

13th November 2020

RE: Suspected and confirmed cases of COVID-19 at Courtlands

Dear Families

You will all have by now received an individual letter explaining that we have had a number of suspected or confirmed cases of Covid-19 in our school. Each of those letters have the detail necessary to help you in your own specific circumstances, and I am now writing just to outline the general picture and what we are doing to keep Courtlands as safe as possible for all of our children, staff and you – our families.

Since discovering the first confirmed case earlier this week, I have been in regular contact with the South West Health Protection Team, our Multi Academy Trust Team, and Plymouth City Council taking their advice and support in making the difficult decisions we have had to make in closing some of our classes. Most of the children having to stay home have had direct or 'close' contact with a confirmed case, however a small number of pupils are having to stay home due to the staff shortages caused by the necessity for some staff to self-isolate. Whilst this is far from ideal, the overall safety of the pupils is paramount, and as you will very well understand, not just any supply staff have the skills necessary to support our children!

As a school leadership, we remain absolutely committed to avoiding any 'fire-break' type closures unless they are advised by our public health colleagues. The damage to our children of unnecessary closure is too big a price to pay. However, as we move into this 'new normal' and with the ever-changing picture of confirmed cases and close contacts, we have to consider what options we have to remain open to as many of our amazing pupils as we can safely support.

To do this, we are devising a clear rationale by which to prioritise the children should staffing numbers get to the point where we need to look at partially closing some classes. This is going to be based on the level of vulnerability each individual child has, much as before when we were only open to a small number of pupils. So, the children of key workers who have no childcare, those children with social workers, who are in the care of the LA or have other underlying vulnerabilities will be prioritised for full time access to school. All other children will, where possible get access to part time provision. All time at home for pupils will be supported through our remote learning offer.

In practise, this will have to be reactive to the daily changing circumstances of staff and pupil absence and will be organised on a class-by-class basis rather than a 'blanket' approach. I accept that this may appear to some 'unfair' in that some children will get full time and other get part time, but it is in this way that the maximum number of children will get the maximum time in school where they thrive so well. I also commit to giving you as much notice as I possibly can should this affect you and your child, but it is sometimes impossible to plan ahead and I will often only know about staff absence by 8 am on the day of the absence.

In terms of general COVID Secure procedures, you already know many of the precautions we have in place, such as face coverings for staff in all communal areas, handwashing routines, strict adherence to bubbles, extra cleaners during the day as well as at the end of the day, visitor protocols etc. but I also want to assure you that all of the areas of the school where either suspected or confirmed cases have been have had additional 'deep' cleans to ensure they are fit to have pupils back soon.

I am eternally grateful to your seemingly unending patience and support for us as a school, and it seems I may be calling on your compassion and assistance more than I would ever wish to during this ongoing pandemic.

If you have any questions about this, please don't hesitate to contact reception or your class staff in the first instance, and me if they cannot answer your specific query.

Thanks once again in advance.

Lee Earnshaw
Head Teacher