

Stop firebreaks during half terms. These are the only breaks teaching staff are permitted to have

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Petition title: Stop firebreaks during half terms. These are the only breaks teaching staff are permitted to have

Text of petition: We have already had one firebreak during half term and teaching staff in Wales were unable to go anywhere or do anything. We cannot just book a week or two off work when we want, they have to be during the school holidays only. It is only fair that teaching staff and the children can go and enjoy their break for all their hard work during term times, just like we could if we had a choice of holiday. Allow children, staff, parents the freedom to enjoy valuable time together doing what they want.



1. Current position regarding COVID-19 restrictions

Wales is currently at [Alert Level 0](#). Whilst some restrictions remain, for example people must still self-isolate for 10 days if they test positive for COVID-19, face coverings are still mandatory in many indoor settings, and the Welsh Government advises against non-essential international travel, most of the restrictions brought in to manage the spread of COVID-19 have ended.

1.1. Education

Schools and colleges are currently open to all pupils and students other than those who are self-isolating due to COVID-19.

On [27 August 2021](#), the Welsh Government published Local COVID-19 Infection Control Decision Frameworks for [schools](#) and [colleges](#). These set out arrangements for the delivery of learning, enabling schools, colleges, work-based and adult learning providers to tailor interventions to reflect local risks and circumstances. The frameworks follow the issuing of [operational guidance](#) on [9 July 2021](#).

The Welsh Government's guiding principles behind the frameworks are to:

- enable education to operate as 'business as usual' as far as possible;
- secure the best outcomes for all learners by considering both their educational needs and wellbeing; and
- manage the ongoing risks of COVID-19 as safely as possible as for other infections, and ensure clarity of actions required if there is a case in a school or college.

The previous arrangement whereby whole classes, year groups or 'bubbles' as they were known had to stay away from school in the event of a single positive case has ended. The Test, Trace, Protect (TTP) system will instead be used to identify close contacts of learners who have tested positive, rather than the whole bubble not being able to attend school.

2. Previous school closures

There have been two prolonged periods whereby schools have closed to pupils other than vulnerable pupils and children of key workers for whom there was no safe alternative:

- From 23 March 2020 until the start of academic year 2020/21 in September (other than for several 'check in, catch up and prepare' days in July).
- Between the final week of the term before Christmas 2020 and Easter 2021 (infant pupils returned in late February, junior pupils in mid March while secondary pupils not in exam year groups did not return at all until after Easter).

[Note that secondary schools closed for an additional week following the October 2020 half term during the autumn 'firebreak'. There have also been instances where pupils have experienced disruption to face to face learning whilst schools have generally being open, due to 'bubbles' or whole year groups having to learn from home for a certain time due to positive cases amongst peers.]

3. The timing of 'firebreaks' or 'lockdowns' and the impact on teachers and pupils

As the Minister's letter indicates, the decision to time the October 2020 firebreak during the school half term was influenced by the desire to minimise the disruption to pupils' education. He also says while the Welsh Government hopes to be able to minimise the need for future firebreaks during school holidays, it will have to make decisions based on COVID-19 transmissions and public health conditions at the time.

The petition appears to ask for firebreaks or lockdowns, if they are judged necessary, to take place during school terms rather than school holidays in order to preserve teachers' and pupils' holiday and leisure time. However, this would not minimise disruption to pupils' education.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

