Coronavirus:
Advice to members when responding to government and other official guidance

At this most challenging of times, headteachers and school and college leaders are being given much advice and guidance by local authorities, regional consortia, Estyn and the Welsh Government itself.

All of this advice is well-intentioned. However, not all of it is practicable, and some has the capacity to cause unnecessary uncertainty and stress for school and college leaders at a time when we need to have clarity and focus around the job at hand.

This has prompted ASCL Cymru to issue practical responses to some of this guidance as it emerges. This paper should enable school and college leaders to maintain a sense of what matters most at this time and to consider, objectively, what they are being asked to do. The aim is to reassure members around their own professional autonomy and judgement and to provide a template to help consider whether what is being asked is safe, reasonable and practicable.

Key Principles

ASCL Cymru believes strongly that school and college leaders:

- are best placed to make decisions regarding their own schools and colleges
- are best placed to consider what is safe and promotes the wellbeing of their staff and pupils
- are best placed to consider different forms of learning moving forward
- can be trusted to act with integrity and insight
- deserve to have their own wellbeing considered by others within the system
- should not be burdened with needless bureaucracy at a time of national crisis

Estyn: Guidance for school and PRU leaders and governors on how to continue with school and PRU business during the Covid 19 pandemic – April 2020

This document, as its title suggests, outlines how we as school and college leaders should conduct ourselves during this crisis. It takes the form of non-statutory guidance. It should not, therefore, be used at any point to form judgements around how school and college leaders have managed their school or college's response to this pandemic.

ASCL Cymru agrees with many of the principles outlined in the document. However, there are some areas where we think the document is unreasonable and/or unrealistic.

In the context of the document as a whole, the following brief checklist will show what we consider to be reasonable and what we do not.

It is reasonable for school and college leaders to:

- determine how to develop support for continuity of learning at home within the context of their own school/college
- determine a level of work that is reasonable for all staff
- have regard to the ability of staff in general to perform their duties in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic
- recognise the issues that might be faced by staff working from home
- emphasise to staff the importance of adhering to normal agreed procedures, protocols and safeguards whilst working from home
- acknowledge that staff may have different ways of working
- support staff wellbeing as far as practicably possible at a distance
- monitor the effectiveness of online learning, where possible to do so
- determine how to maintain contact with staff during the course of the pandemic
- establish ways of 'virtual' communication
- encourage staff to keep a basic record of virtual meetings (date, time, participants, brief notes)
- maintain contact with the governing body via the chair and clerk
- carry out, where possible, necessary strategic decision making

It is not reasonable for school and college leaders to:

- have a detailed knowledge of the individual circumstances of each member of staff
- use, or ask their staff to use, digital platforms with which they are not familiar or comfortable
- be held accountable for staff wellbeing, other than in general terms
- ensure that a detailed record is kept of every virtual meeting
- effectively monitor the performance of staff remotely, other than at a compliance level
- deal effectively with issues of underperformance remotely
- prescribe the precise hours, either in total or in their distribution, that a staff member should work remotely
- be responsible for the actions of staff who move outside normal agreed protocols set out by the school
- be able to guarantee the effectiveness of online learning or the level of take up by pupils

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