

12 January 2021

Dear Parents and Carers,

I do hope that you had a pleasant Christmas and enjoyed some special family time, even if it was inevitably a rather different Christmas for us all.

Our schools have had a very challenging start to 2021 and due to the Government's announcement of Lockdown on January 4th, we have had to make last minute changes to provision which I know has also had a significant impact on your lives.

We know that the new variant of Coronavirus is highly contagious and the number of positive cases is continuing to rise. Unfortunately, it is rising particularly fast in London and the South East.

We are now in a national lockdown. Matt Hancock the Health Secretary last night told us all to stay at home and 'act like we all have the virus'. Chris Whitty the Chief Medical Officer for England has also told us that we are entering the worst and most dangerous period of the pandemic. He says we should all stay at home, reduce our contacts to an absolute minimum and to our household only if at all possible. We do know that one in three people with the virus has no symptoms and therefore any contact that any of us have with others outside our household is increasing the risk to our own health. If we move out of our homes we are all expected to be especially rigorous about hands/face/space which is why our schools are asking you to observe social distancing when picking up and dropping off your children and also asking you to wear face coverings when on site.

As you know schools have been asked to stay open to provide support for the children of NHS and other absolutely critical workers as well as vulnerable children and we will of course ensure that the school environment is as safe as it can be. In March we were asked to do this and most of you managed to keep your children at home. Approximately 5% of children across our Trust attended the school site during that first lock down. This week we have seen a very different picture with over 25% of children attending our schools and, in some schools, almost 50% of you are requesting a place for your child. This puts schools in a difficult situation as they are required in Government guidance to reduce contacts to a minimum.

We are told that the next few weeks will be the time of highest risk. The government and Public Health England have asked all parents to keep their children at home if they are able to do so and schools to do all they can to reduce contact by keeping children in the smallest possible groups. I therefore appeal to you to consider very carefully if you need a place at school during the height of this pandemic, so that we can support those children and staff who need to be on the school site to keep their contacts to a minimum. This will also enable our staff to focus on providing high-quality remote learning for all children, and will ensure that all children are well supported during this period.

We hope that if we all stay at home as much as possible and reduce the number of our contacts we can help the country to avert a huge crisis over the next month. As testing and vaccinations become more readily available I very much hope that we can all begin to return to a more normal life.

I thank you for your consideration and for your support for our schools, as your personal actions can make so much difference to us all.

Yours sincerely



Mrs S M Samson

Chief Executive Officer, University of Chichester Academy Trust