

### Olchfa School – Reopening information for September

Dear Parents and Carers

I hope that you and your loved ones are well during what continue to be challenging times.

I am writing to give you an update on the situation in school moving forward in September.

I am sure that many of you will be aware that the Education Minister, Kirsty Williams, issued guidance to schools on reopening late on Monday. This guidance is very detailed and you will appreciate that it takes some time to work through.

The reality is that the detailed arrangements cannot be communicated with you yet as it will take several weeks to sort them out fully. However, I can provide you with an overview of what school will look and feel like for your sons/daughters when they return to Olchfa in September.

Detailed individual timetables and instructions will follow during the summer holidays when they are finalised. These details will not change or affect your understanding of the overall picture that I will map out for you here.

#### **'A Full Return'**

Basically, the scientific evidence assessed by Welsh Government has convinced it that a return for all pupils is both desirable and achievable in September. Schools have been given two weeks to work towards this return, with a final 'deadline' for full reopening on September 14<sup>th</sup>. Schools can, if they feel able, return fully before that date and we have decided here that **full opening will happen on Monday September 7<sup>th</sup>**.

Some year groups will return before that date.

The term was due to begin on Tuesday September 1<sup>st</sup>. In line with local authority guidance we will be holding two staff preparation days on Tuesday September 1<sup>st</sup> and Wednesday September 2<sup>nd</sup> in order to enable the staff of the school to make sure everything is ready for pupils to come back.

On Thursday September 3<sup>rd</sup> we will welcome our new Year 7. We want to give them a full day with us as they have missed all of the transition activities they would normally have experienced.

On Friday September 4<sup>th</sup>, Year 12 will join Year 7. Year 12 have to be settled into new Sixth Form programmes of study and, again, they have missed some of what we would normally have had to do with them.

**On Monday September 7<sup>th</sup> all pupils will return to school.**

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**Is this a return to 'normal'?**

The answer to this question is a complex one and is best answered with the word 'partly'. I will try to explain why whilst trying not to confuse you with too much detail.

All pupils will be in school all of the time but the school day, and the way it is structured, will change slightly. Movement around the building will be much more rigorously controlled than before, pupils will be kept apart from those who they do not normally mix with in their form groups as much as possible, and break and lunchtimes will look and 'feel' different.

Finally, the school will operate staggered start and finish times. Please note, however, that teaching time remains the same, as does the **core school day of 8.30 a.m. to 3.00 p.m.**

The school will be divided into six 'learning zones' which will be kept separate. These zones will accommodate six groups of pupils: Years 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 and the Sixth Form.

In the case of Key Stage 3 pupils (Years 7, 8 and 9), pupils will remain in their allocated rooms pretty much through all of the day. These groupings are possible because, for the most part, Key Stage 3 pupils are taught in form groups and can therefore stay in the same place and with the same people.

Teachers will travel to pupils rather than the other way around. This is different to the 'normal' experience.

At Key Stage 4 (Years 10 and 11) and in the Sixth Form, things are slightly more complicated. Pupils have made subject choices by this point and these subject choices take pupils, literally, in opposite directions. Up to a point, subjects like English and Science allow for pupils to remain in the same groups, but the problem begins when the optional subjects kick in. For example, let's imagine two pupils in the same form or subject group. They are taught together for some of the time, but at other times they are doing different subjects. The answer in the guidance is that these choices can continue but that the school should look carefully at where pupils are, and when, and do what is possible to minimise unnecessary contact between these larger groups of pupils. This is what we intend to do.

**Minimising unnecessary contact**

I think it's fair to say that the national guidance can be summed up as 'the art of the possible'. It frequently uses phrases like 'where possible' and so on. Clearly, if all pupils return to school, 1800 pupils cannot be kept fully apart in a building of this size. In the end, it will be about taking all sensible measures to minimise that contact.

The school will operate a staggered start. Key Stage 3 pupils will arrive at 8.30 and will enter the school through different specified entrance points and will assemble in different areas in order to be taken to their learning zones. Hand sanitising routines will be applied.

Key Stage 4 pupils and Sixth Formers will arrive at 8.45 and will go to their designated areas to meet form tutors initially. Again, entry to the school will be via specified entrances. Any pupil told to come in at one entrance who tries to use another will be refused entrance at that other location. These measures are for all of our safety and must be observed.

**Lessons will begin at 9.10.****Lesson 1 will run from 9.10 to 10.00**

**Lesson 2 will run from 10.00 to 11.05.** This will allow 15 minutes during that lesson for a supervised morning break. These breaks will be staggered to keep certain groups of pupils apart. Some pupils will have their break between 10.00 and 10.15 and the others between 10.50 and 11.05.

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### **Lesson 3 will run from 11.05 to 11.55**

**Lesson 4** is the biggest difference. It **will run from 11.55 until 1.40**. However it will be a bit like Lesson 2 in that lunch will be contained within it to allow staggered lunches and an element of separation. The lunch element itself will be 35 minutes long. So, some pupils will have their lunch at 11.55 to 12.30, for example, whilst others would eat between 1.05 and 1.40 and so on.

**Lesson 5 will run from 1.40 until 3.00**. The vast majority of this time will be teaching time but we will start to release pupils, in specified order, from about 2.40. Key Stage 3 pupils will leave first as they were the first ones to arrive in the morning.

All of this allows for an element of separation and also allows opportunities for deep cleaning venues, both during and after the school day. I hope you see the logic of it.

As I have hinted, it is going to be really important that everyone in our community (pupils and staff) really reads and acts on the information given to them. I'm thinking particularly of the timetables you will receive later this summer. We have to enter the building in a certain way and via a certain route – all of us. Teachers need to know exactly where they are heading because they will be moving around in a way they have not had to do before. Pupils will need to read their timetables very carefully. They will not, for example, be taught 7 'English' lessons in the same room. It may well be that the 7 lessons are taught in 7 separate rooms, albeit within the same learning zones. They need to know where they are going, day by day, and this will require them (maybe with your encouragement and assistance) to read the information that will be given to them carefully so that they know what is expected of them. Our youngest pupils are the luckiest ones here; they will be the ones who tend to stay in one place and so things should be easier for them.

One thing I need to mention and explain here is the fact that our 6 learning zones will not be permanent bases for year groups. Confused? Well, for example, one of our learning zones contains nearly all of our Science laboratories. If we made that the permanent 'home' of Year 8, for example, then only Year 8 could ever have Science practical lessons. The same is true of other specialised areas like gyms, art room, the Drama Studio, Music rooms, Technology rooms and so on. I think you probably get my drift. So year groups will move to a new learning zone each day. Any issues around contamination are prevented because, at the end of each day, each zone will be deep cleaned.

### **School Uniform**

The guidance is clearly in favour of a return to full school uniform. We will do that here, but **not immediately**. We are mindful of existing public health advice around the easy and frequent washing of clothes, but we are also aware that we were in the middle of completing our transition to a new uniform. With this in mind, and knowing that some of you will have faced financial challenges over this period, we've decided to postpone the day when all pupils are expected to be in our full (new) uniform to **Monday September 28<sup>th</sup>**. Hopefully, this will give some of you, as parents and carers, a little more time to prepare. Please note that not wearing uniform is not the same as wearing anything you like. We expect pupils to observe the existing rules on jewellery, make up and so on.

### **What can my son/daughter bring with them to school?**

The general principle is that people (pupils and staff) bring only what they absolutely need to school, keep it with them at all times and take it home with them at the end of the day. This minimises any cross contamination opportunities. In line with public health guidance, frequently used items such as mobile phones should be cleaned frequently. Mobile phones are expected to be kept away from sight and switched off at all times in school. Pupils who ignore this advice will have their phones confiscated and you will be called in as parents/carers.

### Teaching and Learning

I hope that it will be obvious to you that, with all pupils returning for all of the time, the capacity to offer distance learning will all but disappear. Put bluntly, teachers will not be able to do two things at the same time. The announcement from Welsh Government today about 'shielding' ending on August 16<sup>th</sup> creates a route map for a return to normality for all. There may be a very small number of pupils with extremely serious medical issues for whom it might still be appropriate to offer learning support but these cases will be very rare and will need to be discussed at an individual level and supported by the appropriate medical evidence.

The advice that the school has received is that it would be inappropriate in the first half term to issue penalty notices to parents who do not send their children to school. In my view, this is the right decision. However, I need to make it clear here that pupils who do not return to school will be at a very real risk of falling behind their peers, particularly if they are in examination year groups. Work will not be repeated and pupils will, inevitably, fall behind. Having said that, health is precious and I would be the last to criticise a parent who still felt anxious about sending a child back to school. Sooner or later, though, we all have to return to some sort of normality.

What I will say, though, is that we have seen some real benefits of distance learning (as well as some of the frustrations, as I'm sure you'll agree). We are going to be focusing a significant amount of time and effort next year, via our research team at school, looking at the benefits of elements of distance learning moving forward. It seems that there are lessons we've learned about how we can support pupils generally when they are working at home. I'm thinking here of extension and research activities and the nature of homework and so on.

### General Issues

There is a great deal more in the guidance that I could share with you, but this letter is already quite long. Basically, most of it is to do with the general health and safety advice around Covid 19; things like personal hygiene, what to do if a child has symptoms, deep cleaning and so on. In due course I will issue a full booklet outlining the entire spectrum of factors we have had to consider and plan for. For now, however, please rest assured that we have 'played safe' in all of these areas and gone at least as far as the guidance and in many cases further.

I know that all of you, to a greater or lesser extent, feel a bit anxious about the next few months. If it's any consolation, the staff at the school feel that way too. We all worry about the things that are still unknown about this virus; the chance of a second spike and so on. However, we are now on the threshold of the 'new normal' and we all need to give it our best shot. With your support and encouragement, your sons and daughters can return to school with at least some confidence that everything that can be done is being done to protect their safety but also to ensure that their learning, proper learning, begins again.

As always, I hope that this letter finds you safe and well and that you stay that way.

Sincerely



Hugh Davies  
Headteacher