

Dear member,

'Happy new year' from all of us at the Caerphilly Branch. We hope you had a restful and enjoyable festive season.

On the turn of midnight we were all glad to see 2020 finally leave but unfortunately 2021 doesn't appear (so far anyway) to be looking any better right now. We're still in the grips of the COVID19 pandemic but all we can do is try to keep our spirits high, support and look out for one another and keep pushing through.

Over the festive period the 'return to school' has certainly dominated the headlines and has been the major issue of the week so far. With that in mind we felt it was appropriate to update you on the current position.

As a trade union we have been involved in national discussions but after careful consideration of current infection rates and impact of the new variant of Covid-19 in Wales, UNISON takes the view that it is unsafe for its school members to attend the workplace at present if their school is fully opened to all pupils.

Our advice to school members is that, should they decide, they should advise their head teacher or employer that they will not be attending the workplace but will be available to work remotely from home, or will only be in school to support the provision of learning for vulnerable children and children of keyworkers, if necessary. This advice applies to all schools, special schools, SEND settings and early years settings.

A model letter has been prepared for school members to use in order to assert their legal right to be protected against any detrimental action by their employer, including pay. This right is explained in full in the model letter.

Our advice applies for at least the first two weeks of this term and updated advice will be provided towards the end of this period.

We believe that delaying the resumption of face to face teaching will also provide time for Welsh Government to set out the clear and detailed plan and guidance for the rolling out of serial testing in schools; as yet, no details or timetable for this have been provided. Given the current situation and prevalence of the new variant, serial testing will be a vital measure to enable the safe opening of schools to all pupils.

UNISON continues to stress that the staffing of provision for vulnerable children and the children of key workers cannot fall on support staff alone, but that LAs and schools must ensure that this is covered by the wider school and LA staff complement.

As you can see this is a complex and ever changing situation with wide reaching implications but the safety of our members will always come first.

If you'd like more information please visit our dedicated schools page on the UNISON Cymru Wales website:

<https://cymru-wales.unison.org.uk/campaigns/school-support-staff-cymru-wales-coronavirus/> which has lots of information for school support staff

Also, school members can get all the latest information by following the UNISON Cymru Wales school support staff Facebook page - <https://www.facebook.com/walesupportstaff/>

I hope our update was useful but if you have any further questions/queries then please don't hesitate to give us a call or email the branch.

Take care and stay safe.

Lianne Dallimore
Juan-Antonio Garcia
Stephen Gardiner