

# The Federation of Boldmere Schools

## Cofield Road · Sutton Coldfield · B73 5SD

***Our Vision: The Federation of Boldmere Schools empowers all children to embrace learning; achieve their personal best; and build their social, emotional and physical wellbeing.***

Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2020

Dear Parents, carers and children

Welcome back to a new academic year at the Federation of Boldmere Schools. It is great to have you back after what felt like a particularly long summer and the disruption of the spring/summer term.

I also extend a very warm welcome to our new nursery and reception children and their families too. The start of school life is an exciting time and we are very happy to welcome you in to the Boldmere Schools family. I trust you are settling in, despite the unusual circumstances we currently face. The feedback from your teachers has been very positive and I am confident your years at Boldmere will be very happy ones.

It was a welcome relief to be able to welcome back all pupils at the start of September. Operationally, this has been incredibly challenging, but it was something every member of staff wanted to see happen and they have worked relentlessly to overcome the practical and logistical challenges to create a safe, happy and stimulating environment for our children to learn and thrive. My experience as a school run parent has been a very positive one, with the overwhelming majority of children laughing and smiling as they come and go each day. I'd like to thank all the staff for creating this warmth, and parents and carers too for the role you have all played in terms of reassuring your children and working to the new processes.

I would also like to pay tribute to Mr Glasgow, Mrs Kenny and Mrs Welch (in Mrs Silverwood's absence) for their ongoing excellent leadership and outstanding management of both schools. I have been in daily contact with them have seen first-hand their experience and commitment come to the fore.

### **COVID-19 update**

COVID -19 sadly continues to dominate our daily lives and in order to ensure a safe transition back into school life, there have been a number of changes put in place for the benefit of our children, staff, parents and local community. It is important we all understand, as it is inevitable more changes will come: the situation is changing on an almost daily basis and the school and us as parents/carers have to flex to the latest guidance and local situation.

I urge all parents to access to Parentmail and carefully monitor for any updates as this is our main communication channel for parents/carers.

You will be aware that nationally we are now experiencing a second wave of the virus and measures are being implemented on a national and regional basis. Over the last week we have seen a small outbreak of COVID-19 across both schools that has resulted in a number staff and children being tested positive, and groups being asked to self-isolate. Unfortunately this number includes Mr Glasgow, who tested positive after developing symptoms on Sunday evening. He is currently self-isolating and recovering at home.

Although positive cases were inevitable at some stage it is still upsetting to see some of our staff and children contracting the virus. It goes without saying that we wish all of those affected a speedy recovery.

All those staff and children who have been in close contact have been informed and advised of their isolation period. In all cases, we liaise with Public Health England very closely to ensure that we provide the correct advice to both staff and children / parents.

If you are informed your child needs to isolate, then please act immediately and follow this guidance to stop the spread of infection. It is also important their self-isolation period is observed – I am aware of reports that some children absent from school due to a self-isolation instruction have been seen out and about, including at local leisure facilities. This is not appropriate nor is it fair on the school community.

There is a very clear process we follow when a member of the school community is either symptomatic or tested positive. Decisions are made by the school, myself as Chair of the Governing Board and Public

Health England. It is important to understand it is not the school leaders' decision in isolation and that the decision is always made with the safety of our children, staff and school community as the priority.

With (at the time of writing) five positive cases in as many days, this will naturally result in much anxiety across the school and community. Our staff are not exempt from this and I know, despite the smiles, many arrive each morning anxious about how the day will unfold. I hope you will all join me in thanking all them for their resilience and commitment during these challenging times.

We all have a role to play in terms of reducing our exposure to risk and with the Boldmere area currently classified as a high-risk area, additional vigilance is recommended. Please practise social distancing and wear a mask in and around the school premises. Monitor closely for symptoms and if you or your child begin to develop any of the symptoms, they should isolate and be tested.

Can I also request that all parent/carers exercise their own judgement as to whether their child should be in school or not. There is clear guidance readily available online (including on the school website). Please do not call school unnecessarily: staff are not able to provide medical advice and the volume of calls on some days has prevented staff from undertaking other important actions. Common colds, sore throats, sniffles and snuffles are inevitable at this time of year and are not necessarily grounds to keep a child off school. Please, consult the guidance available and use your own judgement.

### **Short term measures and arrangements**

We are very aware that the changes implemented to the school week have caused some concerns. On behalf of the Governing Board and Senior Leadership Team I want to ensure that parents/carers understand that these are temporary arrangements made to facilitate the school's continued safe operation during the COVID-19 crisis.

The steps taken balance the requirements of the guidance at that time and the operational requirements of the school and have been scrutinised by the Governing Board prior to implementation.

The measures are being reviewed by the Senior Leadership Team and Governing Board on a regular basis and the 'normal' school week will return once we are satisfied it is safe and operationally viable to do so.

- **Staggered start and finish times:** these were put in place to try and reduce congregation in and around our entrances and entrance/exit 'pinch points'. Parents/carers and our children have generally adopted to this new routine well and as a result we have already been able to refine the timings and reduce the waiting time for those dropping/collecting siblings etc. This will hopefully reduce the waiting around outside the school and further promote social distancing.

It is also vital parents/carers respect the parking zones around school, and also refrain from parking across driveways. It saddens me that I have to call this out again, but it remains a consistent problem with a persistent minority. With people social distancing, the need to keep the no parking zones clear has never been more important. The school is in contact with the police about this and action will be taken if this continues.

- **Friday half day closure:** this is also a temporary measure. It provides our teachers with protected time to plan and prepare for curriculum delivery and provide feedback on completed work and children's progress. This helps to ensure that there is no cross-bubble teaching and therefore minimises the risk of whole school infection / closure. It also allows our cleaning teams to undertake a thorough deep clean of the schools.

At present there is no long-term plan for the schools to have a permanent half day closing on a Friday. As social distancing measures are eased, we will review this arrangement.

- **Reduced teaching time:** the impact of the above measures on available teaching time has also be questioned by a number of parents/carers. This does not need to be a concern as we have adjusted the timetable to condense some aspects of the school day to ensure that there is no impact on education and teacher contact time. Teaching staff have concentrated these first few weeks on familiarising children with the new school routines and assessing them so that they can plan appropriately to provide a recovery curriculum.

- **Online learning provision:** many parents/carers have also queried the school's plan to provide a learning provision in the event of class, year group or whole school closures. It's fair to say establishing an online learning provision was a steep learning curve last term, with many technology, safeguarding, resource and knowledge-gap hurdles to overcome.

As you will have seen from this week's newsletter, a better and more robust remote learning platform via Google Classroom is now in place and available to children who are at home due to self-isolation, whether individually or part of a bubble.

This remote learning provision does not at this time include teacher contact via Zoom or Teams. I am aware there is some expectation of this from some parents/carers but unfortunately it is not something that can be provided at this time. There are several reasons for this, but primarily, it is because staff who are self-isolating are not able to provide live teaching sessions virtually, while those in school are engaged with in-school teaching, including covering for those currently absent. There are also safeguarding considerations. This provision is under regular review.

As a Governing Board we are regularly reviewing our processes and supporting our Senior Leadership Team with operational procedures. However, I hope parents/carers can appreciate that the guidance is often confusing / open to interpretation and ever-changing.

### **Thank you**

I appreciate this is a rather long letter so will wrap up. Thank you for taking the time to read it, I hope it has been helpful in terms of giving you some important context to many of the decisions that have been made – and will continue to be made – in school, and that I've been able to reassure you on some of the 'hot topics of the moment.

I also wanted to take the opportunity, as Chair of Governors and a parent, to remind parents/carers of the pressure our schools and teaching staff are under currently, and the collective responsibility we must all take to limit the spread of Covid-19 and keep one another safe and well.

I am very grateful we have a strong team within Boldmere Schools and a proactive and engaged Governing Board working behind the scenes to challenge and support them. We also have a wonderful school community and I know many, many parents/carers have spoken warmly to staff, for which they are very appreciative. But the school is under pressure and my view is we'll face this challenge throughout the winter. However, I am reassured that we have the quality of leadership, support and process to continue assessing our options in a swift and considered way, and that we will continue to make decisions – however challenging – that are in the best interests of our children.

I am always happy to answer any questions – you can either email me via the school, or I can often be found on the morning school run and welcome a socially-distanced chat.

I wish you all a successful year ahead and I thank you for your continued support.

Yours sincerely  
Mr Greg Bloom - Chair of Governors

The Federation of Boldmere Schools:  
Boldmere Infant and Nursery School and Boldmere Junior School  
Executive Head: Mr Carl Glasgow  
Telephone: 0121 464 2338/3656 Fax: 0121 464 4342/1344  
Email: [enquiry@boldmere-inf.bham.sch.uk](mailto:enquiry@boldmere-inf.bham.sch.uk) / [enquiry@bldmereg.bham.sch.uk](mailto:enquiry@bldmereg.bham.sch.uk)