



Omicron Parent Update – January 2022

Dear Parents and Carers,

Firstly, may I take this opportunity to wish you all a very Happy New Year. I hope you have all managed to spend time as a family, enjoying the festivities and have had a restful Christmas break.

As we prepare for our pupils return to school on Wednesday 5th January, I know there are many concerns about the spike in COVID-19 cases due to the omicron variant. Following a headteacher briefing with the Local Authority last night, this letter aims to detail our efforts to ensure that high quality provision for our children in school can continue.

UK government website states: ***“COVID-19 infection rates are very high and the Omicron variant is spreading rapidly. It is important that we all take steps to reduce the spread of COVID-19 infection in the community to save lives and protect the NHS.”***

There were 1,647 cases aged 0-17yrs across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough in the latest week. As of 28th December, the 7 day change rate in East Cambs was + 27%. This is higher than the national 7 day change rate for that period, and the change rate for the East of England. Omicron is now the dominant variant in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough as is the case for the rest of the UK. Initially, spread was in the young working age groups, with a smaller proportion of Omicron cases seen in children. However, Omicron is now the dominant variant in children too and is understood to be more transmissible. Hospitalisations have begun to increase in the county, though numbers fortunately remain below the January 2021 peak. It is important to note that behaviours and testing habits have changed over the Christmas period, and this means that case detection is likely to be lower over the recent weeks making data less reliable.

On Sunday morning, schools received guidance from the Department for Education about the return to school. We are expecting a letter from the Service Director for Education which will summarise this information and we will send you this as soon as possible. The guidance does not contain any significant changes for primary schools.

Because we have maintained robust precautionary measures at Rackham for the entirety of the Autumn term, there are very few recommendations that we are not already carrying out.

Isolation periods for positive cases

The government has recently announced that those who have tested positive may finish their self-isolation at the end of day 7 if they have negative lateral flow tests on days 6 and 7. If this is the case, and to further reduce the chance of passing COVID-19 on to others, if you end your self-isolation period at the end of the 7th day, the government guidance ‘strongly advises’ you:

- to limit close contact with other people outside your household, especially in crowded, enclosed or poorly ventilated spaces
- to work from home if you are able to
- in addition to venues where it is a legal requirement, to wear a face covering in crowded, enclosed or poorly ventilated spaces and where you are in close contact with other people
- to limit contact with anyone who is at higher risk of severe illness if infected with COVID-19

If you wish to reduce your child’s isolation period, please contact the school on both day 6 and day 7 to confirm LFD test results.

Testing

- All staff continue to LFD test and report to school at least twice weekly,
- PCR tests for anyone with symptoms and to remain off school pending results,
- LFD tests for 7 days for all pupils identified as a close contact either by the school or by Track and Trace.

Household members with COVID

- When a pupil lives with a household member who is positive, parents should inform the school and (if appropriate) discuss remote learning and approved absence for their child,
- Where children do attend school in these circumstances, daily lateral flow tests are required.

Control measures

We have updated our risk assessment and have maintained our robust control measures for the return in January 2022. As was the case before Christmas, some of these measures are more stringent than some of the National Guidance, but all risk assessments are designed with individual school circumstances and local transmission rates in mind.

Hygiene and cleaning

- Additional on-site cleaning throughout the day,
- Washing hands or hand sanitiser on entry to classrooms,
- Washing before snack and lunch throughout the day.

Ventilation and air quality

- Outdoor learning is positively encouraged, as has always been the case at Rackham,
- Windows and internal classroom doors open all day,
- Purge ventilation in classrooms by opening external doors at break and lunchtime,
- Carbon dioxide monitors in each classroom which alarm if air quality reduces,
- Open external doors in dinner hall at lunchtime,
- Children to continue wearing their PE clothes on PE days to avoid the need to change in small school changing areas.

Face coverings

- All staff and visitors to wear face coverings while in shared spaces and to maintain 2-meter distance wherever possible,
- All parents strongly encouraged to wear face coverings for drop off and pick up and discouraged from crowding at these times,
- Where children and parents would like to wear face coverings, an arrangement can be made upon discussion with the school,
- Our staggered timings for drop off and collection will remain. However, please bear in mind they are to allow for greater social distancing between families during these busy times.

Minimising contact between year groups

- All assemblies and Collective Worship to remain virtual –streamed into classrooms live via Zoom.
- Ring fencing phase groups for break and lunch times on the playground, as has always been the case at Rackham.
- Minimising cross year group mixing to only:
 - Phonics groups
 - Intervention groups
 - Tuition sessions
 - After school clubs including RASC (Rackham Breakfast and After School Club)
 - Short periods in the hall at lunchtime
- All staff meetings to remain virtual
- Staff to remain spread – out across four separate staff rooms.

Food provision

Where staffing issues or food delivery issues arise, we may:

- Provide alternative lunches eg. Packed lunches for some or all of the children who usually have hot school dinners,
- Provide food packages or supermarket vouchers to eligible families for making packed lunches.

Staffing issues

At Rackham, we need to ensure we have adequate staffing for teaching and learning, site safety, hygiene and cleaning, lunchtime supervision and food preparation. One of our main concerns is the levels of staff absence that may occur, particularly given the fact that there are a high number of staff at Rackham who have underlying health conditions that put them at greater risk of serious illness from Covid.

We have several contingencies in place and the most appropriate one will be used based on the specific circumstances of the absence and following discussion with the Local Authority and/or Public Health.

Contingencies include:

- Non class-based staff (senior leaders/ HLTAs) covering classes,
- Support staff to cover while teachers remotely teach into the classroom,
- Use of supply teachers (but there is very high demand for these, and there are often now none available),
- Doubling up with one teacher providing the core input for lessons and then support staff assisting the learning,
- Remote learning: certain classes or year groups being asked to remain at home and take part in remote learning – this is a last resort.

We are committed to keeping the Rackham community safe and recognise that we are returning to an ever-changing environment. There may be times when we have to adapt or change our plans swiftly. I thank you in anticipation for your patience with this, and I thank the staff for their readiness, dedication and commitment to striving for a sense of purpose and normality for the children of Rackham.

Lastly, I would like to re-iterate to all parents and carers that if you are feeling anxious about sending your child into school, please contact us so we can support you. The weekly newsletters will continue to share Covid data for staff and pupils across the whole school and parents will continue to be notified by the school if there has been a positive case in their child's class. Parents of children whom school staff consider a 'close contact' (seating partners, for example) will be notified by the school directly.

We cannot wait to see the children again on Wednesday and hope that we can start the calendar year strong, looking positively towards the future together. We will write to you again as soon as further updates become available.

May I take this opportunity to once again thank you for your continued support.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs. Bridget Harrison
Headteacher

