

CYNGOR SIR POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL

**County Council
30th July 2020**

REPORT AUTHOR: County Councillor Phyl Davies

SUBJECT: Question from County Councillor Sandra Davies

The Minister for Education, Kirsty Williams gave Local Authorities the choice of school staff working an extra, fourth week ‘voluntarily’ at the end of July (normal school holiday) and have two weeks holiday in October - or not. Powys County Council is one three LA’s that have agreed to adopt this. Has this Authority considered the impact this will have on young people’s education?

The current “Catch Up” system, incorporating social distancing, equates to young people attending school one day a week for face to face teaching for three or four weeks.

Other LA’s who have not accepted this system will not have schools open for the fourth week, at the end of July but their schools will be open for a full week in October for all their young people: four extra days of attending school.

Response

Thank you for your questions relating to the four-week end of term that we decided to adopt, following the request from the Minister for Education. You are correct to state that only a few authorities have adopted the approach, but our decision was taken after very serious deliberation.

We engaged heavily with both headteachers and trade unions, along with meetings with chairs of governors, to seek a way forward that would be 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 to our term dates.

The reasons for our decision were various, but at that time included

- a) Seeking to make good use of school days during a time when the R rate and infections across Wales (outside Anglesey’s hotspot) was 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 in the next academic year. 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 could 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. During our discussions, headteachers were keen to stress that their examination classes could benefit from maximum time during July so that they could be well-set up for summer working and beyond.
- d) Allocating a two-week half-term holiday in October. In June, when the matter was a very 'live' issue, the statistical modelling suggested that October might be a particularly difficult time in terms of pandemic spread. Our schools could therefore be closed for two weeks in that month, but with 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.
- e) We also sought the agreement from the Church in Wales directors of education in both diocese covering Powys, the Catholic church director of education and the governing bodies of all voluntary aided and foundation school in line with Section 32A (7) of the Education Act 2002, and they were fully supportive of our decision.

The decision was taken entirely for educational reasons, and given the uncertainty at the time of the decision it was better to use the days that had on offer, and ensure that our learners could be supported to the best of our ability prior to their summer break.