

4th November 2020

To: All employees of Reach South Academy Trust
Subject: COVID-19 2019-nCoV, Coronavirus

Dear Colleagues,

New National Social Restrictions

On Saturday 31st October, the Prime Minister set out his intention to ask Parliament to approve a national set of social restrictions across England, in response to the rapidly increasing rates of Covid-19 infection. Today, Parliament approved the proposals. This is not the same as the social lockdown between March and July earlier in the year. This time, people will continue to go to work where their place of work is open. In addition, schools, colleges, and universities will remain open. On the 2nd November, the DfE sent the following message to all schools:

“We will continue to prioritise the wellbeing and long-term futures of our children and young people and will not be closing early years settings, schools, colleges or universities. It remains very important for children and young people to attend, to support their wellbeing and education and help working parents and guardians. Senior clinicians still advise that school is the best place for children to be, and so they should continue to go to school.” DfE 2nd November.

Reach South has consistently supported this view. Children are best supported by being in school as much as possible. The professional support that all of you provide for children’s educational development, social development and personal wellbeing equips them for life. This is true for all children and even more so for some.

The social restrictions that will be in place for the next month will help us to reduce the risk of infection spread within schools. Currently, our ‘bubbles’ burst at the end of each school day when children and their families can mix with children and families from other bubbles and other schools. The new social restrictions will help to maintain the integrity of our class and year-group bubbles and hence strengthen our infection controls. We welcome that approach. The DfE has published new guidance for schools setting out the implications of the new restrictions from November 5th at https://www.gov.uk/guidance/education-and-childcare-settings-new-national-restrictions-from-5-november-2020?utm_source=4%20November%202020%20C19&utm_medium=Daily%20Email%20C19&utm_campaign=DfE%20C19#schools

Professional Duty to Protect Ourselves and Each Other

As a Trust we are absolutely committed to keeping our academies open to support all of our pupils. However, we can only do that if all of you are fit and able to work. Each of us has a professional duty to protect ourselves and minimise our own risk of either catching the virus or having to self-isolate because we did not socially distance from someone else who has caught the virus. The Trust’s guidance for the management of our schools, ‘Operational Management for Academies From 5th November’, <https://www.reachsouth.org/covid-19> is designed to minimise the risk of staff catching the virus at work. Recently we have introduced further protections for staff through the requirement for all staff to wear a visor in a situation where social distancing cannot be maintained. We have also introduced a requirement for all adult visitors to the school site to wear a face covering. These measures, along with the measures already in place, are to help you to maintain social distancing (2 metres) from other colleagues at all times and from pupils as often as is reasonably practicable.

Clinically Extremely Vulnerable

A small number of us will receive or already have received an official letter from the NHS or a specialist doctor to confirm that we are clinically assessed to be 'clinically extremely vulnerable' (CEV) and are advised to work from home. The most recent government advice is:

"Those individuals who are clinically extremely vulnerable are advised to work from home and not to go into work. Individuals in this group will have been identified through a letter from the NHS or from their GP, and may have been advised to shield in the past. Staff should talk to their employers about how they will be supported, including to work from home where possible, during the period of national restrictions.

All other staff should continue to attend work, including those living in a household with someone who is clinically extremely vulnerable."

If you have been assessed as clinically extremely vulnerable and provide evidence of the formal letter from the NHS, the Trust will support you in working from home between November 5th and December 2nd on full pay. Please discuss this with your line manager or HR if you are in this position.

The Next Month

Many of our academies have had a small number of pupils and staff test positive for Covid-19 since the start of the new academic year. None of those infections have led to serious health problems, I am delighted to say, and some were asymptomatic. We have become well versed in consulting with the DfE and local public health in these circumstances and identifying if other pupils and staff need to self-isolate for 14-days because they had been in close proximity to the infected person. Academies are collaborating to ensure that we can provide quality home-learning for children when they have to self-isolate at home.

Over the coming weeks we can expect to see more cases of pupils and staff testing positive for the virus. It is vital that if you experience symptoms of Covid-19 you inform your Headteacher/Director immediately, self-isolate, get tested as soon as possible, and share the results of your test with your line manager as soon as you receive them. We can also expect then to have more disruption as groups of pupils and staff have to self-isolate for up to two-weeks at a time. We know this is going to happen and we have been preparing for it. Our job is to ensure that we are able to support children through these disruptions to minimise the negative impact on their education and their wellbeing. Our blend of 'at school' and 'at home' learning must work seamlessly together for the learners. I have been so impressed with the creative and energetic way that so many have you have risen to this challenge already. The way that you have taken the difficulties of our circumstances and turned them into an opportunity to improve learning, rather than wasting energy on seeing it as a threat, is a testament to all of your professionalism and commitment. There is much more to do in this respect, but this is our new norm.

With very best wishes,



Dean Ashton
Chief Executive Officer