

4 January 2021

Happy New Year!

First of all, a very Happy New Year to everyone. As we settle into our new Trust year, it feels as if our launch as a Trust last June was a lifetime ago. On the surface, perhaps little has changed whilst beneath the surface, we're significantly different in terms of our operation, management and ability to respond rapidly to the next Covid-curve-ball.



For all senior leaders working in education, Christmas had a few extra 'treats' for us including getting our heads around the practicalities of previously unknown subjects such as lateral flow testing, Covid-19 reporting without a child in school and trying to imagine the worst 'what if...' scenario to adapt our response to risk. It's been endless but not without its rewards – the messages of support that we've received from colleagues and parents has been really appreciated. I have been on the Stubbin Wood School site all day and colleagues have repeatedly told me how safe they feel.

The stories of fast virus transmission are certainly alarming. Like everyone, I have significant concerns for the wellbeing of my own family too. But, I will stick to my mantra that the science has not changed, our approach to reducing transmission has not changed yet it is the pace of transmission that has changed – there is no room for lapsing to old ways, we must follow the rules and we must work as individuals and as a TEAM (in every sense of the word) to keep our communities safe.

I await the announcement by our Prime Minister later this evening. We have a long term ahead of us but I really do believe that, as we approach the excitement of the Easter holidays, things will be looking better.

Best wishes, keep safe

Sarah Baker
Chief Executive Officer, TEAM Education Trust

1. KEEPING THE SCHOOL OPEN & SAFE

As you know, the Risk Assessment for every school in the Trust is regularly reviewed. The flurry of guidance coming to school has required that we amend these documents further. The latest version is now 8.2.

In summary, the recent changes to the Risk Assessment include:

- The area the school is in is now identified as Tier 4 and advice is to stay at home and not travel outside of your area. As teachers are key workers this allows travel outside of local area to work.
- Individual assessments are being carried out for those staff who have been advised that they are 'critically extremely vulnerable' and they should work from home

- Pregnant colleagues from 28 weeks' gestation, or with underlying health conditions at any gestation, may be at greater risk of severe illness from the worst effects of coronavirus (COVID-19).
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2. LEARNING FROM HOME

We know it's not easy to create a classroom environment at home. We understand and we want to help where we can. We know that our learners are always better learning at school and are doing everything we can to remain open. The sad reality is that it is not always possible so we must make the best of the situation and give our very best to each child.

The Department for Education guidance has tightened up for the New Year and they have set out minimum expectations for each child.

1. Teachers should organise for a minimum of 4 hours learning for each child in secondary school and 3 hours for each child in primary education. We ask our teachers to prepare learning for a full day.
2. Teachers are now asked to follow-up with each child in their class who is learning from home. They will need to challenge students who are not making efforts to learn and identify barriers to learning that might be overcome (such as a laptop, or a quiet place to learn, etc).
3. Teachers are required to give all parents feedback on the learning progress of their child every week.

The tough bit comes next. Some teachers have reported that calls home are met with rude or disinterested responses; please respect our teachers when they call and understand we are doing our best for your child. We are also following government instructions and we will be considered to be failing in our work if we don't provide the best learning resources and education to our students.

We do understand home learning is challenging and we don't want to add to the pressures families are experiencing already, but if you let us know your concerns and we will do our best to assist.

Finally, we guess that if you are reading this, you will be supporting your child's education and will fully understand the need for a strong partnership between the teacher, child and their parent. So, this really isn't aimed at you but we do need the full support of everyone in our community.

3. ATTENDANCE

There was terrifying reporting of rapid virus transmission alongside accounts that schools were closing and teachers were rebelling over the holiday period. We really do believe that school is the safest place for your child but we aren't going to take further action this week.

Any absence from school this week should be supported with a letter from you to school explaining your reason and we'll keep it on file. Attendance is compulsory next week (unless the situation changes).

4. TESTING FOR COVID-19 IN OUR SCHOOL COMMUNITY

You will have heard about the plans for *lateral flow tests* to take place in schools and colleges, followed by their introduction in special schools and then primary schools. Each school will make their own decision as to whether this is an appropriate option for them. There are three options:

1. Test all students and staff
2. Test staff only

3. Decide not to offer the testing programme.

The advantage to testing, beyond it being a very useful way to track cases of Covid-19 in our community, is that it shows up where an individual has the virus but is showing no symptoms. These are the *asymptomatic* carriers who are innocently spreading the virus.

To help us to decide what action to take to support the specific situation in each school, we will need to know if parents will consent for their child to be tested – you will receive a letter from school about this. We will also need to know if you will be prepared to give extra help with the testing if your child needs it.

We will be asking staff to volunteer to administer the programme. We may need to ask for parent volunteers to support us as well.

There are multiple further actions and investment that we will need to take to set up the testing programme and the Executive Team are working their way through plans at the moment and we will try to explain each step as we make it. The guidance is still being developed for special schools and primaries and, if we go ahead, we will need to put training in place before the first test can take place.

The Trust will take a pragmatic approach to the needs of each school; secondary schools are commencing tests in the next week or so, SEN schools at a later date and, then finally, primary schools. If we run a programme in any or all of the schools, we are committing ourselves to operate fully until the Easter holidays. It's not a short term scheme.