

11 December 2020

Dear parent/carers

COVID-19 IMPORTANT INFORMATION

END OF TERM SCHOOL CLOSURE DATE CHANGE

As CEO of the Trust I am writing to update you on government advice we have received about arrangements for the last week of term. This information has arrived with us at the very last minute and I must begin by apologising for the inconvenience such late notice may cause you.

All Trust schools had planned to close for the festive holiday on Friday 18 December as previously communicated to you. However, the government Schools Minister has now announced that schools should close to pupils a day earlier – that is at the end of **Thursday 17 December 2020**. School leaders and staff have been advised to work from home, using Friday 18 December as an Inset Day.

Reasons for this change

Although the Department for Education remain committed to continuing to keep schools open throughout the pandemic they want to counter balance this against the need to manage oversight of virus infections amongst children and families in the run up to Christmas Eve.

By bringing forward the closure of schools to **Thursday 17 December**, this gives six clear days before Christmas, ensuring school staff **will not be required** to engage in Track and Trace or other reporting requirements over the main part of the holiday period. The reasons for this are to:

- reduce the risk of pupils and staff having to self-isolate over Christmas.
- minimise the need for schools to carry out contact tracing over the festive holiday period.
- enable staff to take a break over this period in readiness for what is likely to remain a challenging and dynamic situation in the early part of 2021.
- give families an extra day to isolate before getting together at Christmas.

Arrangements for reporting cases over the holiday

During the first few days of the holiday, it is important that schools are kept informed of any positive cases of Covid-19 amongst pupils and staff. Until **Wednesday 23 December** schools have been asked by the Department for Education to assist Track and Trace to identify and inform close contacts of any positive cases and advise where self-isolation is necessary.

Please note:

- If your child tests positive for the virus **AND** had symptoms within 48 hours of being in school (Friday 18 December or Saturday 19 December) you **MUST** email covid@wychall.drbignitemat.org with your **child's name, class and the date symptoms began**.

- School telephones will **NOT** be monitored over the festive holiday so any voice messages left will be actioned only when school reopens in January 2021.
- School email inboxes will be checked daily, up to and including **Wednesday 23 December** between **9am and 10am**. Schools will take action following an email ensuring all close contacts are informed as soon as possible.
- If you receive an email or telephone message to advise you that your child has been in close contact with somebody who has tested positive for Covid-19, you **MUST** ensure they self-isolate for 14 days.
- If your child tests positive after **Wednesday 23 December**, you **DO NOT** need to inform school and you should follow standard Track and Trace procedures.

Finally

I recognise that this decision to close schools early may not be welcomed by all parents and may add to the difficulty of managing work and family commitments. However, at the outset of the pandemic the Trust committed to following government advice and to doing our absolute best to keep pupils and staff safe. Early closure supports this and ensures health and safety remains our top priority.

Over the last week, we have witnessed growing numbers of pupils and staff displaying Covid-19 symptoms with many receiving positive test results. As a result, we are dealing with growing levels of both staff and pupil absence. At its extreme this has required us to make the difficult decision to fully close one of our Birmingham primary school earlier this week.

This was the right decision and I can only praise the efforts of headteachers and staff for working relentlessly to keep schools open over the Autumn Term and for managing the many infection control measures so comprehensively. School leaders and many staff have not had a break since the pandemic began in early March.

So as CEO, I welcome the fact that school leaders will not now be required to be on call for the whole festive period, as originally demanded by government. This does not mean that the Trust is any less committed to supporting families and local communities. I have requested that all Trust headteachers are available for a meeting before schools return to fully review our Covid-19 Response Strategy and Risk Assessments. This will ensure that any developments in the pandemic over the holiday period can be assessed and responded to appropriately before pupils return to school on Tuesday 5 January 2021. I want to reassure you that the Trust remains totally committed to supporting both pupil and staff health and wellbeing and this will not change.

As this will be my last communication before the end of term, please can I take this opportunity to thank you for your ongoing and amazing support over, what has been and continues to be, a most challenging situation. I would also like to wish you and your family a happy and peaceful festive period.

Best wishes



Robert Bowater
CEO