

22 October 2021

Dear Parents and Carers

As we come to the end of the first half term I wanted to just write out and thank everyone for all the support you have given to your children and the school as we have sought to return to some sort of normality after all the disruption of the past 2 years. Over the past few weeks we have had a number of visitors to the school with wider-ranging educational experience, including one of Her Majesty Inspectors of Schools, members of some other Multi-Academy Trusts, as well as a large group of our own governors, and without exception they have come away feeling highly impressed with the attitude and behaviour of our young people – both their desire to learn and progress, as well as their respectful and courteous manner. This is entirely due to the efforts of both students and staff as they settle back into Uffculme and get back to making it the place we all want it to be.

Unfortunately, I do now have to address the ongoing situation with Covid and the impact it is having on schools across the South West. So far we have been extremely fortunate as a school, in part I am sure due to the students' support of the strategy of wearing face masks in corridors and communal areas. Sadly however, many schools in the region are now facing really difficult situations due to having very high case numbers amongst their students and staff body, and we would be neglectful if we were complacent and didn't continue to do all we can to keep the virus in check.

Yesterday I received a letter that has been jointly written and issued by all of the Directors for Public Health from across the South West – these are the people that have responsibility for Public Health in their County and Steve Brown, (Director for Public Health with DCC) is one of the signatories to this letter. Below I have copied some of the key parts of the letter:

All South West local authority areas are in areas of rapidly rising infection rates and therefore triggering thresholds for additional action in schools. To ensure consistency, South West Directors of Public Health have jointly agreed the additional advice and action set out below in order that their schools can implement additional Covid response measures as proportionate or necessary.

Situation Summary

- *The South West is experiencing the impact of national rising case rates and the impact of increased transmission arising from some false negative PCR results*
- *SW Case rates have increased sharply against the national average and are expected to continue to rise*
- *The majority of cases are in school age groups. There is evidence of this translating into adults of parent age.*

Whilst we are experiencing rising infection rates in the community, and schools are experiencing challenges from widespread transmission, the South West Directors of Public Health recommend a particular focus on a precautionary and sensible set of measures; maintaining these for 14 days post half term (whilst we review) to limit the impact of social mixing at half term.

The letter then goes on to outline a number of particular measures that schools are requested to follow. I am pleased to say that we are already addressing most of these points and have been doing so since the start of term, however there are some areas where we need to make adjustments including reviewing gatherings where large numbers from different year groups come together (e.g. some of our larger assemblies and also events such as the Post-16 Evening). There are also some areas where I would ask for your support as parents and carers and I have covered these below.

Actions for Parents and Carers

1. Please will you continue with the twice weekly testing of your children, both over half term and when they return back
2. Please will you ensure that your child is wearing a face covering when travelling by bus and when in school (in corridors and communal areas). We do accept that some children will have genuine medical reasons why this may not be possible and will always support families in this if you let Mrs Alford know the situation, otherwise we do want all pupils to be wearing a face mask when they return back after half term
3. If your child has any of the Covid symptoms, please keep them at home and book a PCR Test. Please notify the school if this is happening so we can keep track of potential as well as actual cases.
4. If your child is flagged as 'close contact' of a confirmed positive case, they can still come into school (provided they have no Covid symptoms), but here again we would ask that you book them in for a PCR Test.
5. If your child should test positive at any time, please provide full information to NHS Test and Trace about their close contacts, as this is vital so they can quickly contact anyone that might be at risk.

Finally, a number of you have enquired about what is happening with the Covid Vaccinations that were due to take place the other day. We expect that these will be rescheduled either 2 or 3 weeks after the half term holiday. Please note – Virgin Care have closed the consent form for these vaccinations now so any parents/carers that wish their child to have the vaccine but missed signing up for it will need to do so through one of the community vaccination centres. Obviously, anyone that has already given consent for the school-based vaccine can still choose to book in at one of these sites if you prefer to do so. Here is a link to the NHS England page that contains the latest information and link to the booking page: [NHS England » NHS opens online COVID-19 vaccination bookings for 12-15 year olds](#)

I am sorry to spend so much of this letter once again focusing on coronavirus, but sadly it is still with us and if we are to keep the school running as normally as possible and ensure that we continue with face-to-face learning, as well as providing all the enrichment and extra-curricular opportunities that are so important to students, then we do need to continue to be vigilant at this time and make every effort with our protective measures

It only remains for me to wish you all a good half term break, and we look forward to seeing everyone back with us in November.

Best wishes



Alan Blackburn
Headteacher