

28th January 2021

Dear Parent/Carer

I last wrote to you on the 3rd January and much has changed in a very short period of time. Following the Government's announcement of a national lockdown, Head teachers and their teams worked hard to adapt quickly to remote learning and on site provision for vulnerable children and those of critical workers. All of our schools had contingency plans in place to ensure a continuity of education, but the suddenness of the decision, whilst absolutely necessary, made this logistically challenging. I would like to thank all our families for your patience. You will no doubt have heard on the News that it is hoped that schools will be able to open fully on 8th March for all pupils. Whilst it is disappointing to not be able to welcome back all children earlier, our schools will be working hard to ensure we are ready to welcome back everyone on this date.

Remote Learning:

Following the national lockdown announcement, all of our schools were able to move quickly to on-line daily 'live' teaching and provide high quality resources. As we all know with such a big change and little notice, there will be some 'teething issues' around logging in, connectivity and access, but leaders are committed to working quickly with families to resolve these issues and I would encourage anyone still having problems to contact school so we can provide support. Many of our staff are also parents of school age children and fully understand the demands of supporting children at home. Thank you to every parent/carers supporting children at home with remote learning. We are very grateful for everything you are doing.

As we all settle into new ways of working, head teachers may make adjustments to improve provision and respond to feedback. Feedback is always helpful, but I am sure families will understand that people's views about what is right or wrong can be somewhat polarised. I can assure you heads will make balanced decisions in the best interests of all pupils and they are absolutely committed to ensuring children at home are well supported. Positive feedback is also helpful and, as well as helping us review our provision, a real boost to staff morale. Thank you on behalf of heads for the many positive comments we have received which have lifted spirits during this challenging time.

Lateral Flow Testing in schools:

We are pleased to say that at Birdsedge First School and Shelley First School, staff will shortly be able to access home testing kits for Coronavirus. Both Scissett Middle School and Kirkburton Middle School have begun mass testing for Coronavirus using Lateral Flow tests (the same tests used in the community testing centres for people without symptoms) beginning with staff who are working on site. This has also been offered to children on site in Years' 7 and 8 whose parents have provided authorisation. Once all participants have undertaken 2 initial tests, staff will continue to undertake weekly routine testing to identify any asymptomatic cases. The Government's ambition was that this testing would also be used for 'close contacts' of positive cases of Covid 19 in secondary schools, to avoid the need for self-isolation. However, in light of the new variant of coronavirus, Public Health England have now recommended this is paused and that schools continue to instigate 10-day self- isolation periods for close contacts of positive cases.

Bubble closures for children in school (Vulnerable and Critical Worker children):

The guidance from the Government has asked schools to continue with the system of 'bubbles' to reduce social contact. Parents must not send children to school if they, or a household member, has symptoms of coronavirus. Pupils who display symptoms in school will need to go home, isolate with their family and seek a test. Parents MUST notify school immediately of a positive test result in order that we can conduct track and trace procedures in school. Should your child be a close contact of someone who has tested positive, they will need to adhere to the 10-day isolation period at home. During this time, they can of course, access the remote provision.

Staffing:

Currently, we have a significant proportion of staff still working on our school sites to accommodate our on-site provision whilst also offering the remote provision to ensure an equality of access for all – whether on site or at home. This is no easy feat and I am very grateful for the resilience and commitment of our teachers to adjust to running two forms of learning simultaneously.

It is important to remember that due to the pandemic, schools may not always be fully staffed due to illness, self-isolation and shielding reasons. 'Like for like' cover may not always be possible due to the technical demands of teaching remotely and on site. We will let parents know where this is the case and seek to ensure continuity for children and the highest possible standards.

Risk Assessments:

All schools have updated Risk Assessments to reflect the new circumstances and working arrangements. These are available on school website for parents/carers to view should you wish to.

Finally,

Thank you for your patience and support. I know that it is a challenging time for everyone and I would like to reassure you, that our staff are really keen to get to a position where it is safe enough to bring all children back to school – where we want them and where they belong – but safety must be our absolute priority.

I would like to offer our thanks to all critical workers for everything you are doing, and to parents who have children at home working – we know this is not easy! Hopefully, together we can keep our community safe from Covid 19 and return to some semblance of 'normality' in the not too distant future.

Kind regards



Mrs N Greenough

CEO, The Mast Academy Trust