

Wednesday 7 July 2021

To: All employees of Reach South Academy Trust

Dear Colleagues,

On Monday, the Prime Minister announced the Government's proposals for the next stage (Stage-4) of relaxing restrictions on society in their response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The Government will decide on 12th July, whether to proceed with Stage-4. If they do decide to proceed, then from 19th July, we will all be expected to take greater personal responsibility for how we protect others and ourselves as this pandemic continues.

Yesterday, the Secretary of State for Education set out the changes that they will require for schools, if they decide on 12th July to proceed to Stage-4. If they do decide to proceed on the 12th, then the restrictions on how we operate our schools, from the start of the new term, will be hugely relaxed. There will be no changes to how we operate before the end of this term.

The changes from the start of next term will be:

- Adults who have had both vaccination doses will not need to self-isolate if they have been in close contact with someone who tests positive (come in to force from 16th August).
- Pupils under the age of 18 will not need to self-isolate if they have been in close contact with someone who tests positive (come in to force from 16th August).
- Schools will no longer be required to carry out contact tracing if a pupil or member of staff tests positive. The NHS will take over that role.
- All secondary pupils will be required to have 2 on-site lateral flow tests, 3 to 5 days apart, at the start of the new term. After that, they should carry out twice-weekly tests at home until the end of September when the policy will be reviewed.
- Staff should undertake twice-weekly tests at home, whenever they are going to be in a school, until the end of September when the policy will be reviewed.
- Any member of staff or pupil developing Covid-19 symptoms will be required to stay at home and follow the public health advice.

At work, we have both a personal and professional responsibility to keep ourselves and our pupils safe. Our three overarching principles for September will be:

1. Keep our pupils, their families and ourselves as safe as we can.
2. Provide exceptional education for all of our pupils.

3. Continue to provide additional and individual support for pupils whose development has suffered because of the pandemic.

Covid-19 is not going to go away. However, thanks to the vaccine programme in the United Kingdom (UK) we may now be able to live with it. In other words, because of the vaccine, only a very small proportion of people catching the disease will become seriously ill and even fewer are at risk of dying because of it. The risks become similar to other diseases in society that we have already learned to live with. This is what we all hope for, however, as we return to a more normal way of working, we still have to be cautious for a little while longer. That caution is because:

- a) Scientists have only known this virus for just over a year, we still have much to learn about it.
- b) Virus mutation to create variants is a random event. Most variants are weaker than the original virus and quickly die. A tiny percentage will thrive and be more infectious than the original virus. These variants are dangerous if the vaccine is less effective against them. The more virus in the population, the more likely a random variant will be a dangerous one. Now, infection levels are high and increasing in the UK.
- c) Vaccinations across the world are not yet as high as they are in the UK and a few other countries. We will only be truly safe when the whole world is safe.

These are not reasons for us to be pessimistic but they are reasons for us to be cautious over the Summer holiday and start of the new academic year. There are many reasons why we should actually be optimistic, but also stay well informed and realistic. For that reason, we must continue to observe hygiene controls in our schools to continue to minimise the risk of infection to our pupils and ourselves. We do that to not only protect our pupils and ourselves from the infection, but also, to prevent any further interruptions to our pupils' learning. Our goal is to keep our pupils in school where we support them best.

Thanks to the vaccine programme in the United Kingdom, there are far fewer people becoming seriously ill when they catch Covid-19. This is not the case in all other countries. We do not know if a new variant might emerge somewhere for which the vaccine will not offer adequate protection. For these reasons, the rules around international travel are unpredictable and liable to change at short notice. Any member of staff planning to travel abroad over the Summer, must take account of the high risk that the travel rules for that country, or the countries that you would need to pass through, may change suddenly while you are away. Regardless of whether a country is on a green, red or amber list when you plan or start your holiday there is a significant risk that it will change while you are on holiday. Any country, including the UK, may restrict travel or bring in new quarantine rules or requirements to self-isolate, including when returning to this country. It is the responsibility of each of us individually, if taking the known risks of travelling outside of the UK this Summer, to ensure that we have enough time to quarantine or self-isolate, if required to do so, before the start of the new term. Travelling outside of the UK, at the current time, is when you are at greatest risk of exposing yourself to a new variant of Covid-19. Remember, we have a professional, as well as a personal duty to protect ourselves and be ready to give our pupils the academic and pastoral development that they need and deserve, regardless of the job that we do, from the start of next term.

I want to thank every one of you for the way that you have adjusted and responded to this situation over the last 16-months:

- supporting key-workers through the provision of 'Educare' throughout the Easter and Summer half-term holidays in 2020;
- delivery of virtual learning for children at home during national lockdowns or in a self-isolating bubble;
- identifying and supporting our most vulnerable children throughout the period including home visits;
- ensuring children could get access to school meals;
- modifying classrooms and learning spaces to maintain social distancing for pupils;
- and identifying individual need and matching it to catch-up programmes for children who have suffered trauma and loss of learning.

Thank you, thank you, and thank you.

I hope everyone will take a well-deserved break this summer. Let us be optimistic about returning to greater normality in the new academic year. Optimistic but professionally informed, intelligent and cautious for a little while longer.

With very best wishes



Dean Ashton
Chief Executive Officer