

7th January 2022

Dear Families,

I hope that you and your families had a lovely Christmas and a Happy New Year. I am sure that many of you may have had to change your plans over the Christmas period and I hope that if you or your families were affected by COVID or any other reason, you still managed to enjoy the past couple of weeks as much as possible.

Before giving a COVID update, I just wanted to say how lovely it has been seeing your children back at school this week and, whilst it is easy to become consumed by the operational challenges that COVID continues to present, it is also incredibly important never to lose sight of what we are here for and what we stand for as a school. Our mission, namely "to transform our children's lives and the lives of their families" and our ARCHITECT Values (Aspiration, Resilience, Courage, Humility, Integrity, Trust, Enthusiasm, Creativity, Teamwork) remain as important to us as they always have, and will continue to shape our decision-making in the weeks and months ahead.

In line with our commitment to communicate frequently and openly with you about all COVID-related matters, I can confirm that over the Christmas holidays (18th December – 4th January), we received confirmation of 40 positive cases, (30 staff and 10 pupils). This number mirrors the significant increase in positive cases in the community in recent weeks and I think it is fair to say that we are expecting there to be a number of cases being identified in the coming weeks, in line with the national picture. Our commitment has always been, and will continue to be to maintain as "normal" a school experience as possible for your children, balanced with keeping our whole school community as safe as possible whilst cases are still high.

In my letter dated 17th December, I wrote: *"Whilst none of us know how the next couple of weeks will pan out, as it stands, we plan to continue with these arrangements when we return to school in January. Should the guidance change during the holidays, we will of course let you know on our return"*. With this in mind, and in light of new guidance issued in recent days, we will maintain our existing control measures for the time being, including:

- All staff and visitors will be wearing face coverings in all communal areas, both inside and outside, on all three sites;
- All parents dropping off / collecting children from the school grounds are requested to wear a face covering, unless they are exempt from doing so;
- We will not be re-introducing large, cross-phase gatherings but will ensure non classroom-based curriculum opportunities are still on offer where deemed safe;
- We will consider the appropriateness of all visitors coming into school and these will be looked at on a case-by-case basis;
- We will not require any pupils in Y7 and above to wear face coverings in school, although we will support any pupils who wish to do so;
- There has been a lot of press coverage in recent days about the possibility of classes "merging" due to high levels of staff absence in schools due to COVID-related (and other) reasons. Our priority as a school will always be to keep disruption for your child at an absolute minimum, but should staff absence necessitate a flexible approach to class arrangements, then we will do this in order to protect schooling as much as we possibly can. We will, of course, keep this under review and will only contact you about potential disruption to schooling in exceptional circumstances.
- If your child has COVID-19 symptoms, you will be asked to arrange a PCR test for them and as soon as the results come back negative, they can return to school as long as they are well enough to do so;

- Asymptomatic testing is still considered to be important in reducing the risk of transmission of infection and whilst this remains voluntary, secondary-aged pupils are encouraged to test twice weekly at home if possible.

You may be aware that the guidance around testing and self-isolation has changed in recent days and I can confirm that from next Monday, 10th January:

- If your child is considered to be a close contact of a pupil or member of staff that has tested positive (ie in their class or sharing a vehicle), we will contact you. As per the latest guidance, we will ask you to test your child using a lateral flow device (LFD) every day for seven days so that they can continue to come into school safely (assuming the test is negative). If they test positive on a LFD test, they will need to self-isolate.
- If there is a positive case in your household, then the guidance is as above, namely your child does not need to self-isolate but again, we will ask you to take a LFD test every day for 7 days.
- If you are unable to source lateral flow devices, we are happy to provide them for this purpose.
- If, due to their specific needs, you wish to keep your child at home if they are a close contact of a positive case, please contact us and we will respect your decision to do so.
- If you have any questions around this guidance and your own particular circumstances, please feel free to get in touch.

You may be aware that the latest self-isolation advice for people who have tested positive for COVID-19 has also changed and it is now possible to end the self-isolation period before the end of the 10 full days. An LFD test can be taken 6 days after the day symptoms started (or the day the first LFD test was taken if there were no symptoms), and another LFD test 24 hours later. If both these test results are negative, and there is no high temperature, the self-isolation period can end after the second negative test result. However, if you would like to keep your child off school for the full 10 days, this will be authorised.

You will also be aware from previous letters that if there are two or more positive cases in one class, this is considered to be an “outbreak” and additional measures are put in place to try and minimise the risk of further transmission. Due to the recent change in guidance around PCR tests and LFD tests, our response to the management of any positive cases from now on will be:

- When one positive case is identified in a class, you will be contacted and asked to test your child using a lateral flow device (LFD) every day for seven days so that they can continue to come into school safely (assuming the test is negative). If they test positive on a LFD test, they will need to self-isolate (as mentioned above).
- If there is a second positive case identified in the same class (which would therefore be deemed an “outbreak”) the same rules apply as above, and we will introduce additional school-based control measures as appropriate. These will be risk-assessed on a case-by-case, class-by-class basis and we will let you know what additional measures are being taken in your child’s class.

I appreciate that there is a lot of information to take in and I hope that everything in this letter is clear. But to end, I would like to reiterate the point that despite the ongoing challenges, we are all looking forward to the coming weeks and months and whatever the pandemic brings, together, we will get through this with a smile on our face and a spring in our step.

With very best wishes,



Steve Solomons
Headteacher