

The impact of COVID-19 on schools in the Diocese of Menevia

This briefing contains the feedback from headteachers from Catholic primary and secondary schools across the Diocese of Menevia on the impact of COVID-19 in their schools.

The Diocese of Menevia covers the ten constituencies of Aberavon, Carmarthen East and Dinefwr, Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire, Ceredigion, Gower, Llanelli, Neath, Preseli Pembrokeshire, Swansea East, and Swansea West.

The feedback documented below was given in a meeting with 17 primary and secondary headteachers (03/11/20) representing schools from 5 different local authorities. It provides examples of the impact on pupils, teaching staff, parents/carers and headteachers.



Impact on pupils

Only two schools have not had to send classes or Year groups home. The remaining schools are shutting down parts of the school every week. In the largest school this involved sending home over 200 children from a single year group (and those who had travelled on the various buses with them) during the school day. This in turn caused significant issues with transport. The largest primary school reported having to send home up to 3 classes each week and secondary schools have had up to four Year groups out of school at any one time.

Impact on teaching staff

Increasing numbers of staff are testing positive with the virus. Staff absence is significant because of positive tests and those who are self-isolating whilst awaiting test results. Examples from this month: a single form entry primary school had 5 members of staff on sick leave with COVID-19, two primaries with two form entry had over 10 staff absent, one school had a number of members of staff who had tested positive one of whom was in intensive care.

One head reported that the strict health and safety regimes within the school mean that there are no longer opportunities for staff to meet as a group and they are feeling isolated. Staff are anxious about the pupils and parents. They are also worried about ensuring continuity for learning as staff have had to upskill quickly and are having to deliver to pupils who are self-isolating as well as those who are still in school. Secondary school colleagues are very concerned about the arrangements for older pupils studying GCSEs, AS and A Levels who have been hit the hardest since the start of term.

Impact on parents/carers

Schools reported that there are increasing numbers of parents being affected by the virus. One school spoke about pupils struggling to cope with bereavements when parents and grandparents have died of the virus. Headteachers were unanimous in their opinion that parents were very supportive of the measures having to be taken by schools to keep schools open. However, changes to school routines and timetables as well as children being asked to self-isolate at short notice have also presented challenges for parents. Schools are having to spend a great deal of time communicating with parents, often outside the school day and at weekends. School leaders are providing a significant amount of support for families.

Impact on headteachers

The impact on headteachers is best illustrated by some of the comments they made:

"Covid is taking over everything we do"

"Heads are on duty 24/7"

"Covid is the biggest part of our job everyday"

"We are in a state of heightened alert most of the time"

"The level of responsibility falling on heads is massive and it is making a huge impact on them"

"This is crisis management"

"Working like this is unsustainable"

Some of the things causing extra stress:

- Implementation of the new curriculum
- Health and safety - constant scrutiny
- Estyn engagement calls
- Working through holidays
- Managing budgets which have not taken account of the impact of COVID-19
- Managing the impact of staff absence
- Providing support for parents/carers and families
- Supporting staff who feel isolated by COVID-19

What can be done to better support schools?

The Government is continuing to press ahead with the Curriculum and Assessment Bill which if it comes into force will require schools to radically change their entire curriculum for September 2022. This would be a challenge in normal times but during a global pandemic is near impossible. Headteachers feel that the Government does not understand the impact of COVID-19 and that they will be setting them up to fail.

Headteachers do not feel listened to or supported by the Government. Teaching Unions have voiced concerns about the impact of COVID-19 on staff welling and workload but there has been little practical support. There is a feeling that the Government is prioritising new legislation over support to teachers and schools who are dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic now.

The Curriculum and Assessment Bill should be paused while the COVID-19 pandemic is damaging society.