

Covid-19 Update for Schools

Monday 4th October 2021

The pandemic situation in the UK has greatly improved and life has been returning to normal though still with Covid-19 controls. However, despite the mitigations of vaccinations, infection rates have remained high for some months and recently have increased to the highest rates since January 2021. The centre reopened in July 2021, and feedback informs us that young people have been experiencing positive and uplifting experiences since. During the long period of closure many staff were furloughed, and others laid off. This is now a challenging period as we try to recruit and train new staff as we operate through a very busy autumn which will ease soon. Although there are few contingencies at present the centre and staff are robust by nature. We are confident of providing a good quality service unless Covid-19 intervenes.

Recent Infection

Recently on return from Plas Pencelli some staff and students tested positive for Covid-19. Centre staff isolated and commenced daily Lateral Flow Tests (LFTs) and a PCR test. Two staff were positive a day later and isolated for 10 days. Staff continued with regular LFTs, continue to be virus free and are back at work. Covid-19 controls were reviewed, and the Covid-19 Risk Assessment was updated. Due to staff shortages the following week had to be adjusted. All visiting schools were kept fully informed. It appears that the infection was introduced by a school illustrated by the timing and incidence of infection. The centre is infection free.

What Precautions are in place at Plas Pencelli for Covid-19?

The Covid-19 Risk Assessment has been reviewed, addresses all areas of operations and is available on the centre website (www.plaspencelli.co.uk). The levels of risk are controlled so that young people and staff would be no more at risk than in their school environment provided the control measures are followed. Centre staff are concerned about their health working each week with different young people that aren't generally tested. Centre staff undertake lateral flow tests on Sunday and Wednesday, and we ask that all visiting staff do this also. We are taking many covid-19 control steps above and beyond UK recommendations and of a higher standard than advised in English guidance for schools. See the Risk Assessment for further information.

Will visiting Staff have to wear masks?

Yes, we ask that visiting staff wear masks indoors and in minibuses particularly when Plas Pencelli staff are present. Centre staff also wear masks in caves and ask that visiting staff comply with this. See the Risk Assessment for further information.

Will visiting students have to wear masks?

Primary aged children aren't required to use face coverings at all. Secondary students do need to bring a mask and will need to wear it on limited occasions such as traveling in a minibus and as detailed in the Covid-19 Risk Assessment.

What can schools do to reduce the chance of infection?

Centre staff have been adhering to covid-19 controls, but we have found that its most likely that visitors don't always follow the centre's protocols. We therefore request again that all visiting staff follow centre guidance on Covid-19 and reminders will be made at all staff meetings. We also request that visiting schools before traveling are particularly vigilant with their students and avoid bringing any young person that displays any Covid-19

symptoms or where there are significant concerns that they may be infected. It's likely to be a much bigger issue in a residential rather than school setting.

Will Students be safe from Covid-19 infection if visiting Plas Pencelli?

As set out above we have created in conjunction with schools as safe an environment as possible with no more risk of infection than in school. However, there is a lot of infection in the population at large presently and there is no such thing as 100% protection from infection just as there isn't when attending school each day. Staff live in a rural setting, travel by private vehicle, and contact few people in their home lives presently.

Will the outdoor activities and weekly programme be affected?

Although there will be adjustments to arrangements as set out in the Risk Assessment, this won't greatly impact on the quality of the service and young people will still receive a positive, impactful, and undiminished outdoor education experience.

We're a school visiting soon what shall we do?

All schools due to visit are encouraged to liaise with the centre in the weeks and days prior to a visit. This allows for updates and emphasis of control measures. Schools will want to undertake risk assessments for the travel to and from the centre, free time supervision and overnight supervision regarding coronavirus and other risk factors. We will take prime responsibility for all other activities. We will also want to discuss arrangements for accommodation, activity groups and bathroom facilities before arrival. Please provide an emergency mobile contact in case we need to contact over the weekend.

Specialist Adult Courses in Oct-Dec.

These will go ahead in full, but the Covid-19 Risk Assessment will need to be followed particularly with regard to adults.

Finally

- No school has been financially penalised during the pandemic for Covid reasons.
- There is no better time for young people to attend an outdoor education residential.
- There are a few vacancies in 2022 but these are going fast.
- Dec to Feb courses are reduced by £20 per student. This is a great time to undertake a course in the Brecon Beacons. The adjusted programme runs from a warm base with free use of fleeces, gloves, waterproofs etc.
- Bookings are taken up to 2 years in advance and there is much competition.
- Please make contact if you have any queries.

We look forward to welcoming all to Plas Pencelli. Thanks for your continued support and understanding.

Peter Blackburn (Head of Centre)

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