

July 2020

Issued on behalf of the 6 North Wales Local Authorities and GwE

Schools across North Wales have sprung back to life this week as children and young people 'check in, catch up and prepare for September'.

Learners in all year groups have been encouraged to come back to school attend to meet up with their teachers and friends after weeks away from the classroom due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Schools have been given the go ahead to open and five of the six LA across north Wales have already welcomed learners of all ages. Schools in Ynys Mon are ready to welcome their learners when the drop in local infections is confirmed.

Caring for the health, wellbeing of learners, staff and adults on school sites has been the priority as schools put their plans into action. Teams from the six Local Authorities and the Regional School Improvement Service (GwE) have worked together to share their expertise and agree a common approach. Experts from across the region have worked with schools to develop detailed risk assessments that have anticipated potential problems and put safety first. With their support, school leaders, staff, governors and families have made the return to school a positive experience for children and young people.

The support of outside agencies, suppliers, contractors and the wider community has helped schools to put their plans into action. Without the extra supplies, new cleaning routines, safe school transport schools would be unable to open safely.

Cllr Phil Wynn, Chairperson for GwE Joint Committee, praised the dedication and commitment of school leaders and said:

"The health and safety of our children and young people is the priority during this pandemic. We have provided activities for the children of key workers since the end of March. Now I am delighted to see that, through working together, local authority officers and headteachers have been able to invite all children safely back to school to check in, catch up and prepare for September.

Garem Jackson, Gwynedd Head of Education and Vice-chair of the GwE Management Board, said:

"At this point, we need to thank parents and carers most sincerely for the educational support they have been providing over the past weeks and the way they have nurtured a vibrant partnership with schools. Their continuing support for distance learning has ensured that our children and young people have enjoyed the best possible opportunity to maintain their learning experiences, and are consequently well placed to return to school to continue their learning, and, equally importantly, to engage once again with their friends and peers. Together, we have approached the check in, catch up arrangements as first steps towards inspiring and exciting pupils about learning once again.

We have appreciated and have been mindful of the fact that there was some initial apprehension and uncertainty. We understand this. Accordingly, schools and Local Authorities have engaged with parents and carers over the past weeks to inform them of their reopening plans and to provide reassurances where they are needed. Following the return to schools on 29 June, the feedback we have received from children and their parents and carers has been overwhelmingly positive. To see and hear the joy felt by our children and young people at returning to their familiar settings and re-engaging with their friends has been wonderful and inspiring. It is clear that they will not be daunted by the situation in which we find ourselves.

Our school and local authority staff have been fantastic in the way they have kept learning going, and we all owe them a huge debt of gratitude. It is clear from recent experience that learning knows no boundaries and will not be locked down. We would invite all parents and carers to continue to engage with the process of returning to school in order that we can take these steps forward together, supporting our children to continue to learn and to succeed.”

Head teachers and their teams have welcomed learners back to schools across the region:

Ellen Williams, Head teacher of Ysgol Brynrefail, Gwynedd said:

We were very pleased to see our learners return to school last week. We planned and prepared carefully for opening again, with the highest priority given to ensuring the health and safety of the staff and learners on the school site. As a result, the arrangements went very smoothly. We are very proud of our learners, the maturity in adapting to the new ways of working in school. I am extremely grateful to all the staff and parents for their trust in us.”

Debbie Eccles, Victoria Primary School, Wrexham said:

“I would just like to add how wonderful it was to see the children and how they were fully knowledgeable about hygiene and social distancing. They were learning fit and raring to go. They have benefited greatly from the catch-up with friends.”

Schools and local authorities will continue to follow the advice of Welsh Government as they prepare for September.