



Tuesday 19th January 2021

Newsletter Number 1 – Spring Term 2021

Dear families,

Latest update on School life...

It would be fair to say that school life is very different. This isn't the start to 2021 we wished for! I would usually send a newsletter home every two weeks, but the last few weeks have proved to be the most testing in my 17 years as a headteacher and time has been a much missed friend!

Like most schools we found this new lockdown to be very different. It doesn't feel like a lockdown. In lockdown 1 we had an average of 12 keyworker pupils in each day. This allowed for us to have staff on a rota so that they too could stay at home in line with the advice of the government at the time.

This time, we were inundated with requests for places and have about 130 pupils attending. That is about 50% of the school population and it means staff must be in as it is much harder to add them to a rota. As a result the staff in school are now daily interacting with many children and each other despite their best efforts.

We have 2 staff members who have tested positive for COVID in the last week and they are not well at all. It is very worrying to see and hear your colleagues suffering like this. We know many families where COVID has also appeared and we know that those people are very ill as well. This also means that pupils throughout the school often need to isolate.

Last week the Director of Education in Wirral and Julie Webster the Director of Public Health, sent this message to families:

Dear Parents and Carers,

As you know the Prime Minister announced on the 4th January that the country needs once again to move into a national lockdown, because the new variant of COVID-19 is spreading rapidly leading to acute pressure in the NHS and further loss of life.

In the last week the situation in Wirral has become very serious which means we now all need to work together to drive infection rates down. We need to stay at home to protect the NHS and save lives. Only leaving the home when it is absolutely necessary to do so and when we do sticking to all the rules at all times.

In this context we are writing to remind you that your child should stay at home and access remote learning if it is at all possible to do so. This will reduce the number of households mixing and the transmission of the virus in the borough.

Our schools and colleges are open but only for those children who cannot learn from home. Many of our settings last week experienced many more children attending school than they expected and in some cases children who attended could have accessed their learning remotely.

Schools have to work within the capacity they have which is determined by the school based risk assessment, the need to provide remote learning for the majority of children and the number of staff they have available to work. On occasions last week this led some schools having to inform parents that they do not have enough places to accommodate their child.

Already this week the number of school based staff who have tested positive for COVID-19 or who are having to self-isolate has increased and this is likely to continue at least for the next few weeks due to the high levels of community cases in the borough. This means that school leaders will need to prioritise the return of children based on individual need, and on the safety of the school.

Vulnerable children and children of health workers, social workers and those working in our schools will be allocated places before children of other critical workers. The number of places available will be determined by the head teacher of each school and is likely to vary from week to week. All decisions will be made based on the school risk assessment, staffing availability and the capacity needed to provide high quality remote education.

To reduce community transmission, we need to ensure that the number of children and young people accessing the offer of provision in a school or college is kept to the lowest number possible. Therefore, in line with updated government guidance issued on Friday (8th January), even if you are a critical worker, if your child(ren) can remain at home rather than attend school, on some or all days, then they should. Please only use the offer of provision when it is crucial for you to undertake your critical role.

Whether or not your child's education setting is putting in place the rapid testing programme right away, it is very important that we reassure you that all settings will be continuing to regularly review and put in place all the protective measures recommended by Public Health England and the Department for Education to reduce the risk of transmission. These will include social distancing, hand washing, good ventilation, use of face coverings as appropriate, and ensuring people with symptoms do not attend. These remain the most effective ways to reduce the spread of the virus, even with rapid testing in place.

We ask that you continue to show the same patience and compassion to leaders and staff that you have demonstrated throughout this pandemic. We have learned from the first two waves that if we pull together as a borough, with everybody playing their part, we can help to slow the spread of the virus.

*Julie Webster, Director of Public Health.
and Education*

Paul Boyce OBE, Director for Children, Families

Following that letter many families assessed their position and wisely chose to keep their children at home with them where it is safest for the family. Thank you.

The Governors of the school have limited the numbers of pupils we can have in each class at this time. This is a hard decision to make but one that needed to be made to protect staff, pupils and the wider community. We will revisit these limits as the local and national picture develops but it will not change for some time. This will be difficult for all of us but it is the way it has to be.

For those pupils at home, remote learning is being provided by the class teachers. They have a statutory duty to check all pupils are 'ok' and as such, each week, if they don't see a pupils has been engaging in some way in home learning (even if it is only for a short time) they will contact you and so will the school office. We encourage families to check in with us at least weekly.

COVID Symptom free testing in Wirral

A reminder that anyone who lives or works in Wirral and does not have Covid-19 symptoms is eligible for symptom-free testing at the following sites:

- Floral Pavilion, New Brighton

- Birkenhead Market
- Greasby Library
- Eastham Library

The testing will be for those without symptoms. Please, do your bit and get tested for Wirral.

For more information, FAQs and opening times visit: www.wirral.gov.uk/test

Positive COVID tests – what to do

If you, or anyone in your household has a positive COVID test result, you must email in to the school office to let us know schooloffice@pensbyprimaryschool.org This email is checked daily for any emails with the subject 'COVID results'. Thank you.

And finally,

It is hard to write a newsletter to a school community where some pupils are at school and some are at home. No one can provide training for this sort of situation and it is hard for all of us to understand and accept. Above all we are hoping that the day comes when we are all together again – as it should be. The measures we have in place, harsh though they are, will enable this to happen.



Mrs. K Brown, Headteacher