



## **Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council**

### **Education and Inclusion Service Directorate**

**Coronavirus (COVID-19): FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)  
FOR PARENTS/CARERS ON THE RETURN TO SCHOOL IN  
SEPTEMBER 2020  
VERSION 1 (16.7.20)**

Mae'r ddogfen yma ar gael yn y Gymraeg / This document is available in Welsh.

#### **INTRODUCTION**

This guidance is intended to support parents and carers in relation to the 'back to school' plans for September for Rhondda Cynon Taf schools. The Minister for Education in Wales (Kirsty Williams) confirmed on 9<sup>th</sup> July 2020 that all pupils will be able to return to school in September. The Welsh Technical Advisory Group, which provides scientific and technical advice to Government during emergencies, recommended to the Minister that schools should "plan to open in September with 100% of pupils physically present on school sites, subject to a continuing, steady decline in the presence of COVID-19 in the community". Further information is available at <https://gov.wales/technical-advisory-group-advice-return-school>

These FAQs are informed by Welsh Government guidance:  
<https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2020-07/operational-guidance-for-schools-and-settings-from-the-autumn-term.pdf>

Since 23 March, in line with the scientific advice, nurseries, schools and colleges have remained open to priority groups of children and young people, children of key / essential workers and vulnerable children. Welsh Government have been clear that they would review this arrangement in line with scientific advice and has set out a recovery strategy, while also ensuring that safety remains the absolute priority.

The Minister has announced that from September 2020:

- Schools will return to full capacity, with only limited social distancing within contact groups.
- At full operation, a contact group should consist of around 30 children.
- Some direct or indirect mixing between children in different contact groups will be unavoidable, such as on transport, receiving specialist teaching or due to staffing constraints.
- Social distancing for adults should remain in line with regulations and guidance, where possible
- Schools will be required to minimise the risk of transmission by taking other mitigating measures using a hierarchy of risk controls.
- Every school should continue to be “Covid Protected” - having carried out risk assessments and mitigated them with a combination of controls such as hand and surface hygiene, one-way systems and so forth.
- If early warning information shows a local incident or outbreak then nearby schools should implement appropriate restriction measures.
- Each school will be provided with a supply of home testing kits.

## **GENERAL QUESTIONS**

### **1. Why can more children now return to school?**

Since the decision was made to close schools for statutory provision, our understanding of the virus and its longer-term impacts has continued to develop. We know that we are going to have to live with it for some time and it will remain our biggest challenge for the foreseeable future. Although it is not possible to ensure a totally risk-free environment, research tells us that staff in educational settings tend not to be at any greater risk from the disease than many other occupations. There is also no evidence that children transmit the disease any more than adults.

Taking into account the improved situation we now find ourselves in, the balance of risk is now overwhelmingly in favour of children returning to school. Being out of school is detrimental for children’s short and long term academic development and their health and wellbeing, particularly for disadvantaged children. We know that lower academic achievement also translates into long-term economic costs. We also know that school closures have affected some families’ ability to work. Getting our learners back into school as quickly and as safely as possible will bring positive benefits on a number of fronts not least their mental and emotional wellbeing.

### **2. When can my child return to school?**

Schools will start the next phase on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2020 and schools will be open for the phased return of learners from 3<sup>rd</sup> of September 2020.

The first two weeks of term will be a period of flexibility to allow for planning and reorganisation. It is expected that this will mean that at least 33% of pupils will be present during the first week in September; 50% from Monday 7<sup>th</sup> September; with 100% of pupils returning to school by Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> September.

Schools will inform parents/carers of the return date applicable to their child(ren).

### **3. Will all age groups be returning to school in the autumn term?**

The autumn term will start on 1<sup>st</sup> September and schools will accommodate learners from the 3<sup>rd</sup> of September onwards on a phased basis. Schools who may not require significant planning time may opt to have learners in prior to the 3<sup>rd</sup> September. There will be a period of flexibility in recognition that schools may want to focus on priority year groups. This will also allow time, up to a fortnight, for any planning and reorganisation. Planning and preparation days will take place at the start of term to enable schools and settings to work with their staff on reviewing their risk assessments, processes and associated systems.

Some specific groups of learners may need to be prioritised during the first week of term, such as learning support classes attached to mainstream schools, early years and year 6 in primary schools, and year 7 and examination year groups at secondary level.

From the second week of term schools and settings will look to maximise the number of learners in attendance leading to a full return of all learners by the 10<sup>th</sup> of September.

### **4. How will risks to children, teachers and families be managed?**

Welsh Government have provided guidance and support to schools and childcare settings at <https://gov.wales/protecting-staff-and-under-5-year-olds-coronavirus-childcare> to help them to reduce the risk of transmission as more children and young people return.

To prevent the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19), schools and other settings will use a range of protective measures to create safer environments in which the risk of spreading the virus is substantially reduced. Whilst such changes are likely to look different in each setting, as they will depend upon individual circumstances, they are all designed to minimise risks to children, staff and their families.

Schools and other settings should communicate their plans to parents once they have had a chance to work through them in detail. Approaches we are asking schools and other settings to take include:

- carrying out a risk assessment before opening to more children and young people - the assessment will directly address risks associated with coronavirus

(COVID-19) so that sensible measures can be put in place to minimise those risks for children, young people and staff

- making sure that children and young people do not attend if they or a member of their household has symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19)
- undertaking regular hand washing for 20 seconds with running water and soap or use of sanitiser and ensuring good respiratory hygiene by promoting the 'catch it, bin it, kill it' approach
- use of foot operated / self-closing pedal bins for the disposal of used tissues / sanitiser wipes
- installing signage to remind all children and staff of the need for frequent hand washing
- frequent cleaning of regularly touched surfaces, such as door handles, handrails, tabletops, play equipment and toys
- provision of antibacterial wipes to facilitate regular spot cleaning
- minimising contact through the creation of contact groups
- minimising the number of contacts between learners and staff by avoiding large gatherings such as assemblies
- altering the environment as much as possible, such as changing the layout of classrooms to avoid face to face contact
- signage throughout the building to facilitate and remind of the need for social distancing
- reducing mixing between groups through timetable changes, such as staggered break times, zoning play areas and by introducing staggered drop-off and collection times
- pupils bringing and using their own school equipment
- no unnecessary external visitors to the school and visitors being admitted by appointment only.
- developing protocols around the use of toilets during break and lunch times.
- active engagement with Test Trace Protect; and
- formal consideration of how to reduce contacts and maximise distancing between those in school wherever possible and minimise potential for contamination so far as is reasonably practicable

How contacts are reduced will depend on the school's circumstances and should include:

- grouping learners together;
- avoiding contact between groups as much as possible;
- arranging classrooms with forward facing desks (where possible and appropriate); and
- staff maintaining distance from pupils and other staff as much as possible.

## **5. Is it compulsory for my child to attend school?**

All children and young people and priority groups (such as vulnerable children) will be required to attend during the autumn term, as requested by their school unless they are self-isolating or there are other reasons for absence (such as shielding due to health conditions).

You should notify your child's school as normal if your child is unable to attend so that staff are aware of any sickness absence and can discuss with you.

Parents will not be fined for non-attendance at this time, although this will be reviewed and monitored over the first autumn half-term period.

6. **Should I keep my child at home if they have an underlying health condition, or live with someone in a clinically vulnerable group, or if I am anxious about my child returning to school?**

Any parent who has medical concerns about their child should seek and follow medical advice provided by Public Health Wales or their local GP in respect of accessing school during the current pandemic.

***'Extremely vulnerable' or shielding learners***

Where a learner is unable to attend school due to underlying health issues and is shielding, the schools will continue to provide support and resources in order for learning to take place. This may be through a variety of means, such as work packs and digitally sourced work through Hwb, etc.

This position will be further considered in the light of the most current advice around shielding. It is anticipated that updated guidance on shielding will be published by Welsh Government shortly.

***Clinically vulnerable learners at 'increased risk'***

In the context of COVID-19, individuals at 'increased risk' are at a greater risk of severe illness from COVID-19. This category includes children and young people who have a range of chronic health conditions. Young people who are pregnant should stay away from school after 28 weeks' gestation.

If clinically vulnerable learners do attend school, extra care must be taken to ensure these individuals, and those around them adhere to strict social distancing guidelines. Such attendance must be with the full consent of parents/carers and their full agreement with an individual risk assessment and associated control measures.

***Living with a person who is either shielding or at increased risk***

If a learner lives in a household with someone who is at increased risk or is "shielding", they should only attend a school or setting where they are strictly able to adhere to the social/physical distancing measures and the learner is able to understand and follow those instructions. This may not be possible for very young learners, and older learners without the capacity to adhere to the instructions on social and physical distancing. In those instances, it is not expected that learners attend school and they will be supported to learn at home.

This position should however be considered in the light of the most current advice around shielding. It is anticipated that updated guidance on shielding will be published by Welsh Government shortly.

### ***Parents/carers and learners who are anxious about return to school and settings***

All other learners must attend school. Schools are aware that some pupils, parents/carers may be reluctant or anxious about returning and schools will have support in place to address this. This may include learners who have themselves been shielding previously but have been advised that this is no longer necessary, those living in households where someone is clinically vulnerable, or those concerned about the comparatively increased risk from coronavirus (COVID-19), including those from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds or who have certain conditions such as obesity and diabetes.

Parents/carers of learners with significant risk factors who are concerned can discuss such concerns with the school and the school will explain the measures they are putting in place to reduce the risk and provide the required reassurance. Pupils of compulsory school age must attend school from 14<sup>th</sup> September unless a statutory reason applies (for example, the pupil has been granted a leave of absence, is unable to attend because of sickness, is absent for a necessary religious observance, etc.).

## **7. Will education be provided as normal to children and young people who are attending?**

Education settings still have the flexibility to provide support and education to children and young people attending school in the way they see fit during this time. Full curriculum access and delivery is expected.

Schools continue to be best placed to make decisions about how to support and educate their pupils during this period. This will include:

- consideration of pupils' mental health and wellbeing
- assessment of where pupils are in their learning in order to inform any targeted programmes and compensatory learning, if required
- delivery of broad, balanced and appropriately differentiated national curriculum
- provision for pupils with Statements of Special Educational Needs

Schools will contact parents/carers regarding the start of the autumn term.

Schools will use their best endeavours to support pupils attending as well as those remaining at home, making use of the available remote education support.

## **SCHOOL BUILDINGS**

### **8. What measures have been taken to ensure safety on the school site?**

Minimising contacts and mixing between people reduces transmission risk. Hence, schools will endeavour to keep groups separate and maintain distance between individuals where possible.

It is likely that for younger learners the emphasis will be on separating groups and keeping children in their contact groups throughout the school day; and for older learners (for example, in secondary schools where pupils need to access a broad curriculum) the emphasis will be on some distancing.

Adults are to maintain a 2 metre distance from each other, and from pupils (whenever possible). This will not always be possible, particularly when working with younger learners, learners who have complex needs or who need close contact care; however, adults maintaining distance when circumstances allow, even if only for some of the time, will help.

All schools are have installed signage to facilitate social distancing and remind all staff and learners of the need to maintain social distancing.

One-way systems will be in operation (where possible) and floor / wall markings will be used to identify one-way routes.

Timetables will try to ensure that movement around the site is kept to a minimum and congested corridors are not created.

Classrooms are being rearranged so that space is optimised; surplus furniture removed and the layouts ensure face to face contact can be avoided where possible.

Schools will avoid large gatherings such as assemblies with more than one group.

School start / end times and lunch and break periods may be staggered.

Where possible, separate toilets will be allocated to different contact groups. Toilets will be regularly cleaned throughout the day.

Hand sanitiser and hand soap will be readily available with regular reminders of the importance of good hand hygiene.

Schools will have a good supply of foot operated pedal bins for the safe disposal of tissues and wipes – the 'catch it, bin it, kill it' approach will be promoted and will be part of each school's culture.

Windows will be opened (where possible and safe to do so) to improve natural ventilation.

All schools will have updated risk assessments in place ensuring the safety of their settings - the assessment will directly address risks associated with coronavirus (COVID-19) so that sensible measures can be put in place to minimise those risks for children, young people and staff.

**9. Will there be regular hand-washing facilities for staff and pupils?**

Pupils and staff will be encouraged to wash or sanitise their hands upon arrival at school / when leaving school and regularly throughout the day, especially before and after handling food, when using the toilet facilities and when someone has sneezed or coughed. Foot operated pedal bins with self-closing lids will be available for the disposal of used tissues and sanitiser wipes.

These routines will be built into the school's culture, along with behaviour expectations. Younger learners and those with complex needs will be further assisted to help them get this right.

Signage will be in place throughout school buildings identifying hand sanitiser locations and each sink area will have signage reminding all of the need for frequent hand washing. Plentiful supplies of hand soap and hand sanitiser will be available throughout all school buildings.

**10. How often will schools be cleaned?**

Daily cleaning frequencies / durations are being greatly increased at every school. Cleaners have received instructions regarding enhanced cleaning requirements and the identification of surfaces, which require additional / more frequent cleaning, such as door handles, tabletops, handrails, play equipment, toys etc.

Resources that are shared between contact groups, such as sports, art and science equipment will be frequently and thoroughly cleaned, especially where it is necessary for them to be used by more than one contact group.

Antibacterial wipes will be readily available to facilitate regular spot cleaning.

**11. What if a parent wants to enter the school building to speak to a teacher?**

No parents will be permitted within any school building unless they have re-arranged visit. Should teacher / parent contact be required, this should be by appointment and arrangements for audio and / or video communication explored as an alternative.

External visitors to the school will be admitted by pre-arranged appointment only.



12. **School buildings were out of use for several months and will be out of use again over the summer period – have they been maintained?**

Routine maintenance has been undertaken on school buildings throughout the period that schools have been closed and during the period that they re-opened at the end of the summer term. Caretakers have been and will continue to be on many sites throughout the closure periods and statutory testing has been and will continue to be kept up to date.

## **THE SCHOOL DAY**

13. **What will the class sizes be?**

In secondary schools, particularly in the older age groups at Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5, the contact groups are likely to need to be the size of a year group to enable schools to deliver the full range of curriculum subjects and for students to receive specialist teaching. If this can be achieved with small groups, they are recommended.

At primary school, and in the younger years at secondary (Key Stage 3), schools may be able to implement smaller groups the size of a full class. Where this proves to be challenging in Key Stage 3, larger sized contact groups of half-year or full year size will be necessary. Where class sized groups can be achieved, it is recommended, as this will help to reduce the number of people who could be asked to isolate should someone in a group become ill with COVID-19.

Whatever the size of the group, they should be kept apart from other groups where possible and older learners should be encouraged to keep their distance within groups.

14. **What will the arrangements be for pupils using the toilet?**

Hand sanitiser and hand soap will be in plentiful supply and where possible schools will provide separate toilets for different contact groups.

Where it is not possible to provide separate toilets for different contact groups, the plentiful supply of hand sanitiser and hand soap and encouragement of good hand hygiene practices before and after entering the toilet area, will help. Toilets will also be cleaned frequently throughout the day.

15. **Will my child be with the same group at all times?**

Consistent groups help reduce the risk of transmission by limiting the number of pupils and staff in contact with each other to only those within the group. It is accepted that pupils and especially the youngest pupils, cannot socially distance

from staff or from each other and consistent groups provide an additional protective measure. Maintaining distinct contact groups that do not mix makes it quicker and easier, in the event of a positive case, to identify those who may need to self-isolate and to keep that number as low as possible.

**16. Can my child bring in their own hand sanitiser, and wear PPE?**

All schools will have hand sanitiser throughout the building and this will be fully available for the use of all pupils and staff.

Under normal circumstances, PPE is not advised or required unless risk assessments suggest that it is required. However, should a child wish to wear PPE to school, then they are able to, but, please bear in mind the advice that face coverings should not be worn by those who may not be able to handle them as directed (for example, young children, or those with special educational needs or disabilities) as it may inadvertently increase the risk of transmission.

Face coverings are not a replacement for far more effective measures such as social distancing and hand hygiene.

**17. Will my child have their temperature taken on arrival at school?**

All schools have been provided with temperature checking devices (infrared forehead thermometers). This is being managed at a local level at each school, although it is not a mandatory requirement to screen for a temperature.

**18. Can my child bring a pencil case/rucksack to school?**

Children can bring a pencil case / rucksack to school as required. This should be solely for their personal use and equipment / stationery must not be shared. However, please note that fabric pencil cases can be difficult to clean. It is recommended that learners limit the amount of equipment they bring into school each day, to essential items only. Transfer of items to and from the home should be minimised where possible.

**19. How will break / lunch times be managed and monitored?**

Pupils will eat lunch in identified dining areas in their contact groups. Dining may also be undertaken outdoors (weather permitting) again, with pupils remaining in their contact groups wherever possible.

Break times and lunch times will be staggered so that the numbers of children at break / lunch at the same time will be the lowest number possible.

20. **How can social distancing be maintained in relation to pupils with Additional Learning Needs or pupils who require physical assistance?**

In circumstances where social distancing is difficult (such as attending to the needs of a pupil with additional learning needs or physical needs), additional PPE will be provided for staff if a risk assessment deems that this is appropriate. The Local Authority has provided all schools with supplies of PPE.

Schools have also been provided with mobile screens enabling them to provide 1:1 educational / pastoral / emotional support to pupils who require it without the need to wear PPE.

21. **How can the Foundation Phase be delivered safely?**

Foundation Phase pupils will still have the opportunity to learn through play. Additional use will be made of available outdoor areas and classroom spaces can be zoned to create safe areas for writing activities; creative activities; building activities; play activities etc. Sand and water pits will not be in use and soft furnishings and dressing up outfits will not be available. However, Early Years staff have vast experience of creative and engaging ways of working with young children. Resources used will be easily cleanable and cleaned frequently.

22. **What work will be provided to pupils if there is a local lockdown?**

Every school will also need to plan for the possibility of a further local lockdown and a blended learning style of learning will be used to ensure all pupils continue to engage in educational activities even if their school is not open.

Distance learning activities will continue to be provided for those children who are unable to attend school due to health / shielding circumstances.

23. **How will school pick up and drop off be managed?**

School start and end times will be staggered.

Parents /carers dropping off children must maintain a 2 metre distance from other families wherever possible. Markers will be in place on the ground to help parents / carers queue and remain 2 metres apart. Parents / carers will not be permitted to enter the school building and must leave the school site immediately and not congregate.

Afternoon pick up arrangements will vary depending on the school site layout. Schools will make appropriate arrangements to ensure 2 metre social distancing is maintained wherever possible. Parents / carers / pupils must leave the school site immediately and not congregate.

## **CATERING**

### **24. Will breakfast clubs and after school clubs run?**

In line with Welsh Government guidance, consideration will be given to the recommencement of breakfast clubs and after school provision following the phased return of all learners to school over a two week period in September. A staged approach to the re-introduction will be adopted following a review of the capacity of schools to meet demand whilst maintaining discrete contact groups and safe social distancing, where possible.

There will be no breakfast clubs or after school club provision for the first two weeks of term. Provision will be reviewed during this period with a view to capping numbers for priority groups in future. Children eligible for free school meals and vulnerable children will be given the highest priority. Portable breakfast provision will be made available for pupils entitled to free school meals only during this period.

### **25. What will the arrangements be for lunch time?**

Kitchens will be fully open from the start of the autumn term and food will be available to all pupils who want it, including for those eligible for free school meals. Pupils will eat lunch in identified dining areas in their contact groups, with surfaces used for dining being cleaned between groups / uses. Dining may also be undertaken outdoors (weather permitting), again, with pupils remaining in their contact groups wherever possible. It might be required in a small number of cases for learners to have their lunch in their classroom to enhance social distancing.

### **26. Will older students be able to leave school to have lunch in the community?**

No children will be permitted to leave the school site during the school day.

### **27. Will Free School Meals continue?**

BACS payments will be made to parents/carers of pupils entitled to free school meals until 31<sup>st</sup> August. Free school meals will be provided in school from the autumn term.

### **28. Will water be available during the day?**

All pupils should bring filled water bottles to school that can be refilled during the day. The refilling of water bottles will be managed and supervised by the school to ensure that the safe refilling of water bottles is available to pupils who need/or request it.

## **UNIFORM**

### **29. Will school uniform have to be worn, and how often must clothes be washed?**

A return to usual uniform policies is likely in the autumn term. This is a local decision made by the governing body of each school. Individual schools will inform parents and pupils of the expectations for wearing school uniform.

Daily washing of clothes worn to a school setting is strongly recommended to ensure that risks are mitigated.

### **30. Will I need to send in outdoor learning clothing/gym clothes?**

Your child's school will advise as this will be dependent on the learning activities planned. Outdoor learning will be encouraged.

## **ILLNESSES AND POSITIVE TESTS FOR COVID-19**

### **31. What happens if there is a suspected or confirmed case of coronavirus (COVID-19) in my child's school or childcare setting?**

If a child, young person or staff member develops symptoms compatible with coronavirus (COVID-19), they will be sent home and advised to self-isolate for 7 days. Their fellow household members should self-isolate for 14 days unless a subsequent test proves negative.

All staff and students will have access to a test if they display symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19).

Where a child, young person or staff member displays symptoms the school setting will engage with the Test, Trace and Protect strategy. See the link for further details.

<https://gov.wales/guidance-testing-and-contact-tracing-education-settings>

Where the child, young person or staff member tests positive, the rest of their class/group within their childcare or education setting may be sent home and advised to self-isolate for 14 days.

Depending on the outcome of further testing, the rest of the class/group may be sent home and advised to self-isolate for 14 days. The other household members of that wider class/group do not need to self-isolate unless the child, young person or staff member they live with in that group subsequently develops symptoms.

Where settings are observing guidance on infection prevention and control, which will reduce risk of transmission, closure of the whole setting will not generally be necessary.

### **32. When should I not send my child to school? For example, if they have a fever?**

Under no circumstances should learners or staff attend schools/setting 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) or they have tested positive for COVID-19 in the past 14 days;
- live in a household with someone who has symptoms of COVID-19; or
- has tested positive for COVID-19 in the past 14 days.

## **TRANSPORT**

### **33. Will school transport be provided when the schools re-open in September?**

The Council is working to resume its dedicated school transport services, although the available seating capacity may continue to be limited by the latest guidance on social distancing.

We are encouraging parents and carers to take children to school by walking or cycling, or alternatively by private car, rather than using dedicated school transport. We understand that this will not be possible for some people.

Where seating capacity is limited because of social distancing, priority will be given to those who are entitled to free school transport in accordance with the Council's policy, and who live the furthest away or would otherwise be unable to attend without it. Further information will be provided if prioritisation is necessary.

### **34. Will my child's usual school transport route be running?**

We are awaiting further guidance on school transport arrangements from the Welsh Government. In the meantime, we are working with schools and other educational settings to provide the same mainstream transport routes.

Your child's transport may look different when they return to school. Some changes may include travelling with different pupils, transport staff wearing PPE including masks or visors. We understand that the changes to the school journey may be unsettling to some children and young people. Please explain these changes to your child in advance to help them prepare.

For those pupils already in receipt of free school transport or for whom new arrangements have been put in place for September, the mainstream school transport routes will continue to operate as they did before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Details of the timetable, including the school bus operator for your child's journey to school, along with additional information relating to the Mainstream School Transport Service can also be found at:

<https://www.rctcbc.gov.uk/EN/Resident/ParkingRoadsandTravel/Travel/SchoolandCollegeTransport/Schoolbusroutes.aspx> (*Timetables are subject to change and will be updated in August*).

**If transport was not already provided or you have not received confirmation that your child has been allocated a free seat on school transport, you must make your own way into school.**

### **35. My child has additional learning needs. What transport arrangements will be in place to Learning Support Classes, Pupil Referral Units and Special Schools?**

We are awaiting further guidance on school transport arrangements from the Welsh Government. In the meantime, we are working to provide the same transport routes into Learning Support Classes, Pupil Referral Units and Special Schools, although the available seating capacity may continue to be limited.

We are encouraging parents and carers to take children to school by walking or cycling, or alternatively by mobility car or private car, rather than using dedicated school transport. We understand that this will not be possible for some people.

We understand that families may be anxious about home to school transport arrangements during the coronavirus pandemic. We will do our best to provide support and keep things as consistent as possible by trying to use the same contractor, driver and passenger assistant but we may need to provide larger vehicles to enable social distancing.

Your child's transport may look different when they return to school. Some changes may include travelling with other pupils, alternative routes with different journey times, and transport staff wearing PPE including masks or visors. We understand that the changes to the school journey may be unsettling to some children and young people. Please explain these changes to your child in advance to help them prepare.

### **36. My child is not entitled to free school transport, can I pay for a seat?**

Unfortunately the Council has had to suspend this discretionary service for the foreseeable future due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures that need to be in place to mitigate social distancing on transport. With limited availability on public transport, the Welsh Government are encouraging parents and carers to take their children to school by walking, cycling, scooting or car. The situation remains under review. Please do not contact the Council. If and when restrictions are relaxed you will be contacted accordingly.

### **37. What will school transport look like when schools return in the autumn term?**

The Welsh Government has issued guidance for the reopening of schools in September and the Council will be working to those guidelines going forward.

<https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2020-07/operational-guidance-for-schools-and-settings-from-the-autumn-term.pdf>

We are awaiting further guidance on school transport arrangements from the Welsh Government.

It is important for parents/carers and children to practice social distancing wherever possible. Passenger assistants will only be provided for primary and additional learning needs transport. Their role will be to ensure the safety of passengers and ensure that they are sitting in the correct location. Children should be shown how to secure their seat belts, ensuring that personal contact is kept to an absolute minimum.

### **38. What precautions must my child take when travelling?**

We ask that parents and carers help communicate to pupils the importance of following good hygiene and social distancing, as this will play a key role in keeping everyone safe.

This means taking the following precautions:

- **do not travel** if you are experiencing any COVID19 symptoms, self-isolating as a result of COVID-19 symptoms, sharing a household with somebody with symptoms or clinically extremely vulnerable,
- consider if using school transport is absolutely necessary,
- wash your hands for at least 20 seconds or sanitise your hands before leaving the house,
- keep a social distance from people outside of your own household throughout the journey to school, including at the bus stop and on the vehicle,
- avoid physical contact with others,
- windows will be open for ventilation,
- face away from other people when using school transport,
- minimise the number of surfaces you touch, and in particular avoid touching surfaces such as handrails and window ledges,
- do not touch your face,
- keep the time spent near others as short as possible when using school transport,
- do not eat or drink whilst using transport,
- wash your hands for at least 20 seconds or sanitise your hands before leaving school.

**Please note that a refusal to comply with health and safety requirements, good hygiene and social distancing could jeopardise your child's place on school**



**transport. Your support in reinforcing this message with your child would be greatly appreciated.**

### **39. What will the arrangements for social distancing be on school transport?**

Social distancing applies to children as well as adults in order to help minimise the risk of transmission of the virus. Pupils should maintain social distancing from others who are not in their household. If this is not possible they should avoid physical contact and face away from others. A face covering will be required on public transport from 27 July 2020, and it is possible that this will become a requirement on school transport for some pupils, where it is difficult to maintain social distancing.

While parents / carers may feel apprehensive about the risks in using school transport during the COVID-19 pandemic, they should decide whether to do so, or, if they prefer, they should make their own arrangements to transport their child to and from school.

We are awaiting further guidance on school transport arrangements from the Welsh Government. Seating arrangements will be carefully considered in line with this guidance. All appropriate actions will be taken to reduce and mitigate risk on the basis that:

- the overall risk to children and young people from COVID-19 is low,
- school transport carries the same group of pupils on a regular basis, and those pupils may also be together in school,
- pupils will sit together in year groups where possible,
- siblings can sit together,
- there will be no face to face seating,
- there will be no contact between pupils and other passengers
- windows and roof vents will be kept open,
- contact will be minimised with individuals who are unwell,
- all passengers, including the drivers and passenger assistants should wash their hands or use hand sanitiser before boarding transport and when arriving at school or home,
- if there is a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19, then it will be easy to identify who was travelling on which vehicle, helping to test, track and trace,
- there will be a rigorous cleaning and sanitising regime between before / after each journey.

### **40. How will your child know where to sit?**

When boarding the bus on the way to school, pupils must sit in their year groups or with siblings where possible, following the instructions of the driver (or passenger assistant if there is one on the vehicle), taking the rear most available seat and the child or young person nearest the entrance must leave first.

When boarding the bus on the way home from school, following the instructions from the driver (or passenger assistant if there is one on the vehicle). Pupils must sit in their year groups or with siblings where possible, with those living the furthest away from school taking up the rear most available seat so that the child or young person nearest the entrance can leave first.

#### **41. How will you ensure that services are not overcrowded?**

Only named passengers that have prior approval to travel, or those with secondary school bus passes for the route, will be allowed to use transport. Drivers will have lists of pupils that will be allocated to their vehicle each day. No pass, no travel will be strictly enforced on secondary school vehicles, and those not eligible to travel will be turned away from the vehicle.

#### **42. Will transport suppliers be following health and safety guidance?**

We are asking transport suppliers to follow the Welsh Government Guidance <https://gov.wales/restarting-public-transport-guidance-operators>. This guidance includes actions such as regular sanitising, the thorough cleaning of vehicles and the use of PPE.

#### **43. What will happen with school transport for the new school year in September 2020 when new guidance is issued?**

The COVID-19 pandemic has meant that we needed to make some extensive changes to our school transport arrangements in order to accommodate social distancing, when schools re-opened on 29 June 2020 to check in, catch up and prepare for September. In the light of subsequent Welsh Government guidance, we will need to consider what changes or different arrangements might need to happen from the start of the new academic year and should any changes be needed from that point, we will contact parents and carers directly as soon as possible.

#### **44. Will my child be expected to wear a face covering?**

Clear evidence remains that the most effective way to protect your child and others from infection is to follow social distancing rules, avoid touching surfaces and your face, and wash your hands regularly. The wearing of face coverings must not be used as an alternative to any of these other precautions.

Younger children and those with special needs or who rely on lip reading to communicate may not be able to safely wear a face covering. Secondary age children may wish to make use of a face covering, especially where vehicles are full or where pupils cannot sit together in their year groups, but they are not a substitute for good hygiene and social distancing.

At the daily Welsh Government coronavirus briefing on the 13 July 2020, the First Minister announced that in order to help reduce the risk of transmission whilst using buses, trains and taxis, where it is not always possible to maintain a two metre physical distance while travelling, it will become mandatory for people to wear a three-layer face covering from the 27 July 2020.

New guidance in relation to public transport is being issued shortly and this is likely to have an impact on school transport.

## **EMERGENCY CHILDCARE PROVISION**

### **45. Will emergency childcare provision for key / essential workers and particularly vulnerable learners be available?**

There will be no emergency childcare provision in the autumn term. All pupils will return to their usual school setting over the period 3<sup>rd</sup> September to 10<sup>th</sup> September.