

*Please ask for:*

*Direct Line:*

*E-Mail:*

*Our Ref:*

*Your Ref:*

*Date:*

4 December 2020

Dear Parent/Carer

We thank you for the support you have given our schools over the past few months. It has been a challenging time and it will continue to be challenging for a few more months. However, by working together we are confident we will get through this public health crisis. We are particularly grateful to parents and pupils alike who have followed the public and school rules and regulations for keeping safe during the autumn term.

We are aware that there have been discussions in the press concerning the pressures on the education system and suggestions with regard to the last full week of term, which commences on the 14 December 2020. Having considered all the evidence and the scientific advice available, we write to confirm Swansea Council's position that schools will remain open to pupils until Friday 18 December. Nearly all schools and providers in Swansea will utilise 21 December and 22 December as INSET days.

We understand that there are significant pressures on staff in schools and many are dealing with the impact of positive Covid-19 cases on schools. To ensure the wellbeing of our children, young people and our staff, and to ensure that all of us are able to enjoy the school holiday with our families, we all need to continue to act responsibly over the next few critical weeks.

Schools in Swansea have strict procedures in place to protect both learners and staff and have an excellent track record of keeping learners safe and keeping learning going. However, many learners and staff have had to self-isolate for 14 days. Our headteachers in Swansea are finding that running a school at this time is extremely challenging. We have to acknowledge, once again, the dedication of our school leaders and their staff who have persevered during these very difficult times.

Headteachers and other leaders have been on call every day, including weekends for many months. We also have to note that teachers, teaching assistants and other schools staff are exhausted and have not had a real break since September. The motivation of staff who have been responding to Covid-19 for many months is starting to wane, understandably. As one headteacher put it this week "I cannot keep wearing my

cloak of invincibility." School leaders and their staff are tiring as are many other groups of critical workers.

With Covid-19 cases on the rise it is evident that a few groups of pupils have had to self-isolate many times which will have impacted their education. An increasing number of positive staff cases or staff having to self-isolate leading to staffing issues has been a prominent theme this week. As a result, it is increasingly likely that unsafe staffing levels may result in individual schools having to close for health and safety reasons.

The negative impact on school attendance is starting to show. We are aware that schools are now receiving requests to keep children away from school during the last week of term. It is vitally important that pupils attend school when they can, to maintain the continuity of their education. We understand that a few parents have submitted leave of absence requests for their child/ren. As with all requests for term time absence these will be considered on a case by case basis but as attendance at school is compulsory it is likely any absence, other than for sickness or self-isolation, will be unauthorised. There are currently no penalties for non-attendance.

We kindly ask you to work with us to try and ensure that our learners, staff and families do not have to self-isolate over the Christmas school holiday. Fewer cases in the community will mean fewer cases in schools which will reduce the pressures we are currently facing. We ask you politely to ensure that your child/young person limits their contact in your community and respects the advice around washing hands, social distancing and wearing face coverings.

Families eligible for free school meals will receive a payment for the Christmas holidays (that commence on 23 December). Further information will be emailed to eligible parents. For families where direct payments into bank accounts are not possible, a food bag can be ordered from the school for home delivery.

We hope that we can all work together to support our schools and ensure that we can enjoy the school holiday safely. Thank you for all your support.

Regards



Cllr Rob Stewart  
Leader



Cllr Jennifer Raynor  
Cabinet Member for Education Improvement & Skills



Phil Roberts  
Chief Executive

Helen Morgan-Rees  
Interim Director of Education