

## Newsroom

### Council leaders to allow schools to move to distance learning

COUNCIL leaders in Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire and Ceredigion are allowing schools across the region to move to distance learning in the run-up to Christmas.

It follows a meeting between the Association of Directors of Education and Welsh Local Government Association representatives with the Education Minister Kirsty Williams this afternoon (Thursday, December 10) in which she announced that all secondary schools and colleges move to online learning from Monday, December 14 as part of a 'national effort to reduce transmission of coronavirus'.

However, due to rapidly increasing coronavirus cases within the Hywel Dda footprint area, all three councils have decided on a regional approach.

Carmarthenshire council is allowing all primary and special schools the choice to move to distance learning or remain open from Tuesday, December 15.

However, in Ceredigion all primary and special schools will move to distance learning from Tuesday, December 15.

#### **In Pembrokeshire, all primaries will move to distance learning from Tuesday, December 15.**

Council leaders are concerned the situation will only get worse in the coming week if no action is taken and have made the decision in the best interest of staff, pupils and their families.

The rising number of cases in the community is having a significant effect on staff and pupils having to self-isolate, leading to major staffing issues within schools as well as putting considerable pressure on the Test Trace Protect teams.

All local authorities are working closely with headteachers and Chairs of Governors to ensure this has as little impact as possible on children's learning.

Families with children eligible for free school meals will receive payment to cover the days they are learning from home.

Carmarthenshire County Council Leader Cllr Emlyn Dole said: "We are extremely concerned about how quickly the virus is spreading in our communities, and unfortunately this is having a significant impact on our schools.

"We have already seen some schools having to close, not because coronavirus is circulating there but because so many staff are having to self-isolate.

"Our schools have worked hard to provide a safe environment; the problem is not in our schools but in the community, where people are mixing with each other causing the virus to spread easily.

"This hasn't been an easy decision, but we want to make sure pupils and staff can enjoy Christmas with their families. I cannot emphasise enough though how important it is that pupils stay at home and carry on with the work set by their teachers and do not mix with other households, otherwise all this will be for nothing, and the virus will continue to spread exponentially."

Ceredigion County Council Leader Cllr Ellen ap Gwynn said "We all recognise the hard work of school staff during the year and in meeting the challenges that the coronavirus has brought, whilst at the same time continuing to deliver high quality teaching, face to face or remotely. We also recognise that our pupils have had to adapt to the new ways of working.

"However, now is the time to ensure the health and safety of our pupils and staff in the lead up to Christmas and closing schools for face-to-face teaching will enable families to limit contact with people they do not live with leading up to Christmas. The risk of catching coronavirus is reduced when we limit how much contact we have with others – these days will give families that opportunity so that they can see loved ones over the festive period."

Pembrokeshire County Council Leader Cllr David Simpson said: "This has been a difficult decision to take but one that we hope parents and carers can understand.

"Coronavirus is spreading across our communities and we see the impact every day with increasing numbers of classes and year groups having to self-isolate.

"It is important to emphasise that this is not an extended Christmas holiday. Pupils should not be mixing with other households – just like adults should not be mixing with other households.

"It's up to all of us to do our bit to fight coronavirus.