

Friday 8th January 2021

Dear Parents

Earlier this week the government announced the closure of all mainstream schools to the majority of pupils and students as a result of the increased rates of Covid 19. In the absence of any clear guidance to Special Schools and Alternative Provision, we put the safety of our pupils and staff first and followed the same approach that we were advised of in Spring 2020, during the previous lockdown. We reduced the number of pupils coming to school, providing places to those families that needed it most. This was something that we did in all schools across our Trust and was in line with advice we received from teaching unions.

Last night, the DfE finally released guidance to Special Schools and Alternative Provision. It states that Special Schools and Alternative Provision are expected to remain open to all pupils who want a place. Schools should only reduce provision for any child if staffing absence means they are unable to maintain the health and safety of classes. The explanation for the different guidance for mainstream schools opposed to Special Schools and Alternative Provision is that the DfE believe that mainstream schools act as a meeting point for local communities and as such provide increased opportunity for the spread of Covid 19.

We are pleased to finally have some clarity. However we remain in a difficult position. The advice from teaching unions remains to take the approach we have done so far. Reducing numbers on site and by doing so putting the safety of our children and staff first. It is unclear at this point what advice they may give to members about coming to work.

What we are keen to avoid is opening to all pupils only to find ourselves immediately in a position where staffing absence, for one reason or another, leads us to having to close again to some pupils.

It is therefore our intention to remain as we are into next week. Pupils who are safe at home are asked to remain at home. Remote learning will continue to be provided and you can still contact the school for any additional support. We will spend the next few working days reviewing our risk assessments and talking to our staff. We will need to review our numbers in school and consider what level of social distancing we can effectively provide in the light of the new variant of the virus and the significant increase in cases particularly among young people. We will also be starting to roll out our staff LFT programme. Once we are in a position where we are confident that everything is as safe as we can make it, we will review our position and unless new guidance has come to light, may well offer places to all pupils. Even at that point it will remain your choice as to whether you send your child to school. The new guidance is clear that parents that choose not to send their child to school during the current lockdown will not be fined or coerced by any other means. We will send you a further update to our risk assessments at the beginning of next week for you to read and consider what is the best decision for you and your family. No-one can guarantee that cases will not be seen in school, the best we can do is mitigate that risk.

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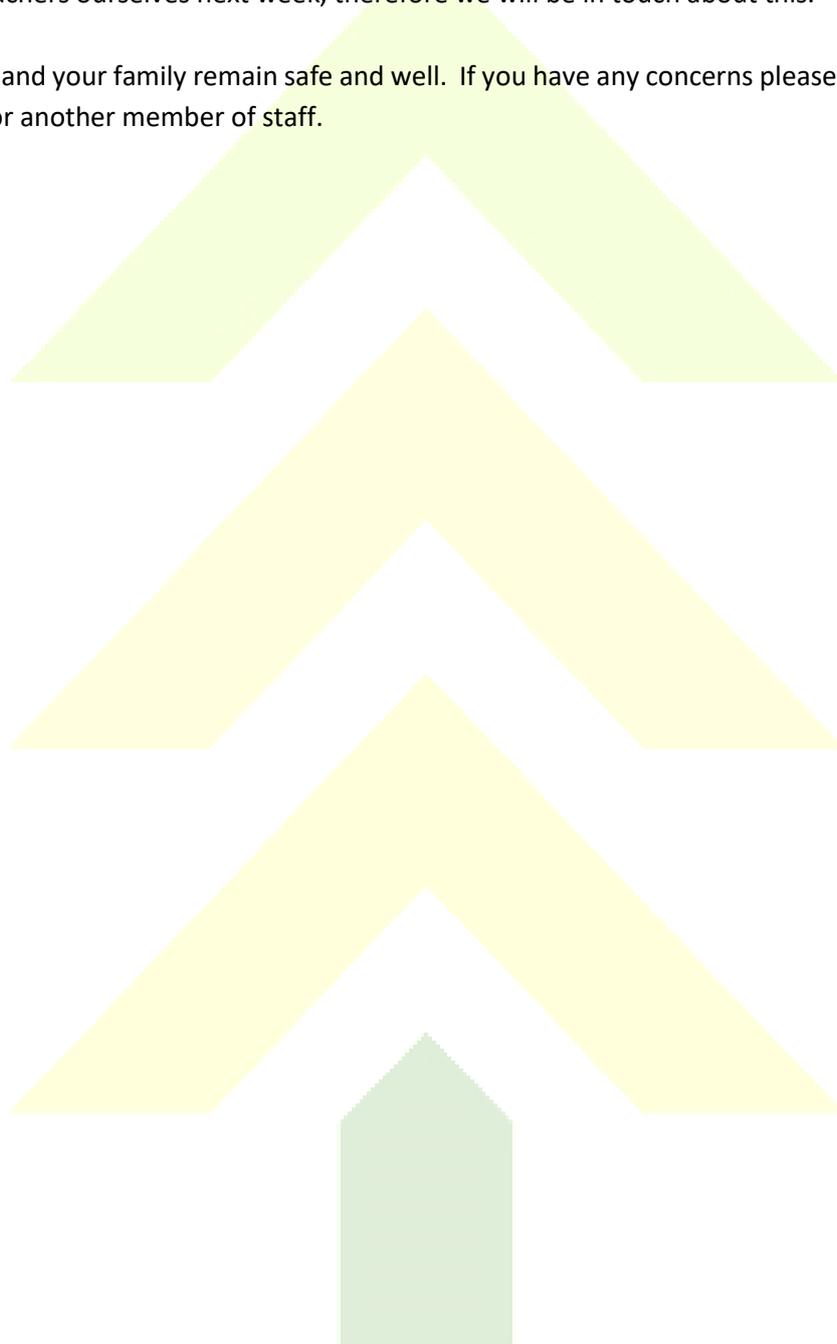
I appreciate the last week will have been frustrating and that I am asking for a little more patience, particularly from those families who have had children at home however I hope it is clear that as much as we would all like to see the pupils back in school we want to make sure things are as safe as we can make them.

We have been awaiting news from the Government about the scheme to provide vouchers for families in receipt of free school meals. At the time of writing we are still waiting. For those families we will put in place vouchers ourselves next week, therefore we will be in touch about this.

I hope that you and your family remain safe and well. If you have any concerns please do not hesitate to contact me or another member of staff.

Yours sincerely

Paul Archer
Headteacher



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