

27.11.2020



Dear Parents and Carers

I hope this message finds you all well and managing as best as possible in the present challenging times. I am writing to update you on the key aspects of our COVID procedures across the schools as we move towards the end of the term. I am also now able to give you more details of how we are approaching the festive season in light of the current lockdown, the announcement this week of the new tier system restrictions and our area being placed in the highest tier from next week.

Firstly it is incredibly heartening to have been able to get through to this point without a positive COVID-19 case across the pupils and staff of our three settings. I put some of this down to our more isolated rural location but mostly to the great work that everyone at home and at school has been doing to establish and maintain a COVID secure environment here in school. As we move towards the end of the autumn term we will continue to need your help and support with these arrangements and also with supporting learning for your children following the period of school closure in the summer. As the second national lockdown ends next week and the tiered system is re-imposed it is vital that we continue to be vigilant in all areas of our lives both at home and at school to reduce infection rates and to minimise opportunities for virus transmission.

A key element of this from a parent/carer point of view is to make sure that if a member of your household bubble displays COVID symptoms you must isolate at home and get tested. We need to be informed quickly that you or your child may have symptoms as we have to report suspected cases of COVID directly to the Local Public Health Authority. We are also required to report test results, both negative and positive, to the local authority. We have work packs for the children ready to go for both the short term, when you may be waiting for a test result, and also for the longer isolation period if the test results are positive for COVID. It is reassuring that so far everyone has been following these rules and it is vital if we are to keep the schools fully open that everyone continues to do so in the coming weeks and months. I am sure that everyone will join me in the desire not to have to close any of our bubbles here in school and send children home to isolate if that can be avoided.

Throughout the pandemic head teachers have been expected to be on-call 7 days a week to respond to Public Health Officers if a positive case occurs in children or staff in their schools. This is far simpler to manage during the week when I am in school and can action communications with colleagues regarding decisions that have to be made about individual pupil/staff isolation if they have been a close contact and more widely with whole bubbles of children. However it can also be the case that I could be contacted over a weekend by Public Health Officers and I would be expected to act to contact families regarding isolation from school for individual children and for whole bubbles in the same manner. Hopefully this will not happen but I wanted to share this with you all so that if I need to contact any parents/carers at a weekend we have a shared understanding of why I am doing this and what is expected of you if this should occur. The worst case scenario would be that I receive notification of a positive case early in the morning and have to inform parents that their child/bubble is not permitted to come into school that day and will be required to isolate for the mandatory period before they can return to school.

Over the last couple of weeks more schools in our area have had to deal with positive cases and to respond to isolation requirements closing bubbles/classes etc. With this in mind please continue to follow the hand washing/sanitising/distancing/hygiene/drop-off/collection procedures and that we have established and shared with you all this academic year. These continue to be reinforced with all children across the schools and adhered to strictly by staff as well. I have sadly observed over the last week that a very small number of parents are not following the one-way systems when dropping off and collecting children from school and nursery. These are simple systems which are easy to follow and help us to minimise individuals crossing paths here at school for the short periods in the morning and afternoons. The system requires everyone to enter the school site via the pedestrian gate in the morning and for parents to then all leave the site out of the vehicular exit. This is reversed in the afternoons with parents required to enter the site via the vehicular exit, collect their children and then leave the site via the pedestrian access. My staff and I will continue to

monitor these systems and to challenge individuals who are not following these routes. Pictures of the one-way system and details of the procedures can be found on our schools websites.

The government announcements made this week regarding the end of the current lockdown, the new tier systems, Christmas rules relaxations and with over 1 million university students due to return home between 3rd and 9th December it is even more important that we all act responsibly to minimise opportunities for virus transmission in our community. Thus far our collective efforts have resulted in no COVID cases in our schools and no bubbles having to be closed – it would be wonderful to be able to maintain this through until the end of term at Christmas. It would particularly hard to stomach if we managed so well all term only to have cases right at the end which would force pupils and staff to isolate over Christmas from family and friends.

Moving on to Christmas 2020 in our schools...we have been planning and preparing here in school and have now received guidance on what we can and can't do. In the words of the head of Health & Safety at Northumberland County Council '*Christmas activities should be very low key*'. Below are details of our planned activities over the next three weeks. We are intending to share further details on activities in each bubble with parents/carers via email directly from class teachers and form tutors by Thursday next week.

Christmas Cards – children will be allowed to bring Christmas cards into school this year but they must follow these simple rules:

- 1) Cards must be brought into school by Thursday 10th December.
- 2) All cards must be placed in the Christmas card box in class/form rooms.
- 3) **Children must not give cards directly to their friends.**

The cards will be kept in class/form boxes for a minimum of 72 hours before teachers then distribute them – this will take place during the last week of term (w/c Monday 14th December).

Class Celebrations – class teachers and form tutors have been discussing options with their classes and are developing Christmas themed activities for everyone to enjoy. These activities have to be carefully considered to ensure that COVID procedures for strictly followed. As noted above each class teacher and form tutor will be writing to parents and carers to share more details of these activities next week. We have been informed by Health and Safety Officers that children are not permitted to bring food into schools this year so we are busy working out how this directive can be managed in our schools for our celebrations.

Christmas Carol Concert – we are determined to ensure that we can maintain as many of our Christmas traditions as possible this year. One special event is our joint Christmas Carol concert – we will be bringing all that we learnt from our virtual harvest earlier in the term to create a virtual Carol Concert involving every child and bubble across the schools. Mrs Humphreys is again taking the lead, supported by colleagues from across both schools, to create a concert that we can share with you all. The children have already been working on their songs and readings (it does sound lovely here in school on Tuesdays and Thursday when the voices of the children are raised in song). Mrs Humphreys and I will be recording the concert over three days starting with the songs with the First School children on Tuesday 8th December, readings by children from across both schools on Wednesday 9th December and the songs with the Middle School children on Thursday 10th December. We will then weave these elements together into a film to share with you all.

Christmas Jumper Day – we feel, now more than ever, that it is important that we continue to support those who are less fortunate than ourselves. With this in mind we will again be taking part in Christmas Jumper Day this year in aid of Save the Children. Our Christmas Jumper Day will take place on Friday 11th December and all children and staff across our school are encouraged to participate and support this very worthy cause by coming to school wearing a Christmas jumper – a £2 donation is suggested by Save the Children and further details can be found via the link below. There are also some great ideas for getting creative by making your own unique Christmas jumper to wear.



<https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/christmas-jumper-day>

Virtual Pantomime – as we cannot enjoy our traditional First School Nativity Play, Glendale Pantomime or any other whole school events/trips this year we have bought a virtual pantomime for all of the children across the schools to enjoy in their bubbles during the last week of term.

Christmas Dinner Day – we will still be hosting our annual Christmas Dinner Day on Wednesday 9th December. Sadly we will not be able to invite friends and family to join us this year. Christmas Dinners can be ordered in the usual way.

One final reminder to end this message is that NHS colleagues will be visiting on Friday 11th December to administer flu immunisations to the children from Reception to Year 7. We have detailed risk assessments for this activity and NHS staff will administer the vaccine in classroom bubbles, they will be in full PPE and strict hygiene control measure will be in place throughout. Teachers will be with their classes to support this activity across both schools.

Apologies for this somewhat lengthy letter but it is important that everyone has the information it contains as we move towards the end of term. The next few weeks will be challenging for us all and we really appreciated your help and support to keep us open and operating safely.

Keep safe

Mr Deane-Hall