



Important Covid-19 Update November 2021

Dear all,

I had sincerely hoped to not be communicating with you again in this manner but sadly, as we are all so acutely aware, the pandemic is really not yet over.

All schools in West Sussex received an email this morning from Alison Challenger, Director of Public Health in West Sussex, which included the following:

The latest data, as of Friday 19 November, further reinforces that we are far from over this pandemic, with many districts and boroughs in West Sussex having some of the highest Covid-19 rates in the country amongst young people. We are aware of more than 1,700 cases in the last week in children and young people's settings including schools; an increase of around 600 on the previous week. Rates have risen sharply in children and young people aged over 5, particularly 10–14-year-olds, with rates of over 2,000 per 100,000, more than double the national average for this age group. Mid Sussex is a particular hotspot and has had one of the highest rates in the country for young people. We are now seeing increasing cases in primary schools.

Unfortunately, we are seeing evidence of this at CFS, with rising cases in both staff and pupils over the last week. Like all schools, we are in regular contact with Public Health England who have confirmed that we are not yet in an outbreak situation but there is no doubt that the situation has escalated over the last week. Whilst we are no longer contact tracing close contacts, we are actively requesting that pupils take PCR tests where there are rising cases in a specific class or year group. However, you may well be contacted via Track and Trace due to your child's friend having Covid-19 and we would strongly ask that you follow all requests made by the NHS service.

Due to the rising cases both at CFS, and locally, I therefore need to update you on the following information.

1. Mask Wearing in Secondary

Alison Challenger has requested that all Secondary schools reinstate the mandatory wearing of masks for Secondary aged pupils in communal areas. We will therefore be bringing this in from tomorrow. This will apply to all pupils in years 7 and above, and all CFS staff (regardless of phase) across the whole school. To emphasise, at present, this request from West Sussex is for all schools (regardless of the number of cases) until the end of term, and is for indoor communal areas only e.g. corridors, indoor break spaces, assemblies. We will not be asking staff or pupils to wear masks in classrooms at present, although West Sussex have warned that this is a possible next step if things continue to escalate.

As always, this is for all pupils unless they are exempt – please do let us know if there have been any changes to exceptions since the last academic year and once again passes will be issued, or your child is welcome to wear a lanyard if they prefer.

Nobody wants this to be needed again, and I understand that many pupils will find this frustrating, although perhaps easier than previously when masks were worn in the classrooms too, but it is important that we follow the local guidance at all times.



2. Calendared Events

At present we are able to continue with most of our calendared events, as CFS itself is not in an outbreak situation. This includes the Christmas Fair, Carol Service and Years 1 and 2 production. However, we will need to monitor the situation very carefully over the coming weeks. I do need to forewarn you that, whilst it is our absolute hope and intention to have Year 1 and 2 parents in to see the production as planned, this is something that we will need to make a decision on nearer to the time – we have a back up plan whereby the production would be shown through a video stream but obviously this is not what any of us want when the children have been working so hard.

Sadly, once again, we have also made the decision to not hold our House gatherings next week – such a shame as this was the first time in so long that pupils from right across the School were going to be able to gather together in support and celebration of either Aquila, Noctua, Pegasus or Phoenix. But, right now, this does not seem the right things to do. We are looking at alternative ways of bringing the Houses together and will get the in person gatherings back in place for the Spring.

3. Staff Absence

I want to be very honest with you and say that staff absence is currently very high in school, in both phases, teachers and support staff. This is not just because of Covid cases; it is sometimes also due to staff supporting their own children who have tested positive in other schools, or due to the awful cold that is also circulating. We also have staff isolating, awaiting PCRs due to being symptomatic etc. We have a strong group of cover supervisors, which is helping tremendously, but are rarely able to get any extra supply teachers in – the message every day from multiple Supply Agencies is there is a national shortage of supply teachers. Speaking to other Headteachers, there is a similar – often far worse - picture in other schools. But the fact remains that this is putting a strain on us at CFS. There may well be times, therefore, over the coming weeks where we need to combine some classes – especially where pupil absence is high – and make alterations to the timetable. At all times we will be mindful of: limiting mixing; keeping pupils safe; and of course the quality of education being offered to all pupils, but especially those in important examination years.

4. Pupil Absence and Remote Learning

I am very aware and of course concerned about the number of pupils that are unavoidably absent at the moment due to Covid, directly or indirectly. Today alone we have 15% of pupils absent. We are doing our utmost to support all those at home that are well enough to still work, with work posted on **Google Classroom** (not Satchel One). The parent guide can be found on our website <https://www.chichesterfreeschool.org.uk/coronavirus-update/>. However, with 85% of pupils still in school and high staff absence it is simply impossible for this to be in the same manner as we would have in a full lockdown situation. It also can take time for work to be actioned during the day when we hear of an absence. We are doing our absolute best, and are working with staff across the school to enhance the remote offer whilst in-school lessons are still going ahead. Whilst in no way a substitute, I would like to



remind you of some resources available to all pupils in the country that can also support your child at home. I emphasise, this is not a substitute but a supplement, and is a good starting point whilst you are waiting for the online work to be actioned for your child:

- <https://www.transum.org/> (starter of the day and maths activities)
- Linguascope, Activelearn, Memrise and Quizlet (Spanish)
- Seneca Learning
- <https://www.internetgeography.net/> (GCSE Geography)
- Doodle (Maths)
- Corbett Maths (GCSE Maths)
- <https://www.mathsgenie.co.uk/gcse.html> (Maths GCSE)
- Focus on Sound (Music)
- Tutor2you (GCSE and A Level Business Studies)
- BBC Bitesize
- Twinkl (currently offering one month's free subscription - good for primary and KS3)
- <https://www.technologystudent.com/> (Technology)
- <https://www.freesciencelessons.co.uk/> (GCSE Science)
- Khan Academy, Amoeba Sisters and Bozeman Science (A Level Biology)
- <https://classroom.thenational.academy/subjects-by-key-stage/>, <https://storylineonline.net/> (online stories)
- <https://uk.ixl.com/> (Primary Maths and English)
- <https://www.mathplayground.com/> (Primary Maths)
- <https://www.topmarks.co.uk/>
- Sparknotes and No Fear Shakespeare (GCSE and A Level English)

5. What to Do If...?

We have had an increasing number of phone calls checking what to do in certain situations, with often some confusion between Lateral Flow Tests and PCR tests. With ever changing national and local guidance due to the ever changing situation, and multiple possible scenarios, we appreciate that it can be confusing. We have therefore pulled together the current actions needed for different situations – we hope this helps with clarifying things for you:

If a pupil has a positive LFD result:

- This pupil should not attend school.
- Parent/Carer should book a PCR test for this pupil.
- This pupil should remain at home until the result is received.
- If a NEGATIVE result is returned this pupil can return to school.

If a pupil has a positive PCR result:

- This pupil must follow the NHS guidance on their isolation period.
- Parent/Carer should inform Absence in the usual way.
- Work should be set for this pupil but no expectation for work to be completed if the pupil is unwell.
- CFS will support NHS Track and Trace with their information gathering.



If a pupil's SIBLING/HOUSEHOLD MEMBER has a positive LFD result:

- If this pupil is not showing any of the three Covid symptoms and/or has a negative LFD result (if they are using the LFD devices) then **NO ACTION** is required at this stage, even though there is potential Covid in the household. However...
- ...Should a parent/carer wish to collect their child/children for a PCR test, that is their own choice, not an instruction from CFS, and they should inform Absence in the usual way.

If a pupil's SIBLING/HOUSEHOLD MEMBER has a positive PCR result:

- Parent/Carer should book a PCR test for this pupil, preferably by being collected from school as soon as possible, although this is not a formal requirement.
- Where possible, this pupil should remain at home until their result is received.
Isolating whilst waiting for the PCR result is guidance from the Public Health Director at WSCC, rather than the Government, which we have chosen to follow until at least the Christmas holidays, and does contradict the current Government website information. As it is only guidance, and we are not formally in an outbreak situation, if parents do not wish to follow this approach then pupils with Covid in their household will be allowed in school even before the PCR result is back. However, we strongly encourage you to wait until they receive their own PCR result as these only take around 24 hours to come back.
- Work should be set for this pupil but no expectation for work to be completed if the pupil is unwell.
- If a NEGATIVE result is returned this pupil can return to school. Despite there being Covid in their household, they can return to school and do not need to isolate
- If a POSITIVE result is returned, the points above should then be followed.

Three Main Covid Symptoms (direct from NHS site):

- **a high temperature** – this means you feel hot to touch on your chest or back (you do not need to measure your temperature)
- **a new, continuous cough** – this means coughing a lot for more than an hour, or 3 or more coughing episodes in 24 hours (if you usually have a cough, it may be worse than usual)
- **a loss or change to your sense of smell or taste** – this means you've noticed you cannot smell or taste anything, or things smell or taste different to normal

6. Lateral Flow Testing

Now, more than ever, it is important that all Secondary pupils who are engaging with the lateral flow testing programme are testing regularly, at least twice a week – more if identified as a close contact.

Finally, in amongst all of this, it is important to say that we are thinking of all those still being affected by Covid-19 in their households, and wish all those who have tested positive a speedy recovery.

With best wishes, stay safe,

Mrs Louise New

Principal