

Flintshire's rates of Covid-19 infection have been rising consistently over the last few weeks. On Friday 10th December, the incident rate reached 558.6 per 100K and whilst below the Betsi Cadwalader University Health Board average of 611.2, it is above the all Wales average of 501.9 per 100k.

Coronavirus infection rates are impacting on many schools and rapidly increasing workforce absence due to Covid-19 and other factors is now having a knock-on effect, with many Headteachers reporting that they are having difficulty in maintaining adequate staffing levels. Some Flintshire schools have already had to close classes or year groups to safely manage. The availability of supply staff is virtually non-existent, not only in Flintshire but across Wales, and this is adding to the pressures.

These factors and the emergence of the new variant of concern in the UK have prompted the Council to advise all schools to reintroduce blended learning from Monday, 20 December to Wednesday 22 December when the autumn term officially ends. Some schools have used training days or the Platinum Jubilee Bank Holiday entitlement to finish on 21st December whilst others were finishing on the 22nd December.

Claire Homard, Chief Officer for Education and Youth said

"This decision – which has the backing of head teachers – will allow staff to use a blended approach to deliver education, whilst also providing head teachers with the discretion to invite groups of learners to attend school for face-to-face learning where required particularly in examination year groups in secondary schools.

Children of **key workers** and **vulnerable children** will be permitted to attend school for the last few days of term (as determined by their school calendar) **if no alternative arrangements can be made**. Further information regarding arrangements will be issued directly by head teachers to parents. This decision has not been taken lightly. The Council expects the workforce situation to deteriorate as the week progresses so has made this decision now to give parents and carers as much time as possible to make arrangements."

Council Leader, Councillor Ian Roberts said,

"Flintshire County Council will do what we believe is necessary to safeguard our children, our staff and our communities. Coronavirus cases have increased considerably and, as a result, staff absence in schools has increased. This does not just include teachers but a wide range of support staff too.

Our young people will continue their education and will switch to blended learning for the last few days of term. We share the concerns of government around the Omicron variant and are aware that many parents and staff are extremely worried. We must consider people's wellbeing after a very difficult year.

"Our education team continues to work closely with head teachers and all staff in schools and I would like to thank our school staff, governing bodies and parents for their continued work and care during a very difficult time."

In the meantime it is vital that we all take the simple but necessary precautions so please remember to:

- wear a mask when needed
- get tested and self-isolate if required
- get vaccinated
- allow fresh air into indoor spaces
- take regular LFD tests at home