

Belong . . .
Believe . . .
Achieve . . .



Waterloo
Oakdale
BLACKWOOD
NP12 ONU
01495 233600
ihsc@caerphilly.gov.uk
www.islwynhigh.org

Headteacher: Mr J Hicks

Chair of Governors: Mr G Bryce

5th March 2021

Dear Parents/Carers,

At long last we now have operational guidance from Welsh Government for the proposed phased return to school beginning 15th March with an initial focus on older pupils. Disappointingly, however, I think it is fair to say that the documentation is rather ambiguous and certainly open to interpretation and, as a result, we are not yet in a position to confirm our plans other than to echo the guidance's focus on welcoming back older pupils first. We hope to make our return as successful as that which our cluster primary colleagues have experienced this week and via Karyn Davies (our transition co-ordinator and Assistant headteacher) they have shared some of their experiences in a document that I have attached. It is lovely to see so many smiling faces being welcomed back to school and this is our ambition for Islwyn pupils in the coming weeks!

We fully understand the need to try and let you know as soon as we can how we see the weeks between the 15th and Easter taking shape but we are also conscious of the need to be confident that our model will be educationally sound and crucially as safe as it can be and we do not want to prematurely communicate something which we may have to subsequently 'roll back' from; hopefully you will understand the need for a steady approach here and try to be patient for a few days at least.

Part of whatever plan we release will be the provision of twice weekly lateral flow testing for all staff based solely at our site. We have now received enough tests to start providing this facility to coincide with the return of pupils a week on Monday and SLT and other staff who have been working with pupils on site will be trialling the tests from Monday morning. Further details and the provision of tests will follow for all staff in advance of next Friday and we hope to take delivery soon of enough testing kits to be able to offer testing to pupils in Year 10 and 11 moving forward (the Welsh Government operational guidance does not require testing for pupils in Years 7 – 9). We strongly recommend the use of the tests for all staff and those pupils in Year 10 and above and we hope that it will provide at least some level of greater reassurance around the return to site. The operational guidance also now details that face coverings should be worn in classrooms as well as communal areas where social distancing is problematic.

We also now have greater clarity around the Centre Determined Grades process for Year 11 pupils with today's release of the latest version of the guidance from Qualifications Wales; Mrs Mainwaring and I intend to say more about the principles and detail of the document next week once we have had time to digest it over the weekend.

These are certainly interesting times and I am sure the next few weeks are likely to bring their own unique challenges but I am personally really looking forward to welcoming back our pupils and seeing (finally) how we operate in something like more normal circumstances. I am certain the whole school community will do its very best to make reopening work so that the young people in our care will feel they belong, can believe and will ultimately achieve (even in these bizarre circumstances) as we are finally able to open our doors to them once more.

Please take a look at the primary return to school document attached if you have the chance – it really is heart-warming to see happy pupils returning to school all across our cluster. Thank you to all our cluster primary colleagues for working so hard to make it happen; we hope we can build on your success in the coming weeks!

Kindest regards,

Mr J Hicks
Headteacher