



Established in 1856

St Peter's Church of England (VC) Primary School

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Covid Update

Monday 6th September 2021

Dear Parents

I am writing to update you on the guidance which the DfE have provided to schools, on how we should operate as we start this new academic year. The changes are considerable and I urge you to read this letter in order to understand the implications fully.

The guidance remains just guidance, but as I have explained before, the local authority have made it clear that we are expected to follow it fully. We do have the power to make minor changes according to the individual circumstances of our schools, but in the main, all schools will be working towards full implementation of this new guidance.

Positive Cases of Covid

The most significant change is what happens if any child or family member test positive for Covid. It remains the case that anyone who displays any of the three accepted symptoms for Covid – loss of taste/smell, increased temperature, new, persistent cough – must isolate. If any of the children begin to display any of these symptoms at school, we will contact you and you will be required to collect your child and to have them conduct a PCR test. If your child develops these symptoms at home, the child must not attend school until they have completed a PCR test and the results are negative.

However, there is a very significant change in policy. Whilst your child or any family member must isolate if they test positive for Covid, just as before, close contacts are not all required to isolate as well.

If you have been in close contact with someone who tests positive for Covid, but you are fully vaccinated (double jabbed), or unable to be vaccinated for medical reasons, *or you are below the age of 18 years 6 months*, you are not required to isolate. You will be contacted by Track and Trace, and strongly advised to have a PCR test – but you are not required to isolate immediately as before.

This has serious implications for us at school. It means that if one of our children now tests positive for Covid, the rest of the class continue to come to school, despite how much close contact they have had with that child. The only person who is required to isolate is the child who tests positive.

In addition, if any member of your household test positive for Covid, your children can still come to school. We would strongly ask that your child has a PCR test before doing so, but if that is negative, they can return to school and do not need to isolate as before.



Implications for Us

The premise for this step seems to be twofold – firstly a belief that children are less likely to catch, spread or be seriously affected by the virus, and secondly an understandable desire to minimise the disruption to children’s education caused by having their classes continually suspended. I understand the latter point entirely. Walking into the Year 6 classroom last July, to suspend their bubble, knowing that this was how they would leave their primary school after 7 years here, was a low point of my career. None of us wish to suspend full classes if there is no need to do so.

However I am concerned that the new measures will increase the risk of the virus being brought into school. Whilst the children do not appear to become overly unwell when they contract Covid, our experience last year shows that they do catch and spread the virus quite readily.

Mrs Stone is double jabbed, but still contracted Covid in July, the sixth member of staff to do so. The DfE guidance is undoubtedly designed to increase the time which children spend in school, but if the teachers are increasingly off work having contracted Covid, then increased pupil attendance is rather a moot point.

If a class teacher contracts Covid, I will of course endeavour to replace them. However, if 2 or 3 become ill, it will be a challenge to provide suitably qualified staff. Hence, whilst we are implementing most of the additional actions outlined by the DfE in their updated guidance, we are not implementing them all. I am trying to mitigate the risk as much as I can whilst implementing the policies as set out for schools.

Bubbles have been dispensed with and consequently we are no longer segregating the children into year group bubbles. The children can now mix freely at school. However, whilst we are allowed to re-introduce physical assemblies when we can all gather together in the hall, we are not yet going to do so. We will continue to hold virtual assemblies twice a week via zoom.

The reason for this is that I am also required to maintain high levels of ventilation in all classroom areas. But whilst we can attempt this in the classrooms, it is impossible to have the whole school sitting in the hall and maintain adequate ventilation. Hence we will continue with virtual assemblies at this point.

The classrooms have been reorganised and there is no longer a requirement for the children to sit in rows. We are now able to reintroduce different approaches to our teaching which had been suspended.

We are not required ask anyone to wear a face covering when visiting the school. However, as you know, we are still asking you to do so. Our school has one, tiny gate through which everyone passes at the beginning and end of the school day. There is no way we can maintain any social distance at this point. Schools have been asked to dispense with staggered starts and ends to their days. At our school this inevitably involves all of you grouping on Mount Pleasant, walking through a tiny gate and then congregating on a relatively small playground. This is why we are still asking you to wear a mask when you come onto the site at the start and end of the day please. I thank all of you for understanding and supporting us with this.

As the term progresses, we will review how the measures are succeeding and we will alter our practices accordingly.

Best wishes

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jim Holditch". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Jim Holditch