



Friday 6th November 2020

Dear Parents, Guardians, Carers, Children and Young People,

A warm welcome back to Term 2 and to the start of what is already going to be rather a different term ahead of us.

I wanted to write, in light of our going back into lockdown yesterday, to offer some reassurances and to give some clarity on how we are going to need to be working together over the forthcoming weeks.

Because the national and local situation is changing so rapidly I have committed to writing to you all each Friday to give an update so that you are aware of what is happening across the Trust and any changes in guidance and approach that we've had to put into place. I hope that will be of some help to you all.

You will all be aware that the approach to the national lockdown has been slightly different this time. You will also have seen in both the national and local news that whilst schools are doing all they can to provide consistent education the knock-on impact of staff children going into self-isolation, school families going into self-isolation, track and trace notifications of close contact, bubble closures, and some incidence of positive cases of Covid in schools is impacting a far wider number of staff and pupils than previously anticipated. And so, we are taking the following steps to try and reduce the risk of this impacting on our schools' ability to run.

We are committed to doing all we can to keep our schools open; to manage staff and pupil absence in the best possible way to ensure consistency for the children and young people, and for families across the Trust; and to ensuring that we focus on the safety of everyone in our Trust as a priority. In order to enable us to do this we are going to return to our **Safety and Capacity First** approach for the forthcoming weeks.

Our key principles are:

- Schools will remain fully open, unless it is unsafe to do so
- In order to keep schools open we may have to flex the timetabled week during a period of staff absence – for example by closing at lunchtime on one day.
- If we are unable to teach all year groups due to staff shortages we will move to a blended learning, part-time timetable approach for a short time to ensure that all pupils have some time in school and some time learning as if in school, but through remote-learning opportunities at home.
- If we have to close bubbles, year groups, key stages, or whole schools – online learning will be available from the next day.
- Whole school closure will be a last resort
- Wrap-around Care, where it is being offered will continue to support families in being able to work. These will all be risk-assessed for safety in light of the current guidance to ensure that they can remain open. Your child's setting will let you know if their provision has to close. We will only enforce a closure where there are insufficient staff to run the wrap-around care safely.

Public Health Authority South West (PHASW) Guidance.

In our planning we have been working very closely with the Public Health Authority South West in each of our regional areas to ensure that we have a consistent approach across the Trust. The

guidance has not changed from my letter on 23rd September - 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.

To further add to this guidance, and to give some reassurance, where positive cases are identified in school PHASW will guide us to inform all parents of the identification of a case, but will only direct us to directly contact the families of pupils who are deemed to have been in direct contact with the person testing positive. Even if there is a case in your child's class, if you are not contacted directly by the school to say your child has to self-isolate, it will be because they have been risk assessed through the discussions with PHASW and have been identified as not being at risk. It can be scary to hear of a case in your school, or in your child's class, but I hope that this helps to offer a little reassurance – if you aren't contacted directly then we have been told by PHASW that your child has little or no risk of having been in contact with the infected person.

We need your help.

Given the changing nature of how we are all needing to work in our schools at the moment I want to ask your help in a few areas that we believe will give added protection to everyone in and around our schools.

Face-coverings: We are requesting that all parents, and people dropping off and picking up pupils wear a face covering, face mask or face shield in the public areas, please. Much as is requested when shopping, and for the same reason, we ask your help in this additional measure to prevent the spread of the virus.

Track and Trace: We would be grateful if parents and those who are attending schools for any reason could download the Track and Trace App, if possible, please. This, again, gives us an additional level of information and enables us to work more closely with health colleagues in addressing the spread of the virus.

Outdoor learning:

It is still advised that we work in well-ventilated areas and outdoors as much as possible, school uniform should still be worn but we would appreciate your help in ensuring that the pupils are well wrapped-up in warm clothes for each day in school so that we can continue to learn, particularly outdoors in some comfort and remain warm. Thank you.

Despite the changes that we are all having to undertake in our schools I also wanted to say how proud I am of how they have all gone beyond the call of duty to stay open and to ensure that there is consistency for the children and young people. The staff in your schools have continued to work hard to keep some stability for everyone, and I am extremely grateful to them for their continued resilience and determination to do all they possibly can... and a bit more besides. My thanks also to you for your continued support - we will get through this together.

I will hold you all in my thoughts and prayers. Keep safe and stay well.

With kind regards,

Jez Piper

CEO

Diocese of Bristol Academies Trust