



**RHONDDA CYNON TAF**

To: Parents/Carers

**Gofynnwch Am:**

**Please Ask For:**

**Rhif Est:**

**Telephone N<sup>o</sup>:**

**Ffacs:**

**Fax:**

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**Cylchlythyr:**

**Circular:**

Gaynor Davies

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Fy nghyf: GD/TM  
My Ref:

Eich Cyf: Your Ref:

Dyddiad: 15<sup>th</sup> July 2020  
Date:

Dear Parents/Carers,

I'm writing to inform you of the latest updated position about the 'back to school' plans for September for Rhondda Cynon Taf schools. The Minister for Education in Wales (Kirsty Williams) confirmed on the 9th of 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, last week recommended to the Minister that schools "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."

The Minister also announced that:

- 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 also 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.
- Schools will be required to minimise the risk of transmission by taking other mitigating measures using the 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.

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#### Gaynor Davies

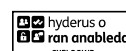
Cyfarwyddwr Addysg a Gwasanaethau Cynhwysiant | Director of Education and Inclusion Services

#### Dewiswch iaith a diwyg eich dogfen | Available in alternative formats and languages

Croesawn ohebu yn Gymraeg a fydd gohebu yn y Gymraeg ddim yn arwain at oedi. Rhwch wybod inni beth yw'ch dewis iaith e.e Cymraeg neu'n ddwyieithog.  
We welcome correspondence in Welsh and corresponding with us in Welsh will not lead to a delay. Let us know your language choice if Welsh or bilingual.



**MAE EICH DATA O BWYS** [www.rctcbc.gov.uk/diogeludata](http://www.rctcbc.gov.uk/diogeludata)  
**YOUR DATA MATTERS** [www.rctcbc.gov.uk/dataprotection](http://www.rctcbc.gov.uk/dataprotection)



The Minister confirmed that the autumn term will start on the 1<sup>st</sup> of September 2020. Our learners will return to school from the 3<sup>rd</sup> of September following a period of school preparation and planning for assessing risk and putting in place control measures, and processes and procedures for keeping learners and staff safe once everyone returns to school. From the 3<sup>rd</sup> of September 2020, learners will undergo a phased return to school over a period of a week with all learners in Rhondda Cynon Taf accessing school by the 10<sup>th</sup> of September 2020.

There will be a period of flexibility in recognition that schools may want to focus on priority year groups, such as those attending learning support classes attached to mainstream schools. At primary level, priority groups may also include learners in the early years or year 6; and at secondary level, learners who are new to secondary school or are due to sit examinations next summer. For further guidance please refer to: <https://gov.wales/operational-guidance-schools-and-settings-autumn-term-covid-19>

Thankfully, we have seen a significant fall in COVID-19 cases locally and nationally and your actions have made a big contribution to this. We know that some families and children have found lockdown very difficult to cope with. Some will have been personally affected by loss and grief, others will have encountered financial challenges and we have all experienced change and uncertainty. In this next phase, schools can open to deliver maximum learning with minimal disruption for our young people. There will be some challenges to re-opening all schools for all learners across the County, particularly as each school has its own context. However, school leaders and the local authority are working together to establish the best approach that is right for each context and we are delighted to be welcoming all learners back to our schools across the County Borough. The many happy and smiling faces that have been so evident in our schools in recent weeks is testimony to the enjoyment that so many have felt being back amongst friends and school staff, and learning in their community schools.

We know you will feel uncertain and will have many questions about your child's individual circumstances. A frequently asked questions link will shortly be posted on the Council website and will hopefully answer all potential queries that you may have. This will be available at [www.rctcbc.gov.uk/schoolreturnfaqs](http://www.rctcbc.gov.uk/schoolreturnfaqs) on Thursday, 16<sup>th</sup> of July.

Pupils who are in receipt of a shielding letter due to their medical vulnerability or who live in a household with someone who is in receipt of a shielding letter should not, based on the current medical advice return to school. However, this 'shielding category' is due for a review in mid-August 2020 so could change. If that is the case then further guidance will be shared with all parents and carers. Until that position is clarified, these children are likely to continue to access digital learning opportunities and remote school support.

School leadership teams will be carrying out risk assessments to help them identify the approach that is right in your child's school. Each school will implement plans which may vary across the local authority, with different year groups being prioritised for a return to school. Each school will be in touch with parents and carers to share this information prior to the summer break.

Schools will work very differently, at least for the first half term. Classes and year groups will be placed into contact groups and social contact across groups minimised. Schools will implement regular hand washing/use of sanitiser and social distancing routines, with staggered break/lunch times and start/finish times. We will be working closely with schools and governors to try to ensure consistency in terms of principles and approaches across the County Borough.

Further details are awaited in relation to school transport and Welsh Government guidance is due to be issued. We ask that parents and carers help communicate to pupils the importance of following social distancing, effective hygiene and respiratory controls as this will play a key role in keeping everyone safe.

Rhondda Cynon Taf Council continues to work closely with all our schools who have done a fantastic job in delivering childcare throughout the term, including holiday periods and weekends, under very difficult conditions. They have also provided digital learning, wellbeing support and a phased return to school during the last 3 weeks which we hope has made a difference during the pandemic. I would like to extend my thanks to you too for the invaluable home learning opportunities that you have provided during these challenging few months and for making a positive difference. This is hugely appreciated.

If your child is expecting summer examination results there will be an opportunity for these to be picked up from the school on the designated date, with some significant changes to procedures. This experience will be very different this academic year and schools will be required to allow small groups of learners only into the school building to collect their results at set times, so as to manage the flow of learners and maintain social distancing. Learners will also not be allowed to congregate in large groups outside the school due to the potential risks this is likely to pose. It is recognised that this will be difficult due to the obvious emotions associated with the day but this is an essential requirement to keep everyone safe. Schools will provide follow up opportunities for learners and their families if they require support and guidance. To assist families with any queries that they may have about the examination changes, a frequently asked questions document been prepared for information. This can be accessed by visiting [www.rctcbc.gov.uk](http://www.rctcbc.gov.uk) and clicking on the 'Latest Schools Information' section on the home page.

Your child's headteacher will inform you shortly of the imminent plans for the autumn term and/or examination results day arrangements if applicable. During the school closure period, if there are updates from the Education Directorate these will be provided via the Council website. In the meantime, I hope you have a lovely summer.

Thank you in anticipation of your continued support.

Yours sincerely,



**Director of Education and Inclusion Services**