

Reopening of Bridgend schools from September 2020

Frequently asked questions (FAQ)

Curriculum, learning, assessment, data and qualifications

Background

This FAQ document provides an overview of the current situation and expectation from the Welsh Government and other statutory bodies regarding school arrangements from September 2020.

It is important to note that this guidance is accurate at time of writing. However, due to emerging information, it will be necessary to update this document periodically to reflect the most recent Welsh Government guidance.

How has the legislation changed?

On 24 June 2020, the basic curriculum requirements for Wales and associated assessment arrangements for schools and non-maintained nursery settings were suspended as part of the Coronavirus Act 2020. This was intended to provide schools and settings with the necessary space and flexibility to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

There will be a need for schools and settings to adapt their approach to learning during the autumn term as they negotiate a range of challenges and we will take this into account in all decisions. The Welsh Government will clarify the expectations for legislation in due course and our focus will continue to be the needs and interests of learners in unprecedented times.

What guidance has the Welsh Government provided?

The Welsh Government has provided 'learner guidance'. The purpose of this guidance is to give schools and supporting partners a common set of priorities for learning, regardless of the level of operations in response to COVID-19. The guidance can be found here:

<https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2020-07/guidance-on-learning-in-schools-and-settings-from-the-autumn-term.pdf>

(Please note this guidance is subject to updates. At the time of writing this document relates to the most recent guidance provided by the Welsh Government)

Will learning and teaching continue to be affected by COVID-19?

Yes.

Learning and teaching will continue to be affected by the COVID-19 pandemic during the 2020-2021 school year. The approaches taken by schools and settings will continue to evolve to provide learning both in school and elsewhere if the need arises. The balance between learning in schools and settings, and time spent learning elsewhere may well change at particular points in response to the pandemic.

Has learning been affected?

Yes.

We know most learning will have been impacted in some form over recent months, with more significant impacts expected in vulnerable or disadvantaged groups. There is also a specific impact on learners taking formal qualifications in 2021 (ie pupils entering Years 11, 12 and 13).

The Welsh Government has announced £29m to recruit, recover and raise standards, bringing teachers in to schools to provide more in-depth focused support for those who have specific challenges to enable them to achieve their potential. The local authority and regional consortia will work proactively alongside schools to support them through this period.

The Welsh Government will also be supplying supplementary guidance on supporting vulnerable and disadvantaged learners.

What will happen to GCSEs and A levels next year?

The Welsh Government's 'Recruit, recover and raise standards' plan will seek to build up learning confidence, knowledge and skills in the cohort of learners undertaking formal examinations in 2021. This is intended to support learners and ensure they are not disadvantaged.

The Welsh Government will seek to gather information and develop feedback on how learners in this cohort are progressing with this additional support and will share it with Qualifications Wales to help inform their considerations for 2021.

Qualifications Wales, working with Welsh Joint Education Committee (WJEC), is also considering changes that can be made to examinations in 2021 to provide learners

with an appropriate opportunity to demonstrate their ability recognising the significant disruption to teaching and learning.

Qualifications Wales and WJEC have consistently kept their website up-to-date on their latest announcements and considerations, including the intention to hold the usual November exam series, primarily to support learners who wish to take examinations to try to improve the grade they were awarded in the summer.

Will parents be issued with fixed penalty notices if their children do not attend school?

All learners will return to their school or setting in the autumn term unless they have a medical/health reason not to. The Welsh Government's view is that it would be difficult for a local authority/school to justify issuing a fixed penalty notice (FPN) or commencing proceedings for non-school attendance. The Welsh Government will monitor the situation over the first half term.

If a learner is unable to attend the physical setting of the school it is vital that the school continues to engage regularly with the learner remotely. Schools and settings should keep a record of attendance and families should notify their school if their child is unable to attend and explain the reason for this to enable the school to record attendance correctly. This will help schools, settings and local authorities plan for, and understand any barriers to, learners returning to school and identify any further support needed. It will be critical that all learners engage with the school and any concerns about engagement, or the welfare of a learner, are followed up immediately. The Education Welfare Service, alongside Early Help services, can assist in these situations.

It is important that all learners, their families and staff follow Public Health Wales advice in respect of the virus and under no circumstances should learners or staff attend schools/settings if they:

- feel unwell, have any of the three identified COVID-19 symptoms (a new continuous cough, or a high temperature or loss of or change to their sense of taste or smell) or they have tested positive to COVID-19 in the past 7 days; or
- live in a household or are part of an extended household with someone who has symptoms of COVID-19 or has tested positive for COVID-19 in the past 14 days.

As a parent, I'm really worried about my child returning to school and contracting the virus. What should I do? Will I get in trouble?

If parents/carers of learners are concerned about their children returning to school, we recommend parents should discuss this with their child's school/setting.

Schools and settings should be clear with parents/carers that learners of compulsory school age must be in school unless a statutory reason applies (eg the learner has been granted a leave of absence, is unable to attend because of sickness or is absent for a necessary religious observance).

What additional support is available to children and families who have been affected by the pandemic?

Early Help and Social Services continue to be available to children and families in need of support or safeguarding.

Early Help services can provide support linked to parenting, wellbeing, counselling, financial advice and employment/training, should families require it. Early Help services work closely with schools and other services including parents/carers, who can refer children and families for support via earlyhelp@bridgend.gov.uk

If there are safeguarding concerns, contact must be made with Social Services via mashcentra@bridgend.gov.uk

Will school uniform have to be worn in September?

The Welsh Government updated its guidance on 11 August 2020 which can be found here:

<https://gov.wales/operational-guidance-schools-and-settings-autumn-term-covid-19>

Within that guidance it is explained that a school uniform is a governing body's decision. Welsh Government state that school uniform can play a valuable role in contributing to the ethos of a school and setting an appropriate tone.

However, if a governing body decides to relax its uniform policy, the local authority will be supportive of that decision.

How can I access a school uniform grant for my child?

The Welsh Government Pupil Development Access Grant (PDG) provides assistance to families on low incomes. More information can be found under benefits and support, grants for pupils on Bridgend County Borough Council website.

Parents/carers can contact individual schools for details of how and when the grant will be issued.

Will schools have a Coronavirus (COVID-19) risk assessment?

Yes.

All school will have comprehensive risk assessments.

Have schools been provided with personal protective equipment (PPE) for undertaking tasks within the school such as personal care or first aid?

All schools and settings have been provided with COVID-19 related PPE supplies and guidance on where it should be used appropriately (eg working in very close proximity to individuals for personal care, first aid, or possibly when supporting an individual displaying symptoms who is awaiting collection to return home).

Will schools have procedures for dealing with anyone becoming unwell with COVID-19-related symptoms within the school?

All parents will receive letters advising them not to send their child to school if they are displaying COVID-19 symptoms and similar arrangements are in place for staff. Schools will have guidance on how to deal with anyone who becomes unwell while at school displaying COVID-19 symptoms including isolation, supervision and additional cleaning requirements.

The requirements of the NHS Wales 'Test, Trace and Protect' Service will be followed in any case connected with the school or setting.

What do we do if children want to wear a mask in school?

As per the risk assessment children can wear face coverings providing that they themselves are able to put them on and remove them, store them (if reusable) or dispose of in a bin.

Are we allowing staff and sixth form pupils off site at lunch time?

Providing that social distancing measures are followed when off site and strict personal hygiene standards adhered to when returning to school, there is no reason to prohibit movement off site.

Will school transport be available from 1 September 2020?

It is the local authority's intention to operate school transport as normally as possible from the start of autumn term 2020. However, we recommend that parents should seek where possible to make their own arrangements to transport their child to school for the time-being.

Will there be school transport available for non-eligible learners?

No.

There will be no change in eligibility as a result of the current situation.

What arrangements are you making regarding social distancing on school buses?

It is unlikely that the current two-metre social distancing requirements will apply to school transport.

My child is brought into school in a taxi. Will that continue?

For the time-being, some children may be provided with an alternative vehicle eg minibus to ensure social distancing requirements are adhered to. However, taxis may be used on some contracts.

Can my child be refused travel if they are eligible?

The local authority will need to take a 'zero tolerance' approach to pupil behaviour on school transport to ensure the safety of pupils and transport staff. Any child demonstrating poor behaviour, putting others at risk or not following instructions from transport staff, for example, to remain seated, may be refused future travel.

Should my child wear a face mask on school transport?

We recommend that face coverings are worn on school transport for secondary school-age pupils with masks being provided by the local authority.

Individual schools will maintain a stock of these and will provide these by request.

Pupils with medical conditions or with additional learning needs are not recommended to wear a face covering but may do so if they wish.

Does a parent need to accompany their child to a bus stop?

Learners in primary schools who are eligible for home-to-school transport need to be accompanied to their nearest bus stop by a responsible adult (from the same household) unless they have a prior arrangement with the local authority for exemption.

Secondary school learners do not need to be accompanied to the bus stop/pick-up point.

Nationally agreed social distancing advice should be adhered to at all times.

Will a parent/carer need to be available to collect their child at the bus stop/pick-up point at the end of the school day?

All learners in primary school must be received at their bus stop/pick-up point by a responsible adult at the end of the school day, unless they have a prior arrangement with the local authority for exemption.

Many school transport vehicles normally have an escort with them on the transport. Will this continue?

For some children, where an escort has been provided previously, this may not be possible moving forward. There is no statutory requirement to provide escorts, although the local authority will assess the needs of learners and determine the appropriateness and availability of escorts in all cases.

Are all eligible children guaranteed home home-to-school transport from September 2020?

The local authority does not anticipate any significant issues with school transport availability for September. However, if changes are required, the local authority will make every effort to communicate any necessary changes directly to parents/carers as soon as possible.

Are secondary school-age pupils required to show their bus passes when they board the school bus?

No.

The 'no-pass, no-travel' requirement has been suspended for the autumn term 2020. The local authority will review this requirement for the start of the spring term in January 2021. However, only pupils who are eligible to travel will be allowed to do so.

What happens if there are primary and secondary pupils sharing transport? Will only secondary pupils have to wear the face covering?

The wearing of face coverings for secondary school-age pupils on school transport is recommended not mandated.

How are masks distributed for the very first journey?

As masks are recommended not mandated.

There is no expectation that for the first day pupils will wear masks unless they are provided by their own parents/carers.

Schools will have stock available for learners on their first day in school and will make know the arrangements for their collection by pupils to parents and carers.

Who allocates seats for the first journey?

For the first journey to school on the first day, we expect there to be some flexibility and drivers/escorts will indicate where a pupil should sit on the basis of older children sitting at the rear of the bus, with younger children towards the front. On the return journey, schools will advise and support the allocated seat for the learner. Pupils should board/alight the bus as 'first on, last-off'

What are the start and finish times for the school day?

The Welsh Government updated its guidance on the 11 August 2020 which can be found here:

<https://gov.wales/operational-guidance-schools-and-settings-autumn-term-covid-19>

The Welsh Government asks schools to consider introducing staggered starts or adjusting start and finish times to keep groups of learners apart as they arrive and leave school and to allow more journeys to take place outside of peak hours.

Each individual school will be able to advise on their start and finish times.

How do I apply for a school place?

School admissions information and a timetable, which includes when the next round of applications open can be found under school admissions on Bridgend County Borough Council website.

Please contact Learner Support at pupilservices@bridgend.gov.uk if you require further information.

School meals

My child normally attends breakfast club. Will there be free breakfast available for them when my child returns to school in September?

It is unlikely that free breakfast provision will be available at the start of the new school term.

However, each school will assess its current arrangements for free breakfast provision for learners with a view that the arrangements are reinstated as early in the autumn term as possible, but only where it is safe to do so. The future availability of free breakfast provision will be communicated in due course.

My child is eligible for free school meals (eFSM). As they are unlikely to be able to attend school full-time until 14 September, will they get both a weekly food parcel as well as a free school meal until that time?

Free school meals will be available on the days your child attends school.

The local authority is also providing of a weekly food parcel for eFSM pupils until 4 September.

Is my child eligible for free school meals?

Please email FSM@bridgend.gov.uk or contact (01656) 643396 for information about free school meal eligibility criteria.

Will school meals be available to purchase when my child returns to school in September?

Yes.

However, individual schools may need to limit the menu choices for a short period of time.

Can I provide my child with a home-produced packed lunch for September?

This is a decision that will be made by individual schools and you are therefore advised to contact your child's school directly.

My child normally has a medical specialist diet. Will this be available on the days my child attends school for September?

Medical specialist diets will be available for your child, but parents would be expected to update the school on any changes to a previously provided specialist diet, to ensure that the Catering Service can be informed prior to your child attending.

Will children still receive their free milk in the infants?

Yes.

Individual schools will be liaising with the milk provider to resume their free school milk provision throughout the autumn term.

Where will my child eat lunch?

Individual schools will be following Welsh Government guidance and local risk assessments, and will therefore determine the suitability of pupils eating in dining halls or in their classrooms/designated desks.

Will the cashless catering system be functioning?

Yes.

However, parents/carers will need to ensure there is sufficient balance on their child's account. If parents have not received a recent email with their child's account balance, they can contact the school administrator to ask for this information.

It is unlikely that cash revaluation machines in secondary schools will be accessible initially and parents/carers are therefore advised of the need to credit school meal accounts via the ['Pay it'](#) function on the Bridgend County Borough Council website.

Inclusion Service

Will pre-schoolers access speech and language therapy (SALT) in September?

We are currently awaiting further guidance from Welsh Government. Currently, telephone conversations, activities and sign-posting continues.

Will the sensory playgroup continue?

There will be a review at the end of September. Individual discussions will take place with the families who attend sensory playgroup.

We are currently exploring different possibilities including “drop in sessions” and using Microsoft Teams to provide one-to-one remote sessions with families where necessary.

Will specialist provision applications for observation classes, moderate learning difficulties (MLD) learning resource centres (LRCs) and communication autism resource education (CARE) LRCs be submitted in the autumn term as in previous years?

Specialist provision application forms will be sent via the Education and Family Support Directorate’s Monday Mailshot to schools at the start of the autumn term. The closing date for applications will be 31 October 2020. Further details regarding electronic and mail submissions will follow in September.

Are Special Needs Support Assistants (SNSAs) able to move between two school placements in any given day?

Yes.

SNSAs are able to fulfil their contracted hours in two schools (but no more than two) in one day.

Can statutory and school reviews take place in the autumn term?

Yes.

Reviews have been undertaken successfully throughout lockdown remotely. These will continue remotely in the autumn term, where possible to reduce the risk of

transmission and staff from outside school being introduced into contact groups unnecessarily.

Will there be any changes to the statutory assessment process and timelines for statements?

We are still awaiting further guidance from Welsh Government but currently the process and timelines remain unchanged. However, consideration is being given that direct assessments may not have been possible and further information may need to be gathered later when appropriate.