



BISHOP VAUGHAN
CATHOLIC SCHOOL

9th December 2020

Dear Parents and Carers,

I need to bring to your attention the very difficult position we find ourselves in currently, this now making it impossible to avoid adapting on-site provision plans in some way in the remaining days of this term.

Like so many schools across the city, and indeed further afield, we are faced with large numbers of staff and pupils self-isolating. While there is no evidence of virus transmission within the school community, the city-wide picture of increased cases is reflected within our pupil and staff population. Large numbers are currently self-isolating due to their own positive cases or having been identified as a contact of a positive case.

Despite significant pressures in terms of staff absence, particularly in the last 7-10 days, we have been able to operate the school safely due to the fact that there has also been a reduction in the number of year groups in school, with Track and Trace having contacted us to put in place isolation requirements for several. With this reduction in year groups and with exceptional efforts on the part of the staff, who have worked to cover colleagues' absence (these often occurring at short notice with requests to collect their own children from schools) and cover up to six outdoor duties each day – forgoing all breaks – to make sure that the split lunchtimes and breaktimes for each bubble are supervised, we have been able to ensure that all year groups able to attend school are not impacted by the rising levels of absence.

In the coming days, however, while the numbers of affected staff are rising, the isolation dates for all affected year groups end. Having analysed the situation very carefully in conjunction with the Governing Body, the Diocese and the Local Authority, we have no option but to close on-site provision to some of our year groups and move these pupils to blended learning. As you are aware, we have worked extensively on the blended learning provision in case of an eventuality such as this and find that our pupils' engagement with it is excellent.

Of course, the greatest challenge in the decision-making that surrounds this is centred around which groups should be offered on-site provision, and which the blended learning provision. Key considerations in this, amongst so many others, have been:

- Looking at which year groups have been **least** impacted by bubble closures
- Looking at which year groups have been **most recently** impacted by bubble closures
- Looking at which year groups are **engaging in online learning** particularly well
- Taking account of **family pressures** with work and childcare

You will be aware that, to date, Year 9 pupils have been entirely unaffected by bubble closures, and also that Years 7 and 10 both only end their isolation periods at the end of this week (Year 10 on Thursday 10th December and Year 7 on Friday 11th December). On this basis, we have had to make the decision that, starting on Friday, **Years 9, 11 and the Sixth Form will have**

blended learning provision made to them in their homes (the Sixth Form are in fact already isolating), and **school will be open to pupils in Years 7, 8 and 10**, as normal. These arrangements will remain in place up to and including the last day of term, which is Friday 18th December.

We hope that parents of our younger pupils will find the decision that we have made supportive in terms of childcare considerations, and that all parents will understand the rationale above. We are aware, of course, that there will be some families of pupils in Year 9, 11 or the Sixth Form for whom this arrangement will present difficulties due to issues with either childcare or access to online learning. For that reason, should parents/ carers of children in those year groups wish to send their children in to school despite those year groups being 'closed', we will make provision for them to access the online learning for their year groups under teacher supervision. Should you wish your child to access this provision, please email the Student Services team at ServicesS@hwbcymru.net, or telephone on 01792 772006. As we anticipate that this will be a small number of pupils, they will be placed together in one or two groups, this therefore combining pupils of different ages and becoming a new contact group, or bubble. We will be in touch with all families of pupils entitled to free school meals to discuss provision arrangements.

The strict protocols for ensuring your child's safety, such as those for frequent hand sanitisation, cleaning of workspaces between every user, split break and lunchtimes, etc., will continue in our efforts to reduce the likelihood of virus transmission amongst those who attend school in the last week of this term.

Online learning provision will be made, as stated, for all pupils in Years 9, 11 and the Sixth Form. We regret that we are unable to offer this to pupils in Years 7, 8 and 10 who do not attend school from Friday 11th – Friday 18th December. We are aware that some parents and carers have made the decision that their children will not be attending school in the final week of term to reduce the likelihood that their child will be required to self-isolate over the Christmas period. While we fully understand the pressures upon families and the difficult decisions with which parents and carers are faced, and while there will be no penalties for non-attendance as outlined by the Local Authority in their recent letter to parents ([Microsoft Word - 04 12 20 Letter to parents & carers](#)), our teachers of those year groups will be teaching the classes present in school throughout the week and therefore will not be able to deliver online lessons also. The Local Authority has confirmed its intention that schools will remain open until Friday 18th December, except where partial closures are necessary due to safety considerations in terms of staff: pupil numbers, and as such we are making provision on-site for as many pupils as we can safely cater for. All staff, other than those unwell or isolating, will be working up on the school site up to and including 18th December to teach those classes, to supervise at breaktimes and lunchtimes and to deliver blended learning to those accessing lessons remotely.

To confirm arrangements, then:

- Year 7 pupils will return to school on Friday 11th December; school will be open for these pupils up to and including Friday 18th December
- Year 8 pupils will continue in school up to and including Friday 18th December

- Year 9 pupils will end on-site provision on Thursday 10th December and begin blended learning on Friday 11th December; this will continue up to and including Friday 18th December
- Year 10 pupils will return to school on Thursday 10th December; school will be open for this year group up to and including Friday 18th December
- Year 11 pupils will end on-site provision on Thursday 10th December and begin blended learning on Friday 11th December; this will continue up to and including Friday 18th December
- Sixth Form pupils, who are already isolating, will continue with their blended learning provision up to and including Friday 18th December

Finally, may I re-issue a plea to all parents not to send any child in to school if they, or a family member, is displaying any of the symptoms associated with Covid-19? This is for the protection of all, and it will be key to ensuring that no groups of pupils receive messages from Track and Trace requiring them to self-isolate over the Christmas period. The importance of us all working together to control and prevent infection has been highlighted clearly in reporting over the last two days; see <https://twitter.com/SwanseaCouncil/status/1336279051762360320> and <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-55216458>. With the news of the vaccine on the horizon, but not here for most of us yet, it is more vital than ever that we do not slacken in our efforts to keep safe and prevent virus transmission.

We remain committed to doing everything within our power to safeguard your children and, by extension, you and your families in these tough times. We are in awe of the resilience and maturity of our exceptional pupils despite the restrictions imposed by the virus. We are grateful for the unwavering support and the strength in our school community and keep every family in our prayers.

Yours faithfully,



Mrs. E. Pole
Headteacher