

Children and Young People

Corporate Director: Beate Wagner

Cabinet Member: Councillor Margaret Isherwood

Children and Young People Services

County Hall

Bond Street

Wakefield. WF1 2QW

Date: 11 January 2021

Dear Parent(s) and Carer(s)

As you know, England has entered a third national lockdown and Primary and Secondary schools have closed for everyone except the children of critical workers and vulnerable children. We would expect all vulnerable children to attend school. For all others the best action for you to take for your child, yourself and the whole community is to keep your child at home if it is safe to do so. You may have already had communication from your school and we thought it would be helpful to provide the view of the Local Authority.

We continue to be vigilant in Wakefield and to encourage everyone to follow the national guidance. The infection rate increased to 285 per 100,000 and continues to rise. We must all continue to follow the lockdown rules to help NHS Hospitals to continue to function for all of us. In time vaccinations will provide us all with hope but we must remain strong and determined at this point in time.

The national Government guidance allows for the children of critical workers to be in school. However, the most recent guidance broadens the definitions of critical workers and, as a consequence, increases the number of children who may be seeking a place in school as compared to previous phases in the pandemic. Consequently, Schools are under increased pressure and we would ask that you do all you can to support them by keeping children at home if you can. The safety of your child and their staff is the school's number one priority and all school decisions about school places will be guided by this.

For some of you, we understand that your work is of such critical importance that your child absolutely has to be in school. However, if you qualify as a critical worker, but can manage to have your children at home, please do this, and let your school know. Government guidance published on 7 January reinforces this point. It says "Parents and carers who are critical workers should keep their children at home if they can."

Government guidance also says that there should be a place for all children of critical workers "who need to attend." We know that many of you are in families where both parents are involved in frontline work that takes you out of the house and where your work is essential in the fight against Covid-19. Where this is not the case, we would urge you only to send children to

school if absolutely necessary. This would greatly help our Wakefield schools and our local effort if those children stayed at home and accessed the school's remote learning offer.

Your cooperation will help schools reduce potential transmission of Covid-19 by minimising the numbers on site and to ensure staff have the capacity to support the home learning of all other pupils. Each school will have undertaken a health and safety risk assessment and will know the maximum number of pupils they are able to have safely on site at any one time, given the amount of staff they have available.

We do ask that you support our schools during this challenging time. They are having to make very difficult decisions about how to balance the number of children and staff in school to reduce transmission, with the need 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 families through the national scheme, but some are not yet able to order their allocation. We ask for your patience whilst schools work through arrangements to ensure that all children can access their remote learning. Wakefield 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 your understanding in what we recognise is a very difficult situation for everyone. We recognise that this will cause considerable disruption to your personal and working lives. Like you, we wish our children could be in school for the sake of their education and well-being. We really do appreciate the pressure this situation places on all of us but we are acting in the midst of a pandemic. We hope the progress with vaccinations means we can see a brighter future ahead and so there is hopefully an end in sight.

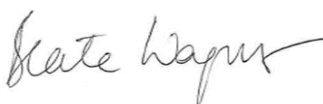
We will of course continue to keep all arrangements under constant review as we progress our response through this period of lockdown and beyond.

Our best wishes to you all please stay safe.

Yours faithfully,



Cllr Margaret Isherwood
Cabinet Member



Beate Wagner
Corporate Director and DCS