

Monday 4th January 2021

Dear parent / carer,

This letter is to update you on education for your child during the ongoing pandemic. Our view is that it is important that children are in school where possible and that in containing COVID-19, schools should be the last settings to close for face-to-face learning, and the first to open. But we also understand that you may be concerned about your child being in school at the moment.

As you will have heard in the news, there is a new variant of COVID-19 in England which is thought to be 70% more infectious than the dominant strain. This has led to rapid increases in transmission in London, the South East and the East of England, putting enormous pressure on NHS services.

Data suggest that this new strain is not currently the dominant variant circulating locally. The latest data for Calderdale show that the infection rate in the 7 days ending 29th December was 198 per 100,000, compared to a rate of just under 500 per 100,000 at the peak of the second wave in mid-November. This places Calderdale 290th of the 343 English local authorities.

At the time of writing, Calderdale is under Tier 3 restrictions which means that a number of settings remain open, such as non-essential shops, gyms and organised sports. As such, we feel that schools should also remain open where possible. We are reviewing this position daily, and our view could change rapidly in response to changes in the local infection rate.

You may have seen on the news that secondary schools will start offering testing to pupils this term. At present this is not being extended to primary schools. This testing is not mandatory, and it is your choice as to whether your child is tested. Schools will not test your child(ren) without seeking your consent first. You may also have seen that the government have said that secondary schools can test all contacts of a confirmed case of COVID-19 with the new tests, and that pupils can stay in school if they test negative. In Calderdale we do not support the use of this serial testing to allow children who have been exposed to COVID-19 as a contact to stay in school. This is because a negative result on this type of test does not necessarily mean that the person isn't currently infectious. In order to limit transmission, we will continue to operate under the existing legal framework where contacts of positive cases self-isolate at home for 10 days. This means that if your child is a contact of someone who tests positive for COVID-19 they will still be expected to self-isolate if advised to do so.

Schools are working incredibly hard to keep staff and pupils safe, and the protective measures they have put in place will reduce the risk of transmission within the setting. However, we have asked all schools to review their risk assessments, and where they are not confident that they can implement the necessary control measures and that the risk of opening is too great, we will support schools to move to remote learning for some or all year groups. Where staffing issues make it difficult for a school to stay open for pupils to attend, we again support a temporary move to home learning.

The situation is changing rapidly, so we will review the position every day to decide if our advice to schools needs to change.

In the meantime, please help our schools to keep everyone safe by:

- Staying at home and arranging a test if anyone in your household has COVID-19 symptoms
- Making sure that anyone in your household self-isolates if they test positive for COVID-19 or are identified as a contact of someone who has tested positive
- Keeping your distance from others at drop-off and pick-up, and wearing a face covering if asked to do so. If anyone you have come into close contact with in the school yard tests positive for COVID-19, you may have to self-isolate. Please don't stop to chat with other parents
- Avoiding using local playgrounds before and after school when there are likely to be more people around
- Remembering that school staff are working under incredibly difficult circumstances and doing all they can to provide a good quality of education whilst ensuring that everyone remains as safe as possible
- Observing the current Covid-19 restrictions to mixing that are in place in Calderdale, see www.gov.uk/find-coronavirus-local-restrictions

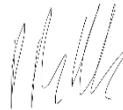
If you or your child have any concerns about COVID-19, contact the Healthy Futures Calderdale school nursing team by phone on **0303 330 9974** or by text on **07480 635297 (young people)** or **07507 332157 (parents/carers)**.



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