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**Head of School: Joan Wright**

Dear Parents and Carers,

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 we put the safety of our children 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 children coming to school, providing places to those families that needed it most. This was something that we did in all special 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. It states that Special Schools are expected to remain open to all children 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 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 children 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 children.

It is therefore our intention to remain as we are into next week. Children who are safe at home are asked to remain at home. Remote learning will continue to be provided and you can still contact our family support team 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 class bubbles 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 continue the roll out of our staff testing 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 children. **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.** Our risk assessments remain on the website for you to read and consider what is the best decision for your family. No-one can guarantee that cases will not continue to be seen in school, the best we can do is mitigate that risk, so that when it does happen it is limited to a class bubble.

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 children back in school we want to make sure things are as safe as we can make them.

Regards

Kind regards



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