



Ysgol Uwchradd
CASTELL ALUN
High School

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Acting Head/Pennaeth Dros Do: Paul Edwards B.A. (Hons) N.P.Q.H.

9th December 2020

Dear parent / carer,

I really hope you are keeping well. Today, after very great deliberation with the Senior Leadership Team and guided by the latest statement issued by the Technical Advisory Group to Welsh Government (although not Welsh Government Policy) I have conducted a full consultation with our Chair of Governors and have made the decision that it is in the best interests of our entire school community to move over to remote learning for learners for the final week of term.

We will continue to provide high quality teaching and learning through digital technologies for all, in keeping with our distance blended learning protocols and staff will undertake this from the school premises. This approach is the best way to ensure that learning can continue and indeed be consolidated and developed until the end of this term. This was by no means an easy decision to make, but it is a decision that I believe is in the best interests and well-being of the Castell Alun school family.

The Technical Advisory Group Statement regarding the pre-Christmas period strongly suggests the following:-

"A period of pre-isolation for families with children as a result of school closures could reduce the level of social mixing ahead of 23-28 December..... (next week) should be used for reducing social contacts, with a clear 'stay at home' message for all age groups.....(this would) likely be an effective way of lowering your risk of infecting others". The report also states, *"it is to be expected that numbers of school students in self-isolation as a 'bubble' contact will continue to grow as cases in the community rise."*

Furthermore, a recent Welsh Government and WLGA announcement regarding schools in the run-up to Christmas stated, *"...moving to remote learning will only be used where it is proportionate to the prevalence and impact of the virus within the locality"*. Sadly, COVID-19 cases in Flintshire and across our close border in Wrexham continue to rise at an alarming rate. At Castell Alun we feel we are more likely to maintain learner engagement with a remote learning approach, and indeed some parents have already signalled an intention to withdraw their children from school next week. Through our Google Classroom use we can ensure continuity of the curriculum to the end of next week and also guarantee adequate staff provision. We talk to our students often about caring for others and feel strongly that our words are given meaning when we lead by reasonable example and play our part in mitigating against the rising number of local COVID positive cases by deliberately reducing contacts for a short period of time.

We fully intend to do our best to support every member of the school family in ensuring they have the best possible chances of not having to self-isolate over the festive period, and especially between 23rd - 27th December. You will probably be aware that many other Flintshire schools currently have year groups who are self-isolating, and I would remind you that Test Trace and Protect currently require an entire year group to self-isolate following a single case for 10 days.

In making this decision we have considered many varied factors. We have decided that the **Years 12 and 13 should still attend school for their ongoing mock examinations** from Monday 14th to Wednesday 16th December, and for which they are revising so hard. However, these examinations will take place absolutely with due regard to social distancing and other enhanced hygiene measures. We feel this is necessary because Years 12 and 13 require examination hall experience and have the right to prove their learning gains at this stage of their development, with data then potentially being used to assist in the eventual formulation of grades, along with other forms of internal and external assessment. Mr Kevin Davies will write to all Sixth Form students with further information.

Furthermore, students in Years 7 and 8, who are unable to distance learn from a suitable venue with due supervision, perhaps as a result of parents' / carers' work commitments, would still be able to be able to attend school and pursue their learning in a staffed computer room with access to the same input as their peers who are distance-learning. If you require your Years 7 and 8 child(ren) to attend school, please contact the school office with this information, before 3.30pm on Friday 11th December in order that provision can be made. Please phone on **01978 760238** or email reception@castellalun.flintshire.sch.uk

We will, of course, make arrangements for families eligible for free school meals to receive direct payments for this period. For students with specific learning requirements which cannot easily be met through online provision, or if students do not have access to ICT at home, please contact Mr Carl Pugh (Acting Deputy Head), who will place you in contact with the appropriate member of staff. If we are unable to supply ICT support we will provide hard copies of relevant materials. We are told that school buses should actually still run as normal, and will only be stopped if there are no passengers.

I believe that it is important to try to do the *right thing*, and even though I genuinely appreciate that some parents / carers will not agree with this decision for perceivably equally convincing reasons, Castell Alun has to balance carefully the ability to maintain the safety of all our school community and to deliver an effective curriculum, with perhaps reduced staffing and in the unpredictability of the current situation.

Staff at Castell Alun have joined countless others across the nation in working hard to support learners and their families throughout this very difficult year. Colleagues have had to adapt their working practice quickly and in many different ways, and I thank and praise them for their continued commitment to our young people.

Thank you so much to parents and carers for being extremely supportive of our school and the great challenges we have faced, including the heart breaking passing of a student, in recent times. It has been a most difficult year for everyone without doubt, and both continuity of learning and reducing the risk of self-isolation over the Christmas period, which would mean not being able to spend precious time with loved ones, are the factors at the heart of this decision.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish you and your loved ones a very happy and safe Christmas.

Best wishes to all,

Paul Edwards