

Updated Information Regarding Covid 19 and the Spring Term 2021

Dear Parents/Guardians,

I hope you all managed to have a good break, a lot has happened since we broke up on Friday 18th December. You will be fully aware that the infection rates of Covid 19 have continued to rise, especially with the new variant of the virus. We have had over 30 members of staff test positive for COVID 19 and I know many of you have also been affected.

I fully understand that the high numbers of cases of COVID 19 that we have experienced will cause you concern regarding your child returning to school. In following updates from Public Health England, it is evident that the new strain of COVID 19 does seem to be resulting in high instances of positive cases throughout Central Bedfordshire.

Following the announcement yesterday regarding the reopening of schools in January, we have a number of decisions that we need to make to ensure pupils and staff can return safely. Some of you may have been confused by the announcements but essentially the guidance states;

“Special schools should open on 4th January (unless they have a planned INSET day) for primary aged pupils but for secondary aged pupils they have some flexibility on face-to-face attendance of pupils in the first week of term to enable them to appropriately mobilise the testing programme”

Next week the priority is to establish our procedures for testing, the intention is that staff will complete their own COVID-19 tests supplied by the school. These are set to be delivered on Monday 4th of January.

For the week beginning 11th January it is expected that we will be able to start testing all our Phase 2 and 3 pupils. We do acknowledge that for some pupils this will be difficult. Pupils are encouraged to have a test before returning, but will not need to have had one in order to return to school.

We have been liaising with other special schools and the Local Authority and have carried out a rigorous review of our Covid 19 Risk Assessments, we'll be liaising with colleagues in Health and Social Care on Monday. This is in line with the latest information from the Department of Education which states that schools need to 'consider the additional risks and control measures that are needed to be able to return to full capacity.'

As you know we are very different from mainstream schools and need to be working with you to make sure we place your child at the centre of everything we plan for. After speaking with other Special School Head Teachers, we all feel that the coming weeks will be the most difficult we have faced so far.

We are currently doing a full assessment of our staffing profile as you can imagine, the virus has taken its toll in the last few weeks, we also have staff that are Clinically Extremely Vulnerable and will have to shield and staff that are also still unwell or self-isolating. It is anticipated that we will have a fuller picture in the next few days, this will help inform our next steps.

It will also be necessary to implement remote learning for some classes/zones due to staff shortages caused by COVID 19. As we did during the Autumn term we will identify classes that cannot be accommodated at school on a particular day or on a rotation basis. I recognise how inconvenient this can be for all concerned; however, please be assured that the decision to implement remote learning for some pupils is always taken as a last resort and we will always endeavour to provide as much notice as possible.

In recognition that some parents/guardians will feel too anxious to allow their child to return to school from January 5th, we will ensure appropriate remote learning is available for your child and will work with you to enable your child to return to face-to-face education as soon as possible. If you are worried about your child returning to school from the 5th, please contact the school to inform us of this decision.

To help prevent the spread of the virus in schools, we continue to expect all pupils to follow the latest Government guidelines where they are able to do so.

- Minimise contact with individuals who are unwell by ensuring that those who have coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms, or who have someone in their household who does, or those who have been advised to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace, do not attend the school.
- Clean hands thoroughly more often than usual. There are hand sanitisers around the school, including in every classroom.
- Enhanced cleaning of the school will continue. Prior to re-opening in January, a deep clean of the school has been undertaken to ensure the school is as safe as possible for everyone's return.
- Maintain social distancing wherever possible.

We will be sending out further information about school reopening over the next few days. Finally, let us all hope that 2021 is a better year and I wish you all the very best for the New Year.

Kind regards,

Lisa Leonard

