

Shepherds Down School

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Dear Parents / Carers,

I want to update you on the plans we have, whilst we once again find ourselves in a lockdown situation. Since the announcement last Monday evening, we have asked all parents/carers what they want from school whilst in lockdown. 80% of our families want their child to continue to attend school during this period. We are, as always, committed to remaining open and ensuring that any child who wants to, can continue to attend school. However, we also need to factor in staff capacity and safety for all the school community at this time where infection levels are so high. We have therefore implemented a rota system, similar to the first lockdown ensuring a place for every child whose parent/carer has requested it; whilst allowing for remote learning support for those children remaining at home, factoring in staff capacity and ensuring reduced numbers in school each day to minimise the risk for all. Implementing part time attendance for all those who want a place has enabled class sizes to be roughly halved and reduced the number of children in school each day to 50% of the total number of children on roll. I believe this is a fair way to minimise the risks to all whilst ensuring that all children are able to continue to attend school who want to, as opposed to a smaller number of full time places that would inevitably restrict access to face-to-face education for some children.

On the evening of Thursday 7th the government released their guidance which outlines their plans moving forward and does state that special schools should remain open full time to all children who want, where appropriate. Whilst I, and the governing body, share the ambition of enabling all children to return to full time attendance as soon as possible, this has to be safe for all the school community. Full time attendance for 80% of the children, which in some cases would mean full classes, would reduce any possibility of social distancing at a time of such high transmission rates and would pose significant challenges on staff capacity. We are therefore, proposing that for the moment we will continue to work as we are – providing part time face-to-face education for all children who want it. I hope you can understand the reasons for this, however if you are experiencing difficulties with this arrangement, your circumstances change or want to discuss this further please do not hesitate to contact me. I know this is very difficult for all but do believe that we are doing the best we possibly can and we will be looking to increase the number of children in school each day as soon as the situation changes.

For those children attending school the changes made to our risk assessment shared on Monday 4th, remain in place. In particular, mask wearing at busy times, ventilation of all occupied spaces and limiting visitors and face to face meetings as far as possible. Thank you for your support in this by wearing a mask when dropping off or picking up your child and ensuring your child has additional clothing to put on in case they need it e.g. fleece, hoody or thermals.



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As always, please be vigilant to possible symptoms and keep your child at home if they or anyone in your household displays any of the symptoms. The class teacher will also send out some general ideas and discuss with you what remote learning support you require on the days your child is at home.

For those children learning from home, an individual home learning plan and any necessary resources will have been provided over the last few days. The class teacher will be in contact with you each week to discuss how your child is responding to the learning, whether there are any additional ways we can help and any issues you may be having. Where appropriate, some classes may provide an opportunity for children to connect with their peers via zoom.

We will also continue to share ideas, useful resources and opportunities to interact via our school website page. In fact, we are excited to say that there will be a Facebook Live activity every Tuesday from next week for you and your children at home to join in with. The first session will be a sensory story delivered by Shelley, our teacher in Nightingales. Timings will be confirmed on the day so keep an eye out for updates on our Facebook page.

On a slightly more positive note, I believe that parents with disabled children who are the main carer (regardless of whether they receive Carer's Allowance or not) have been moved up to tier 6 for the vaccine. Here is the link with the information:

<https://contact.org.uk/news-and-blogs/parent-carers-added-to-covid-19-vaccine-priority-list-across-the-uk/>

We should also be receiving rapid home tests for staff intended to start the week beginning 25th January. I am sure this will provide some fresh challenges but hopefully some peace of mind aswell. I will be in touch with details of how this will work and possible issues towards the end of next week, when hopefully I will know more.

As you know the situation is fast moving and the guidance is changing all the time, we are constantly reviewing our practice when this happens and will continue to keep you informed of any changes or developments as they arise.

I appreciate how challenging it is for all families at the moment and whether your child is attending school or remaining at home it is a very worrying time. As always, do not hesitate to contact me via email or phone if there is anything I can help with or you want to discuss.

Keep well

Debby