

COUNCIL: 25 NOVEMBER 2021

EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT & SKILLS STATEMENT

Covid-19 Update for Schools

Positive case numbers of both pupils and staff have been increasing since the start of the autumn term. However, due to changes in the guidance, schools have seen fewer pupils having to isolate than in the previous academic year. With the increased cases, continuity of learning is still a factor and overall attendance rates in schools have been lower at this time of year than in a normal year.

To reflect the increasing numbers of cases, all Cardiff schools have been moved to a risk level of high. In line with this, all schools have consistently applied the twice-weekly use of Lateral Flow Device testing to identify asymptomatic positive cases. The use of face coverings for all staff and visitors, and secondary age pupils, has also been in place across schools where social distancing is difficult to achieve. All schools continue to communicate messages to parents regarding staying at home where symptoms are seen as well as reinforcing hygiene messages in school.

With schools at a high risk level, the Council tracks positive cases in each school and offers additional Health & Safety support where localised case numbers rise or where they reach more than ten cases in an individual setting. This allows localised decisions on additional mitigations for each setting to be made.

Whilst we are not seeing the large numbers of pupils having to isolate as previously, there is still significant pressure on the school system, particularly around staff sustainability. With increasing staff absence, linked to several issues including Covid-19, and the lack of supply staff to backfill absences, some schools can get to a stage where a class or year group may have to receive distance learning over a specified time in response. Where this happens, schools liaise with the Council to ensure that appropriate risk assessments have been undertaken and communication with all partners has taken place.

Schools are updated of any guidance changes, as well as wider issues, through a weekly newsletter that is sent to head teachers. A member briefing to provide an update on the Covid-19 position in Cardiff schools was also held on 15 November 2021.

Qualifications Arrangements 2021/22

Last month, Qualifications Wales provided an update on the arrangements for exams and assessments in 2021/22:

Winter Series 2021/22 – GCSEs

As confirmed in May and July 2021, the November 2021 series for GCSEs in English Language, Mathematics, Mathematics-Numeracy and Welsh Language will go ahead using the adapted assessment requirements put in place by the WJEC. The adaptations will also apply to GCSE units available in January 2022 (English Literature and Welsh Literature) and to Skills Challenge Certificate components submitted in January 2022.

Summer 2022 – GCSEs, AS and A Levels

As previously announced, in summer 2022, GCSEs, AS and A level qualifications will be assessed via exams and, where applicable, non-examination assessment (NEA). In recognition of the disruption to teaching and learning for learners sitting GCSEs, AS and A levels and the Skills Challenge Certificate Qualifications in summer 2022, the assessment requirements have been adapted. These adaptations have been put in place for summer 2022 to support learners and make the exams fairer for them. The WJEC has published adaptations booklets, which can be accessed via their website.

If the disruption continues to have a significant impact on schools and colleges, appropriate steps will be taken as further adaptations may need to be made. If despite these steps, the exam series must be cancelled, then a contingency approach will be applied. This contingency will be based on the Centre Determined Grade approach from summer 2021, where centres will again be asked to award learners' grades based on evidence of attainment across the qualification. Some aspects of the approach will be improved, including measures to avoid over-assessment and reducing the reliance upon whole past papers where learners have had access to known mark schemes. A contingency approach will also be adopted for vocational qualifications.

Grading GCSEs, AS and A levels in summer 2022 and beyond

With the return to exams, the WJEC will award grades to learners in summer 2022. The WJEC wants the grading process to be as fair as possible to learners and reflect the disruption to teaching and learning that they have experienced. For summer 2022, the WJEC has decided to align the approach to one being taken in England to ensure that learners in Wales are not disadvantaged relative to other learners. The approach is to treat 2022 as a transition year to reflect the pandemic recovery period and disruption to learners' education. As in summer 2021, the WJEC acknowledges that it is a priority that the grades that learners achieve support their progress onto the next stage of their learning and/or employment. In 2023, the aim is to return to results that are in line with those in pre-pandemic years.

Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) – Education Provision

The Welsh Government has confirmed that the Council will receive funding for the continued provision of primary and secondary education to Afghan children and young people whilst they are based temporarily at the bridging accommodation within Cardiff. This is being delivered with the support of council staff and local primary and secondary schools. The Cardiff Parenting Team is also offering a weekly family play session to Afghan families.

I want to thank all those involved in supporting the provision of education to the Afghan children and young people, particularly for their creativity and flexibility in making this unexpected additional provision possible in challenging circumstances. Local schools have also played an important part in the warm local welcome that has been extended to these Afghan families and the support provided to the children and young people will not only help them prepare them for school, but will also enable them to have a better future here in Wales.

This is an outstanding example of our city's continued and significant work to support young people seeking sanctuary. This is an area of practice that we will continue to strengthen with the extension of our Schools of Sanctuary programme, actioning the recommendation of Cardiff's Race Equality Taskforce to widen participation in this work, as well as showcasing the fantastic efforts of flagship schools, such as St Mary the Virgin Primary School, in raising awareness of the stories and experiences of refugee and asylum-seeking communities in the UK.

Welsh Government 'Winter of Well-being' Grant Funding

Covid-19 has had a major impact on the emotional, social and physical well-being of children and young people over the last 20 months and I welcome the announcement last month by the Welsh Government Deputy Minister for Social Services, Julie Morgan MS, of a significant funding package to help provide well-being support for children and young people aged 0–25 years in Wales. Building on the successful Summer of Smiles Festival, Cardiff's approach to utilising what is being referred to as the 'Winter of Well-being' funding will be made up of the following three elements:

- Well-being grant programme for children and young people;
- Child Friendly City pop-up hosted by St David's Shopping Centre; and
- City-wide arts and cultural programme.

Further detailed information will be publicised in the coming weeks on the Child Friendly Cardiff website.

Anti-Bullying Week 2021

It has been good to see so many schools in Cardiff taking part in Anti-Bullying Week on 15-19 November 2021, as well as promoting and raising awareness of anti-bullying initiatives via social media. This week also saw the launch of [The Voice of Young People on Safeguarding](#) plan, which is accompanied by a video on YouTube at: https://youtu.be/-Q7Qdno_Uyc The Education Service, Children's Services and the

Youth Service are working together to build this approach and to include young people at the core of this work. The Cardiff Youth Service Young Creators Group has also been involved in the conception of the goals and aims, design, creation and promotion of this initiative. The plan represents a wide range of views, experiences and expertise expressed by internal and external stakeholder professionals and young people. The information that has been gathered to form the plan will support stakeholders to progressively configure their services to help young people feel safe and be safe. It focuses on risks and behaviours outside of the family home, also known as contextual safeguarding. Peer-on-peer abuse is part of the harm experienced by young people and a reason for not feeling safe and sometimes being exploited. Bullying is a part of contextual safeguarding and is not limited to extreme behaviour and can be damaging without the threat or delivery of physical harm.

To get a clear picture of the incidents and types of alleged bullying, the Council is working with neighbouring local authorities, schools, young people and a national group to get a consistent reporting system. The Council funds this system in all its schools and wider education provision, as well as the Youth Service. This provides all organisations with the means to log concerns and, where appropriate, to escalate them for further action. In future, cross-city reports will enable training, targeted resources and wider understanding of the causes and effects of bullying for both victims and perpetrators.

UNICEF Rights Respecting Schools Awards

Our approach to embedding Child Rights across our school communities is producing extremely positive outcomes. In Cardiff, 75 schools, representing 59% of all school pupils, have submitted their Rights Respecting Schools action plan to UNICEF UK. Engagement with training and support is increasing and, this term, it has reached its highest levels yet.

I am pleased to announce that UNICEF UK has confirmed that both Stacey Primary School and Ninian Park Primary School have achieved their Gold Award, with another 12 schools waiting for their assessment in the coming weeks. Adamsdown Primary School has also achieved their Silver Award this month and I want to say “well done” to all those involved in this important work in Cardiff.

Open Your Eyes Week

On 15 November 2021, the Cardiff Commitment Team launched their second virtual Open Your Eyes Week for pupils in Years 5 and 6 from primary schools across Cardiff, following on from the first virtual Open Your Eyes Week that was held in June 2021. Over 150 classes from 67 primary schools registered to take part throughout the week. Open Your Eyes Week is designed to ignite and inspire interest in a wide range of occupations among Years 5 and 6 pupils. All class teachers taking part are provided with a profile of the organisations (including information such as jobs, pathways, qualifications needed to work for the company, links to teaching resources associated with the company etc.), as well as a recording of each of the sessions. Employers taking part and speaking to pupils included Principality Building Society, The National Digital Exploitation Centre (cyber security), Cardiff Metropolitan University, Willmott Dixon, Welsh Water, Renishaw, Screen Alliance Wales and NHS Wales.

Estyn Inspection

As I confirmed in my statement last month, I would like to remind members that the Council will be subject to a full Estyn inspection during the week commencing 29 November 2021, in accordance with the framework and guidance for the inspection of Local Government Education Services. The final inspection report will be published on 9 February 2022.

Councillor Sarah Merry
Cabinet Member for Education, Employment & Skills
18 November 2021