

## CABINET STATEMENT

# Written Statement: COVID-19 Recovery Phase Planning: operation of schools

**Kirsty Williams, Minister for Education**

Our latest understanding of the rate of transmission of COVID-19 allows us to be hopeful but still requires us to be cautious. This statement is to update Members on the planning work for the next phase for schools.

School provision will adapt and extend further in the next phase, in line with timely Welsh Government changes to the current restrictions. In planning for that next phase for schools, there are a set of key principles for decision-making:

1. The safety, and mental, emotional, physical wellbeing of students and staff
2. Continuing contribution to the national effort and strategy to fight spread of COVID-19
3. Having the confidence of parents, staff and students – based on evidence and information – so that they can plan ahead
4. Ability to prioritise learners at key points, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds
5. Consistency with the Welsh Government's framework for decision making, to have guidance in place to support measures such as distancing, managing attendance and wider protective actions

It is important to remember that many schools settings are open – providing a vital service for the children of critical workers and our more vulnerable learners. Therefore I do not want to refer to a 'reopening' or a 'return', we are planning for a 'new normal'.

Last week, the First Minister published a framework and seven key questions to help lead Wales out of the coronavirus pandemic and the operation of schools will be considered in this wider context.

It is vital that parents, staff and students have confidence in returning to their setting. We will only be taking the next step for schools when the evidence and advice is that this is the right thing to do.

In the next phase, schools will not immediately return to operating at full capacity. It will be a phased approach. This means that I do not expect that schools will be open for all pupils, in all year groups, all week.

The ongoing challenge of COVID-19 means we will prepare schools for a range of scenarios for the foreseeable future. However unlikely, we must prepare for an eventuality that requires schools to reduce operations at specific future points.

We have, and are developing, a broad evidence base to inform these decisions. This draws on the latest health evidence, wider international experience, understanding of the workforce's current capacity and health and well-being impacts on all staff and children in schools. My officials are working with counterparts from across the governments of the UK, and with colleagues across our education sector (including further and higher education), on these matters.

I will communicate (any) decision to change the operation of schools well in advance of any required action. The Government will provide further guidance to help with the transition to the temporary conditions that will be required for schools during that time.

I would like to thank all those working hard to ensure that schools and hubs are able to provide support for those who need it. As I have said previously, our teachers, support staff and childcare workers have proved themselves to be national heroes.

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