change the attendance day for your child. These rotas have been very complicated to draw up and we are unable to make any last minute changes.

Also be aware that the start and end times of our days have changed, and the school day has been shortened to ensure that pupils are eased back into education gently.

### **Changes To Our Premises.**

#### **Toilets**

After seeking advice, our toilet arrangements have been reconfigured, to limit the mixing of pupil bubbles. Therefore we now have a Year 6, 5, 4, 3, 2 and year 1 toilet. Reception and Nursery toilets are contained within the classroom. We have a clear protocol for a 'one in, one out' system. Younger pupils will be accompanied to the toilets to ensure that they wash their hands/sanitise thoroughly before and after using the toilet.

#### **Yards**

Our yards have been reconfigured and when you arrive you will see that they are marked with socially distancing lining up spots. We will ask pupils to line up on these spots when entering the building. When we dismiss pupils at the end of the day we will bring pupils out to these spots for collection. Can I ask that all parents remain on the ASTRO TURF when picking up and dropping off their children. We have measured these areas and they are plenty big enough for social distancing. That will allow us to line children up and get them into school safely. Many thanks.

#### **Indoors**

Our classrooms have been reconfigured to support social distancing. All seating is now 2m apart. We are currently working on signs for the school, to reinforce the measures that we will promote throughout the day. Corridors are marked up with 2 m distancing marks, and the outside areas are also appropriately marked. Following consultation with our Health and Safety Officer it has been decided that our school configuration does not support a one way system, however where possible corridors have been marked to ensure good separation of pupils. Pupils will also be instructed to keep to the left. Additionally, our new school timetable, and relocation of toilets minimises the need for crossing/passing in corridors.

#### **Social Distancing**

it is important to realise that children may find social distancing challenging, and the Welsh Government Guidance recognises this. It states '*In primary schools we recognise that it is not practical to expect learners to maintain consistent social distancing of two metres. Staff however should seek to ensure some distancing between learners.....For primary school aged children, schools and settings may wish to consider allowing small, consistent groups (no more than 8 to mix)*'. Our mainstream classes for the next three weeks will have a maximum of 8 pupils at any time. Hub numbers are as yet unknown, but are larger classrooms and therefore can accommodate a few more pupils as long as we ensure good social distancing.

## **Isolation Rooms**

To manage pupils who may become symptomatic, we have identified two isolation rooms for pupils, where we can manage pupils safely and effectively until parents are able to pick them up. In addition to this we have relocated our First Aid Room to ensure that pupils who are generally under the weather can be looked after separately from pupils who may be symptomatic.

## **Breaktimes**

Break times and lunch times have been staggered. When pupils are having breaks, we will expect them to remain with their class 'bubbles'. In fact class 'bubbles' will stay together for the whole day. Pupils will have (weather permitting) an opportunity to have some outdoor exercise within the school day. Therefore we kindly ask that pupils come in dressed in a PE kit ready for some socially distanced exercise. In terms of weather, we really want to ensure that we can get pupils out whenever possible (as recommended) , so please send them in with a light rain mac so that we are not deterred from the outside in cases of light drizzle.

## **Catering**

Lunch times will be taken at pupil desks. These will be cleared and cleaned before use. Of course pupils will be required to wash their hands before eating lunch.

As you will know by now, Caerphilly Catering will not be operating normally for the next 3 weeks. Therefore, we will not be providing hot lunches for pupils. As a result, **ALL pupils** will need to bring a packed lunch. To ensure that all staff can maintain social distancing, all pupils will need to be able to eat their lunch independently, so for our younger pupils that will mean ensuring that they can eat their lunch without support. If you could be mindful of this when preparing packed lunches we would be really grateful.

## **Breakfast Club**

There will be no breakfast club in any Caerphilly schools. Instead, Caerphilly Council is going to supply breakfast bars for all children, which can be eaten during their early morning break.

## **Water on Desks**

Please be aware that as our water fountain is a communal fountain it will now by necessity be out of use. Pupils are able to bring a ready filled water bottle to school which they can keep on their desks. Please be reminded that Welsh Government Statutory Guidance is for water only at desks, no sweetened or fizzy drinks please.

## **Office Routines and Appointments**

As we are required to minimise movement within our building we are now restricting visitors into school, and restricting access to our Office. I am sure that you will agree that it is important that Mrs Wilmore, our school Clerk is kept safe in our busy office. Therefore, we have made the following changes to our school routines.

- Visitors to school will now only be able to enter the school as far as the outer school lobby.
- Visitors to school will be able to speak to Mrs Wilmore via our round glass communication window.
- We will operate a strict 'one in one out' policy to our outer lobby.

As we are not supplying school meals for the duration, pupils will not need any lunch monies. Additionally we are unable to sell fruit at break times so there will be no need for monies to pass through the Office for the next 3 weeks. Many thanks.

I am sure that you will also understand that presently it is impossible for us to hold 'face to face' appointments with visitors to school. However, should you need to speak to a member of staff we are more than happy to speak to you by telephone. Should you need to speak to staff, please telephone the office and we will get back to you as soon as possible.

## **Keeping Us All Healthy and Following Welsh Government Rules.**

I am sure that you will appreciate that it is important for us all to remain healthy, and therefore it is important that we follow Welsh Government Guidance for Covid 19 at all times. Accordingly, please DO NOT send children to school if they:

- Feel unwell.
- Have any of the three identified COVID 19 symptoms (a new continuous cough, a high temperature, or loss of taste or smell)
- Live in a household with someone who has symptoms of COVID 19 or has tested positive to COVID 19 in the last 14 days.

Please be aware that when assessing pupil and staff health we will always err on the side of caution, and if in any doubt we will always send pupils home. Please be aware that we will need up to date telephone numbers from all parents to ensure that we can quickly and safely send a pupil home should they be symptomatic.

### **Shielding Pupils.**

Pupils who are shielding are not expected to return to school. Please can you inform us if your child has received a shielding letter, or if anyone in your household has received a shielding letter. Many thanks. You can contact us on: [risprimary@caerphilly.gov.uk](mailto:risprimary@caerphilly.gov.uk)

### **Vulnerable Pupils**

If your child falls into one of the vulnerable categories, the Welsh Government guidance advises that “ *If in doubt about whether their health condition means that they should be shielding, staff, parents and carers should take advice from their GP.* ‘ Once again, should you need to contact us to discuss your child’s needs please contact us on the school e-mail address.

### **Pupils Living with a Shielding or Vulnerable Person.**

The guidance from Welsh Government states that ‘*If a learner lives in a household with someone who is vulnerable or extremely vulnerable (shielding), they should only attend a school or setting where they can adhere to social distancing and the learner is able to understand and follow those instructions.*’ Therefore this may not be possible for very young pupils. If it is not possible for your child to attend for these reasons we would continue to support your child with home learning.

### **First Day Back**

I know that our attendance during the last week dropped dramatically, as parents became more and more uncertain as to whether to send their children to school. As a result, when reopening the building we have noticed that some pupils left some items in their trays. We have now ‘bagged up’ any items left in trays as we have cleaned and disinfected all trays in preparation for the return to school. All pupils will keep their learning kit (pen/paper/rubber) in their trays, which will be placed on their desks. If we have any of your children's possessions ‘bagged up’ we will give them to you, on the first morning back. Many thanks.

### **And Finally.....**

I appreciate that this is an extraordinarily long newsletter! And I fully appreciate that it is a lot of information to take in. I can also appreciate that you may be apprehensive about that very first morning with its new routines and protocols.

We will all be getting ready for new routines and I agree that at a glance these may look strict. However, I am sure that you would agree that it is better to start with tight routines, which may be reviewed, rather than start with less rigorous routines which may have poor implications for health. Where necessary when drawing up our routines, we have always erred on the side of caution, and I hope that you will fully support us to ensure that our site is as safe as it could possibly be.

We are currently finishing the risk assessment for our school building and we are awaiting some essential supplies from the local authority before we can complete our repurposing and put photographs of our changes on our website.

Can I take this opportunity to thank you all for your patience and understanding. Staff and I have spoken to some parents over the last few weeks and it is lovely to hear familiar voices and chat to you about preparations for our return to work. I know that I have repeatedly apologised that I have been unable to answer all of your questions, but please be reassured that as soon as we know, we pass the information along to you as soon as possible. We all know that these are unprecedented times. We have no established rule book for this scenario, and therefore often we are waiting for advice and guidance before being able to implement required changes.

I would also take this opportunity to thank all of the staff who have worked tirelessly over the last 12 weeks to set online learning, communicate with parents, appraise pupils work, whilst also volunteering in the community, and running the Hub provision in Risca Comprehensive School. I am extremely proud of the contribution that staff have made to the Hub provision, and know that when they were needed anywhere they would drop everything to support that provision.

We are currently constructing a handbook for the return to school. I hope that that will be with you shortly.

In the meantime, stay safe,

Mrs Arthur and Staff.