

Report on the re-opening of schools in Powys for four weeks until 24th July 2020

The Local Authority has worked extensively with all stakeholders since we went into business critical priorities in March. This has included our headteacher groups, all trade union representatives including the teacher unions, and our governing bodies. As a result of this, when the Welsh government proposed the four week period of Catchup, Check in and Prepare we consulted with all these stakeholder groups. We closely liaised with our Portfolio holder and cabinet throughout who also attended and contributed to many of these meetings.

After consultation, we took a proposal to the Education portfolio holder and leader of the council.

We were proposing to extend our October half term holiday to two weeks, by adding an additional week before the current published date. That would mean that schools would be closed for the two weeks 19-30 October. We were also proposing to end our summer term on 24th July 2020.

We had given this matter very serious consideration, and as stated earlier engaged heavily with both headteachers and trade unions, along with meetings with chairs of governors, to seek a way forward that is best for our learners and staff. It is only after these discussions that we came to the view that we should support the Minister's request, and proceed with making the change. The reasons for this were various, but include

- a) Seeking to make good use of schools during a time when the R rate and infections across Wales (outside Anglesey's hotspot) is at a low point, giving us more certainty than we may have later in the year.
- b) Bringing learners back into carefully-managed school environments after an unprecedented length of detachment from schools, with growing concerns about the mental health and wellbeing of many of our children and young people, and in some cases, concern for colleagues.
- c) Seeking to use this time to help support learners with their wellbeing, but also to build up their skills for what might be a further extended period of distance and blended learning. Many colleagues have expressed concerns particularly about the wellbeing of and support for learners in the current year 10 and year 12. The unpredictability that faces that group for the next year is a serious concern, given the significance of that year in their lives. Our secondary schools are fully committed to supporting them, and can use the additional time in July to help equip them to be the best they can be in facing the coming months, helping them with planning their work and embedding their skills for further blended learning.
- d) Allocating a two week half-term holiday in October. At the moment, the statistical modelling is suggesting that October might be a particularly difficult time in terms of pandemic spread. Our schools will therefore be closed for two weeks in that month, but with our pupils better equipped for the next phase of blended learning than they could have imagined back in March, and hopefully our staff having a significant break in what is always a gruelling term.

The Leader and Educational portfolio agreed to the proposal.

