

Update re. start of Spring term 2021

Dear Parents / Carers,

I apologise that I am writing to you at such short notice, given that the start of the new school term is (for the children) on Tuesday. However I feel it is important to make you fully aware of the current situation and to address any questions you may have following a weekend where the media has been filled with talk of schools. I am sure that many of you will be wondering how the events of the weekend will impact upon The Grange School. I apologise in advance for the fact that this letter will not – and cannot – give you all the information you will undoubtedly require, but I will keep you fully informed with future updates.

Background

On Wednesday 30 December, the government announced that secondary schools, and primary schools in some Tier 4 areas, would be instructed to undertake online learning with their children for the first two weeks of this term.

In addition, anyone identified by the NHS as 'clinically extremely vulnerable' (CEV) was directed to resume shielding and not attend work or education. This advice was emphasised in the updated guidance for schools, where it was advised that CEV staff and pupils should not attend school in Tier 4 areas.

On Friday the 1st January, the DfE updated their guidance, following health concerns raised by some local councils, to include all London boroughs.

On Saturday the 2nd January, a number of unions shared their concerns with both the government, and their members, and questioned why primary schools in some Tier 4 areas were being instructed to undertake at least two weeks of remote learning while others were being instructed to start in person learning from Monday 4th January.

School Leaders' unions issued their intent to implement legal action against the Government, to obtain the evidence that school was safe for children and staff to return to. The government maintains that school is a low-risk environment for children and staff.

Some school unions have asked their members to consider whether they feel adequately protected in the return to school. If not, school staff have the right to invoke Sections 44 and 100 of the Employment Rights Act (ERA) 1996. This is connected to their right to not attend their place of work if they believe they have reasonable concerns around their personal health and safety at work. A small number of staff have outlined personal concerns, which I will now consider.

These are based on their own personal circumstances and I would kindly request that you remember they have every right to take this action. I would also like to reassure you that any concerns raised are not linked to unsafe practices at The Grange. Concerns being raised are due to the rise in numbers of positive cases both locally and nationally.

As you will be aware, anyone who tests positive for COVID19 or has been in contact with someone who tested positive, who develops symptoms that could possibly result in a positive test or who lives in the same household as someone with symptoms of COVID19 MUST self-isolate for a defined period of time and take a COVID test.

I am sharing this information to be open with you about the position which schools - and school leaders - are in at this time. On Tuesday, there may be a small number of staff missing from school, for a variety of reasons as outlined above. This is unavoidable and will require that we make some different arrangements in order to educate children. I can assure you that every member of staff who is able to, will be working to support the education of your child; be this in the classroom or remotely. However, things may be different for a while. We may have to make changes to our usual practices, so that we can continue to educate our children. I will, of course, keep you fully updated about these as we make our way through the coming days.

All risk assessments have been reviewed and are now being published on our school website. These may need adapting further over the coming days, but you will be notified of any changes, as you have been throughout the pandemic.

All education unions are clear that they believe that children should attend school, when it has been proven safe to do so. Myself and the staff support the DfE's view that consistency of learning is important for children, and we recognise that the relationships and routines associated with schools support children's wellbeing.

In conclusion, I have not written to cause further worry or concern, but to be open with you about the current situation. I appreciate that this letter may have raised more questions for you and your child, but please be patient and wait for further information to be sent to you. School staff are unable to provide you with any further information at the moment – I will keep you updated via the school website, Parentmail and our social media feeds.

I do understand that this is a difficult time for you all. You may be anxious and uncertain about your child's return to school. Please be assured we will do everything we can to safeguard the health of your child and every member of our school community. We have journeyed through this pandemic together, as a strong school community, and your support has been very much appreciated.

We know that opinions differ on all aspects of the pandemic and would urge you to remember that we all want the same thing - for your child to be safe, happy and on track to achieve well academically. Every decision I make is taken in the best interests of the children and all members of our school community. This has been true since the outset of the pandemic and will not change now. Your ongoing support is very much appreciated.

Kind regards,

Vicki M M Masters

Head Teacher

