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Schools: coronavirus firebreak guidance

Guidance for schools during the firebreak (from 8.00pm on Friday 23 October).

Part of Schools coronavirus (COVID-19) operational guidance

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General

What do you mean by a 'firebreak lockdown'?

A short period of time between half term and the end of the week in the week before half term (the firebreak) will be a period of restrictive measures will be in place from from Friday 23 October until 5 November (an attendance week).

Does that mean schools will remain closed after the autumn half term?

Primary schools, special schools and independent special schools will remain open for all pupils. Secondary schools, independent special independent schools will be open for children in years 7 and 8 and for those who need to be in school for exams. Sixth form colleges, further colleges and alternative provision will be open for those who have supported by learning staff who will be based in schools.

Will there be any exceptions to the open year groups in years 10 and 11) can attend school?

No. Only those pupils who are sitting exams during the week of 2-5 November can attend school for the examination or we should have the permission as soon as their exams are over.

What will happen with pupils who are educated other than at school (EOTAS) including Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) during this period?

Provision for the group of learners will continue as normal during this period.

What does this mean for all-age schools?

These schools will remain after the half term break to accommodate pupils in the primary phase, and for 11 and 12 year olds who are sitting during the week of 2 - 5 November for attendance for the examination only. Pupils in the secondary phase of the school will continue their half term holiday for that week.

Why can primary schools and secondary schools for pupils in years 7 and 8 and those sitting exams remain open but other year groups they will be closed? What is the rationale for this decision?

Children and their education is our top priority and we have tried to keep schools open for most children. We have kept primary schools open and pupils in schools for the primary phase of education are less affected by the effect to prevent social mixing, along with restrictions in a range of settings. We have also kept secondary schools open for those in years 7 and 8 (middle schools in certain arrangements), and those who are sitting exams in the week of 2 - 5 November. We have also kept sixth form colleges able to safely continue their learning at home as well as being more able to attend their learning.

If secondary schools are closed for older children is it because it is not safe?

Schools are not closed and we are not taking this decision because children are more vulnerable or are at risk, but we do consider this to be safe as possible, with effective control measures in place. What we are trying to do is reduce the number of pupils in schools and to limit the number of pupils in schools. We are doing everything we can to be as environmentally as possible.

Are there any circumstances where pupils in years 9 to 13 can attend school during the firebreak?

Children and their education is our top priority and we have tried to keep schools open for most children. We have kept primary schools open and pupils in schools for the primary phase of education are less affected by the effect to prevent social mixing, along with restrictions in a range of settings. We have also kept secondary schools open for those in years 7 and 8 (middle schools in certain arrangements), and those who are sitting exams in the week of 2 - 5 November. We have also kept sixth form colleges able to safely continue their learning at home as well as being more able to attend their learning.

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Which mainstream children and young people in years 9-13 might access school premises during the firebreak other than those sitting exams?

Schools and local authorities should work together to identify the children who needs to be in school, for an occasional, or regular basis, school. In doing so schools and local authorities should take account the following factors:

- the vulnerability of children and young people (at risk, safeguarding, neglect, vulnerable and developing)
- the ability of children and young people from years 9-13 to attend school independently (for example, the ability of mainstream secondary schools and local authorities should work together to identify those who need to be in school, for an occasional, or regular basis)
- the decision taken by the Headteacher on impact of any restrictions on child or young person's emotional, mental and physical health, and their ability to learn
- the decision taken by the Headteacher on impact of any restrictions on other children and young people's emotional, mental and physical health, and their ability to learn
- the decision taken by the Headteacher on the needs of the child or young person and their ability to cope with, or their needs to be understood and delivered through the most appropriate support. Schools should also take into account the impact on other children and young people's emotional, mental and physical health and their ability to learn
- the child or young person's should be informed of the decision
- The needs to attend a young people should be regularly reviewed and monitored on a multi-agency basis.

Schools and local authorities should work together with learners sensitively to ensure that all pupils who need to be in school can be supported and provided with appropriate support and settings in doing so.

Children on vulnerable or disadvantaged backgrounds have been issued and could begin to identifying and supporting learners who may be vulnerable or disadvantaged.

Staff and pupils who fall into the shielding category - what are the arrangements, including after any firebreak?

The firebreak and shielding are a matter for the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) for Wales but the decision to pause the advice for extremely vulnerable people shielding from the CMO for Wales, means that people who were shielding need to follow shielding advice they have been required to shield since but should continue to closely follow the guidance on social distancing and other measures in place. The introduction of the firebreak means that changes that are shielding are able to return to work or school.

How are you going to ensure my secondary aged pupil doesn't fall behind with their learning?

We will be issuing guidance to schools which will include minimum expectations for the provision of work for pupils who are self-isolating or absent during the firebreak. We know from the last time we had to close schools that lessons and tutorials and out in arrangements in place for those who are self-isolating. We will be in touch with all schools, local authorities and trusts to make sure that they are ready to cope with further guidance.

Online learning - how are we ensuring all children have access? Are we satisfied with provision?

Video lies hold the way in our national response to ensuring children have access to high quality education. To support digitally excluded learners in maintained schools, there have been 10,000 MiFi devices made available to local authorities and maintained schools to support activity feedback, through the current lockdown period. We have provided support, we understand that provision for digitally excluded learners is a matter for local authorities and maintained schools, and continues they should be sensitive to context that local area.

What is the position with independent schools?

The same arrangements all apply to schools in the independent sector as for maintained schools. The requirement for learners to attend in order not to attend the school site for education for the extra week will apply equally to the relevant year groups in independent schools.

Our school boarding house will remain open, does the relevant all boarders will be able to receive their education on-site?

No, although it will be necessary for boarding schools to continue to keep their residential provision open throughout the period, only pupils who are in the year groups that are required to attend school in the week at the end of the half term will be able to attend school. Those who are in those taking examinations will receive tutorials remotely.

My child goes to college/sixth form college, why would they would have had 2 weeks off school by Monday 2 November. Do they also need to comply with the firebreak requirements for schools?

Yes, the requirements will be in place for all schools across Wales regardless of whether they are school or specialised sixth form colleges (Welshpoolfamily, Prestatyn and Colleges) schools have extended half term by one week, the requirement for attendance in school will be delayed to a position COVID-19 control.

Can I get any support to develop and deliver remote learning?

The regional consortia are available to support and advise schools on how to develop a remote learning offer for all learners, including those and beyond where individuals or groups of learners need to work at home. Further information can be found here:

Gwell
GwE
ERW
CSC
EAS: Supporting Our Schools Project and
https://blog.eanetwork.com/ Click here to access blog

Hwb also hosts a range of support documentation and guidance.

What about if my learners do not have digital devices at home?

Schools should work with their local authority and/or IT departments to establish the most appropriate digital provision for learners who do not have digital devices at home.

Further information is available.

As a headteacher one of my teachers is self-isolating. How do I provide remote learning for pupils?

Many teachers may be able to provide remote learning from their homes if they are self-isolating, or support other teachers who are remote learning resources to teachers.

Schools may be able to provide, in schools in particular topics, to support learners of particular age or ability.

One of the learners in my class has not responded to the learning I have set. Do I have to do anything?

We would expect teachers and support staff to seek to make contact with learners who are not responding to the remote learning or attendance remote. Wellbeing remains top for these learners.

My year 8 class is self-isolating. Do I have to provide remote learning for them?

Schools would usually provide remote learning for a self-isolating class, and this will not change during the firebreak.

What will I prepare for teaching for remote learning? Do you expect teachers to do this in half term?

We expect all schools, teachers and school based staff to have a full remote learning offer in place. Much of the resources needed are available and many schools will have already tried these approaches during the lockdown period. We have provided support and guidance available in Hwb. We believe that we expect teachers and school leadership, to collaborate in the development and the delivery of remote learning. We will be in touch with schools and trusts in the non groups.

Why are secondary school leaders, teachers and staff supporting learning go into their school in the second week of the firebreak?

We have been clear that education must continue for all pupils and that this can often be best achieved with teachers supporting learning remotely from school premises. Schools will be able to provide a range of resources and support.

The First Minister was also clear in his announcement that critical workers can continue to go to their normal place of work during the firebreak. The Welsh Government was in that all education practitioners and support staff are critical workers and will be able to continue to work attending in their school as usual.

I am nervous and would prefer my year 9 child not be attending school during the firebreak. Will they receive remote learning?

It is hugely important that your child continues with their education the encouraged of learners to attend school where they can get access to the resources learning and remote interaction to the learner's education.

I am a parent working from home. Will I be expected to provide home learning for my child?

Schools will be expected to provide remote learning to years 9-13 and specific groups which have been instructed to self-isolate (which may continue online teaching, self-directed learning and structured learning).

I am a pupil and have an exam in that week. What do I do?

Schools will be expected to provide guidance to those learners who are sitting exams in the week commencing, as they would usually intend to do.

Operational guidance has been published.

Attendance

Do normal attendance procedures apply for children who are expected to attend school?

Routine attendance procedures will apply for all pupils attending school during the firebreak. Schools should follow their usual procedures, absent from school in accordance with Further guidance on managing attendance in schools in the coronavirus pandemic.

Should schools monitor the engagement of pupils in years 9 and above when they are remote learning?

Schools should keep in regular contact with all pupils who are not attending school, including those who are self-isolating or shielding and as they are not present at the school setting. Further guidance on attendance is available in the operational guidance.

How should schools record attendance if they have an additional learning from home?

The 4 code should be used for the half term weeks during the firebreak, and the 4 code should be used for pupils in years 9 and above during the firebreak. Further guidance on attendance is available in the operational guidance.

Free school meals

During the firebreak, will children who are eligible for free school meals continue to receive provision?

The Welsh Government has consistently confirmed that it will provide funding to LAs during school holidays up and including Easter 2021 to ensure that children who are eligible for free school meals receive support. Local authorities have been working hard to make available to pupils LA's to provide provision in lieu of free school meals. It will be up to each LA to decide how it will provide support according to their needs.

My child is eligible for free school meals, but is not receiving provision from the LA, what should I do?

If you feel that your child is eligible for free school meals, but has not been receiving provision to date, it is important that you contact your local authority to discuss eligibility and provision.

Are children that are Electricity Home Educated entitled to free school meal provision?

Where a student or guardian has chosen to educate their children at home, these children will not be entitled to receive free school meal provision.

Local authorities can use their discretion to make the equivalent of free school meals available to children in Elective Home Education, or exceptionally financial hardship.

Are pupils that are in receipt of home tuition entitled to free school meal provision?

Pupils who are home tutored (where education is still being provided by the local authority) can be entitled to free school meals provision, provided that they are registered pupils with the local authority and meet the criteria. Local authorities have discretion to provide free meals when attending school.

What arrangements should local authorities make to ensure that pupils who are shielding or self-isolating receive free school meal provision?

Local authorities should have worked out previously and can want to make arrangements to provide free school meals to eligible pupils who identified needs. In order to address the needs of vulnerable families, it is important that local authorities and schools work together to identify or parallel. Further guidance is expected to be issued to local authorities. Local authorities also need to be aware that a self-isolating family may be unable to access food and other essentials, and may need to be signposted to local authority services and support.

Whichever method is chosen, local authorities are reminded of the legal duty to protect the welfare of pupils in receipt of free school meals.

What about pupils with special diets or food allergies?

If you choose to deliver food to pupils you will need to ensure that pupils with special diets and requirements are catered for. Care needs to be taken to check with families whether any pupils have allergies or special diets which need to be provided for.

Do I need to still comply with The Healthy Eating in Schools (Nutritional Standards and Requirements) (Wales) Regulations 2013?

In a congested that is exceptional circumstances, the requirements of the Healthy Eating in Schools Regulations may cause increased challenges for school kitchens and their suppliers. Consideration of the Regulations is made to ensure that the nutrition guidance for pupils is a healthy nutritious as possible, within the current constraints of the local and national supply chains.

How do local authorities claim for additional costs incurred in providing free school meal provision for a pupil who is self-isolating or shielding?

Local authorities will be able to claim from Welsh Government's COVID-19 Hardship Fund for additional costs incurred in providing free school meals on a receipt of free school meal provision and are permitted to self-isolating.

More guidance on LA costs in respect of free school meal provision for self-isolating learners is available.

How much can local authorities claim?

The additional funding available is based on a weekly allowance of £15.40 per pupil per day (£77.00 per week).

The funding made available is based on the assumption that local authorities will pay parents/carers the first £12.50 per pupil, per day (£72.50 per week) of any costs incurred, with the Welsh Government providing the balance of £2.90 per pupil, per day (£14.50 per week) per day or £70.50 per week.

Local authorities are reminded that they will need to demonstrate that they have paid the first £12.50 per pupil, per day (£72.50 per week) to school meals recipients from their contribution to ensure that they can claim the balance.

What if a local authority has already committed its budget for free school meals and cannot meet the first £12.50 per day or £12.50 per week of the cost of providing free school meal provision?

The Welsh Government is aware that local authorities will have fixed costs associated with the provision of free school meals, and that local authorities may have already committed budgets for the provision of school meals and likely to be committed. In these instances the local authority should contact the Welsh Government to discuss the provision of free school meals. The Welsh Government will be in touch with local authorities to investigate if savings have been made in other areas of the budget, and if there are any other ways the local authority can be supported. We further mitigation offered is unlikely there are will make reasonable exceptions and will pay in excess of £1.40 per pupil per day.

What about claiming for additional costs incurred in providing remote learning?

LA will also compensate local authorities for reasonable administrative costs associated with providing free school meals provision. Local authorities

required to isolate due to COVID-19. Again, the principle of optimum value for money should apply.

What about providing free school meal provision for pupils who are absent for any other reason (other than shielding or self-isolating because of COVID-19)?

The additional funding is available only in respect of pupils who are isolating as a result of COVID-19. It is not available in respect of pupils who are absent for any other reason.

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