



Dear Parents, Guardians, Carers, Children and Young People

I wanted to start by thanking you all for your help, support and guidance for our schools since the start of the term; and for your confidence in our approaches which has enabled so many of our children and young people to return to school during these continually complicated times. We appreciate and completely understand the concerns that many of you have as the Covid-19 pandemic has continued, and as the R-rate has risen and guidance has changed. Your continued support for the schools has enabled us to be able to ensure that our risk assessments are robust, adaptable, clear and follow the most up-to-date guidance to keep our children, young people and staff as safe as we possibly can.

Your feedback has been extremely helpful, and I wanted to take time to clarify a few areas of concern that have been raised by yourselves, and to set out our next steps.

1. Guidance on suspected cases in schools.

Some concern has been raised about whether schools should be informing parents where suspected cases have been identified in schools. We have checked with the Public Health Authority South West (PHASW), and with the Department for Education (DfE) and the guidance is clear – where there are suspected cases in a cohort or a school, those affected will be directed to take a Covid test, and the school will inform PHASW if a positive result is returned. At the stage PHASW and the Local Authority will guide the school and the Trust as to the response required through the Track and Trace system and we will be able to inform parents. We are advised not to share suspected cases with parents, and to only share confirmed case information in line with PHASW guidance.

2. Another local school is working in a different way and providing different information to parents. There are some aspects of the guidance that can be interpreted in slightly different ways. I have raised this with the DfE, the Regional Schools' Commissioner and with the Local Authorities who share the same concern and who are committed to ensuring a consistency in approach across all schools to help parents' confidence in the messaging they are receiving. Our approaches have been checked, and verified by the Health and Safety Authority over the last two weeks and we are confident that our approaches represent the most appropriate and effective response.

3. What do I do if my child is poorly, or showing any Covid-19 symptoms? We appreciate how hard it is to make the decision about whether or not to send your child(ren) in to school if they are under the weather, or may be displaying symptoms of colds, flu, or other seasonal illnesses. We also understand that everyone needs some support and guidance in this; however, our schools are not qualified to make this decision and don't want to put anyone in the position of making the wrong choice, and so we've attached the parents' flow chart to this letter to give some guidance on what to do. First and foremost, you know your child(ren) best – if they are not well then at the moment please keep them away from school in the first instance and seek advice from your GP. If they are displaying any of the Covid-19 symptoms, please ensure that you let the school know immediately and seek a test through the 119 helpline.

4. 119 helpline. We have been informed this week that 119 are advising parents seeking Covid tests that schools are holding sufficient tests for parents to get one from their school if they aren't able to get to a test centre or to locate a test locally. We have sought to have this advice changed as schools have only been provided with up to 10 emergency tests, to be used at the schools' discretion and which can only be replaced in limited supply. Your school will advise you if they

can provide you with a test, but I wanted to clarify that schools will not hold sufficient tests for everyone.

5. **Attendance.** There has been a lot of concern raised about attendance, and whilst the Government guidance is rightly clear about the expectation of attendance for all pupils there have been some requests for clarity about potential action to be taken against parents for the non-attendance of children and young people. I wanted to be clear on this... If your child is genuinely unwell and unable to attend school, or if they are self-isolating, or have been permitted not to attend for a specific and agreed reason, then schools will not seek an enforcement notice. If you are worried about your child returning to school and have not supported their return yet, please talk to your child's school first; go and see how they are running; and ask for support and guidance. We want to see every single child and young person in the Trust back into full-time education as soon as we can, and our schools are doing an amazing job to ensure that this is possible and as safe as it can be. If you have concerns, please talk to your child's school, or to us. School will only be advised to take further action where it is deemed to be necessary to ensure that the child(ren) come in to school as expected. Similarly, please be aware that the attendance figure for your school have an impact on how they are viewed Nationally, and can impact negatively on their inspection outcomes too, and so whilst it is best for the children and young people to be in school, it is also important to your schools' success that they attend too.
6. **Wrap-around Care.** In my last letter to you I set out a timeline for us to check and to test our risk assessments in order that we could, as and when we felt it appropriate, start to look at opening up additional provision. We have also heard from you of the need for Wrap-around care provision to open up, where possible. I am delighted to say that in some of our schools we are now in a position to be able to begin to open the wrap-around care provision. It will be limited in the first instance, and will be different in each school setting where it is possible. But it will be a start. Your school will let you know as soon as it is able to open the wrap-around care provision and how it will work.
7. **Extra-curricular School-run (after-school) Clubs.** The school day looks and feels very different for everyone at the moment. It is a lot more intense and focused, and this does have an impact on the amount of time available and on the ability of our staff to be able to run the after-school clubs in the current climate. Whilst they would love to be getting started we are advising schools, in line with the changing guidance, to not start any of these clubs until later in the Autumn term, unless there is significant capacity to do so. We will keep you up to date with any changes in this guidance.

I hope that this will help to give you continued confidence in the work of our schools, and in our close focus on capacity and safety-first planning. I will continue to keep you updated over the forthcoming weeks as guidance changes and adapts, and as we gain further information about the expectations for schools over the forthcoming weeks.

My thanks again to you all. I hope that you continue to stay safe and well. My thoughts and prayers are with you all.

With kind regards,

Jez Piper

CEO

Diocese of Bristol Academies Trust