



Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> January 2021

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

Following the changes that we had to implement last week taking us into a national lockdown there have been a significant number of guidance changes and updates which I wanted to share with you today as some will impact on how we are operating in our schools.

You will have seen in the media today, and over the weekend, the Prime Minister, Health Minister and the Chief Medical Officer talking about the possibility of introducing further restrictions in order to stem and reduce the transmission of Covid-19 at this critical time.

The message has been clear – if you can stay at home, isolate, and 'act as if you have the virus' – then this is part of everyone's responsibility to each other in the fight against the pandemic and the spread of the virus. And this applies no less to schools.

Today we have been issued with updated guidance on the expectations for attendance at school sites, and we have been asked to share this with you. The updated guidance for parents and carers can be found at this link [\[click here\]](#) and sets out some clear changes.

The most important change to the guidance is in respect of who should be attending school during this lockdown period. The guidance hasn't changed that children identified in the vulnerable category should attend. The guidance has, however, altered in relation to the children of critical workers. The updated guidance sets out that:

Critical Workers are... Parents whose work is critical to the coronavirus (COVID-19) and EU transition response include those who work in health and social care and in other key sectors outlined in [guidance]. Children with at least one parent or carer who is a critical worker can go to school or college **if required**, but **parents and carers should keep their children at home if they can**. [\[click here\]](#)

**Your child's school or college will speak to you to identify whether your child needs to attend. You should keep your child at home if you can.** They may ask to see simple evidence to check whether you are a critical worker such as your work ID badge or a pay slip.

We appreciate the pressure on you all at the moment, and completely understand the need for children to be in school. However, we are also being advised to reduce, as much as possible, the number of children attending schools at the moment to prevent the spread of the virus. Whilst the science offers greater reassurance as to the impact on the virus on the children and young people, the impact of an increased spread of the virus in our schools will have a fundamental effect on our ability to staff the schools and to keep them open.

I appreciate how difficult this is for you all but, where possible, if you have capacity to have your children at home the guidance is that they should remain at home until the end of the lockdown.

Over the forthcoming days your child's school will be in contact to confirm places. If you are able to keep your child at home, please let your school know as soon as is possible this week.

Further changes to the guidance this week are as follows:

- We have now had confirmation that nursery classes in schools, and pre-schools on school sites are able to start to open again, where possible and where there is sufficient staff. Our schools with these provisions will be working this week to see what can be offered, and will be contacting parents to let you know what we are able to offer, and when that provision will start.
- Similarly, wrap-around-care may now be offered, only for vulnerable children and the children of critical workers attending school. Again, we will be working on how to provide this service and schools will let parents know as soon as is practical what provision will be on offer.

All of these changes, and the provision in school is based entirely on our risk assessments, and on the over-arching guidance for **children to remain at home where this is possible**. Each school has a capacity for safe-running, and they cannot exceed those capacity caps. These have been agreed with Trustees, and are there to ensure a Covid-safe school environment. The changes listed above will require us to revisit our capacity assessments and this may impact the number of children that we can safely have within our school buildings.

The lack of clarity in the guidance has caused significant confusion, and has raised expectations. It has also strained relationships and led to some challenge of our staff who are trying to run the schools in the most effective way possible, in extremely difficult circumstances. I ask your continued patience and support whilst we continue to adapt and refine how we are able to work, within the guidance, so that we can provide the most safe and secure learning on the school sites; and for those families who are working from home, to enable us to provide the best possible online and blended learning offer possible.

All of this must also be viewed in light of possible further restrictions over the forthcoming days and weeks. As ever, we will do our best to give you as much notice as possible for any changes that are likely to be required in line with any new guidance.

My apologies again, that the guidance has changed such that we must ask you all to take a different consideration to school attendance for your child(ren). We appreciate that this is far from ideal, but are grateful for your help, support and consideration of this request.

With kind regards,

*Jez Piper*

CEO

Diocese of Bristol Academies Trust