

7th January 2021

Dear Parent

It is with regret that we see the country entering lockdown for the third time. Unfortunately, rapidly rising transmission of the new COVID variant is overwhelming health services. Whilst we know how disruptive this is to people's lives it is essential that we all stay at home as much as possible.

We know that education is crucial and keeping children in schools wherever possible has been seen as a national priority throughout this pandemic. However, we have reached the point once again where protecting the population from the harms of COVID and protecting the NHS so it can continue to provide exceptional care to those who do catch COVID is even more important.

We wanted to write to you to explain the seriousness of the current situation, and ask for your help as we try to give ourselves the time to vaccinate people in Calderdale who are most at risk if they catch COVID. We also wanted to explain why this lockdown is different to previous lockdowns, and why it's so important we all do everything we can to stay at home.

When the first national lockdown started last March we knew very little about COVID. Schools moved to online learning for most pupils, and very few attended school for face to face lessons. As we learnt more about how COVID spread from person to person, our schools worked with Public Health to develop plans to keep staff and pupils as safe as possible. This meant we could reopen schools in a way that meant that all but the most clinically vulnerable could be in school once again.

Towards the end of 2020, it became clear that a new variant of COVID was spreading quickly in the South East of the country. This new variant is no more dangerous in itself to each individual who catches it, but it spreads from person to person much more easily than previously, meaning that more people are catching it, and, overall, more people will become seriously ill with it and end up in hospital. We've become much better at treating COVID, and for those people that do get really ill, the risk of dying is lower than it was during the first lockdown. However, the more cases of COVID we see, the busier hospitals get and the harder it is for them to provide high quality care.

The new COVID variant is in Calderdale now, and is spreading rapidly. The number of cases we have seen has gone up by over 60% just in the last week and continues to increase rapidly. Nationally, 1 in every 50 people are estimated to have COVID at the moment. Think how many children attend your child's school and think about how likely it is that someone in their class may have COVID now.

Anywhere where groups of people come together – such as schools – brings with it an increased risk of transmission now compared to what we saw last year. This means that schools are not as safe as they were in September, and the only thing we can do to make them safer again is to dramatically reduce the numbers of pupils attending school in person. We need your help with this. The national Government guidance allows for the children of key workers to be in school, but many parents and carers fall into this category, and schools simply can't accommodate all those children safely whilst also supporting the most vulnerable.



We would urge you only to send children to school if absolutely necessary, and instead to make use of other support available to you by speaking to your employer about furlough or changing your working pattern, or making use of any informal childcare bubble where you can (following national childcare bubble guidance). The new variant makes it much more likely your child will catch COVID from another child if they are in the same room as them and makes it much more likely they in turn will pass it on to other family members and friends.

We know this is a lot to ask of parents and carers who may struggle to juggle work and home learning, and it simply won't be possible for all families, but if there is any way you can support your child to learn from home, you will be protecting your family, protecting school staff and protecting the people of Calderdale.

The guidance for Early Years is slightly different and we know that the transmissibility in very young children is much lower as they do not carry the same viral load as older children. Early Years settings can therefore stay open where it is safe to do so but it is important that people taking children to and from settings observe all the usual safety measures.

The major difference between this lockdown and previous lockdowns is that this time there is light at the end of the tunnel. We now have effective vaccines available to us, and when the most at-risk people have been vaccinated, we will be able to relax the national lockdown and reopen schools to all pupils. This is important, in that we are not going into this lockdown without a plan to come out of it again. If we all do everything we can to stay at home we should soon be in a position to move forward with a relaxation of the lockdown nationally. By staying at home, we really are saving lives, and you could be saving the lives of those you are closest to.

We do ask that you support our schools and early years settings during this challenging time. They are having to make very difficult decisions about how to keep the number of children and staff in school as low as possible to reduce transmission, whilst wanting to ensure that critical workers are supported and the most vulnerable children are kept safe. That means that not everyone who meets the criteria for attending school in person will be able to have a place.

We are also acutely aware that not every child that needs a laptop or internet access has that provision yet. Many schools are waiting for the devices to be loaned to disadvantaged families promised by Government and in fact some are not yet able to even order their allocation so again we ask for your patience whilst we work through arrangements to ensure that all children can access their remote learning. Schools are working hard to provide support for home learning which we know poses challenges for many families. We encourage parents to work with their schools where there are any specific concerns.

Thank you for all you are doing to support our efforts in Calderdale, together we can beat this.

Kind regards,



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