



To: Headteachers - all schools and settings

25 January 2022

Dear Headteacher

I am writing to you in advance of this afternoon's Welsh Government press conference during which the Minister for Education and Welsh Language will provide a series of updates which I would like to bring to your attention.

School operations

As the First Minister announced on Friday, we will complete the move to Alert Level Zero this Friday, 28 January. We will achieve this move through a cautious, phased and planned approach.

Schools should plan to move back to using our Local Infection Control Decision Framework at the start of the next half term (i.e. 28 February) to determine the mitigations they need to put in place based on their local circumstances and on the basis that we will be at Alert Level Zero. Face coverings will remain in schools for the time being, just as they are required in most public places, at Alert Level Zero.

Schools need time to put in place these plans and to communicate with parents and learners which is why we are signalling this now. We want to minimise disruption to learners and that includes removing mitigations when it is safe to do so. The Minister for Education and Welsh Language will confirm the arrangements for schools by 11 February at the latest. However, until that point schools should continue to keep in place their current mitigations.

As part of their suite of mitigations, some schools will have made changes to their session times. The Minister has indicated that he plans to issue a further notice disapplying the school session regulations enabling schools to continue to operate on this basis until the end of this half term.

Ventilation

As we move towards Alert Level Zero, I want to reemphasise the importance of maintaining good levels of ventilation in classrooms. Replacing internal classroom air with fresh air from outside remains a key requirement in the control of Covid-19, as well as other viruses such as colds and flu. Teachers and learners have worked incredibly hard in maintaining good

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

ventilation through the winter; I know it has not been easy. With restrictions slowly being lifted, and as we move ever closer to spring, I ask that you continue the excellent work in maintaining good ventilation of classrooms.

Qualifications

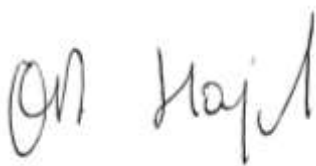
We know it has been an extremely uncertain time, but we want learners to be clear; Qualifications Wales has confirmed it is planning to hold exams in the summer and learners should be working towards preparing for these exams, supported by schools. The intention to adjust grade boundaries to reflect disruption has already been set out. Adaptions have been made to reflect the disruption learners have faced as well as prior notification of areas of examination, and the Minister for Education and Welsh Language has been clear that exams are the fairest way to assess all learners and being held towards the end of the year they maximise teaching and learning time available, as such it is his intention that they will go ahead. We know alternative assessment arrangements such as Centre Determined Grades can introduce new inequities and inequalities for learners – including those progressing to higher education alongside peers across the UK – we also know that they place heavy demands on an already stretched workforce.

We recognise the disruption faced, and that this has been variable across Wales – to help address this we have provided £24m to schools and local authorities and partners to support exam cohorts this year. Attached is a summary of the support available and relevant weblinks which schools can share with their learners directly. Specifically, we encourage all schools to talk to their exam learners about which routes and options suit them best, and what support they need to achieve that. Our priority must be to help individual learners make the right choice for them given their personal circumstances and that may include making different decisions about their exams than previously. As the exam entry deadline is 21 February, we consider these conversations a high priority for schools. It is worth reiterating here that the Minister for Education and Welsh Language confirmed in June 2021 that qualification awards data will not be used to report on attainment outcomes at a school, local authority or regional consortium level in this academic year.

Finally it is important that all of our learners, whether they are in school or educated elsewhere have the opportunity to take their qualifications so they can progress to their next steps. So we would encourage you wherever possible to accept the entry of private candidates who wish to register with you for their qualifications.

As we move forward through this new term, I'd like to thank you and your teams for your continued efforts to maximise learning and minimise disruption. Diolch.

Yours sincerely,



Owain Lloyd
Director, Education and Welsh Language