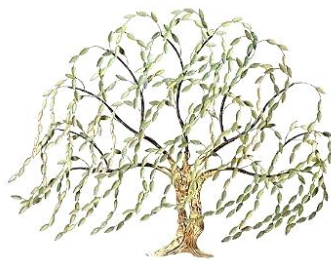


WILLOW TREE ACADEMY



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Mr A. Trueman – Chair of Trustees

Mrs J.K. Fearnley – Chief Executive Officer

4th March 2022

Living Safely With Covid-19

Dear Parents/Carers

I hope you had a wonderful half-term break with your families? Our term has already started with a bang, with World Book Week learning being phenomenal!

Since I last wrote to you we have had another challenging term with the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic as the Omicron variant of Covid-19 took hold both in Rotherham and nationally. The considerable staff absence through illness has been significant, putting an incredible strain on our schools. Thankfully the infection rates in Rotherham are coming down from an all-time high in January. The half-term break has been significant in this, as next to community transmission, schools are particularly vulnerable places.

The move to the government's Plan B because of Omicron was stepped down on the 27th January to Plan A, mainly due to the success of the booster programme, the public supporting return to restrictions and evidence that Omicron causes a less severe disease than previous variants. There was an indication that further restrictions would be lifted and on the 21st February 2022 the Prime Minister launched the '**Living with Covid-19**' strategy.

I am writing to update you now on our recent Strategic Response Meeting following a LA/Public Health briefing this week. This letter explains the clear ways forward in our Recovery and Contingency Plan for our schools over the remainder of the school year.

Going forward Coronavirus Covid-19 is likely to be viewed as an endemic highly transmissible infectious respiratory disease, however we are not there yet and Winter 2022/23 will be the test of this.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-response-living-with-covid-19/covid-19-response-living-with-covid-19>

Where there is an outbreak of 10% or more we will take advice from Public Health in Rotherham to plan a course of action, just as we would with Norovirus, Chicken Pox etc. We will remain just as vigilant in our approach to child health and we are required to maintain our Covid risk assessments.

The document states; ***'You must comply with health and safety law and put in place proportionate control measures. You must regularly review and update your risk assessments - treating them as 'living documents'- as the circumstances in your school and the public health advice changes. This includes having active arrangements in place to monitor whether the controls are effective and working as planned. For more information on what is required of school leaders in relation to health and safety risk assessments and managing risk, see the health and safety advice for schools.'***

We are also required to have contingency plans in place.

You should have contingency plans outlining how you would operate if you need to take extra measures in exceptional circumstances.

In light of this you might find that our controls and measures in place and the management of risk for your children and our staff **differ from government advice and guidance**. The key message from the government and Public Health England is that everyone should take **personal responsibility** for the health of the community and have a 'duty of care' to safeguard others. Although some of our controls and measures are being relaxed, others remain in place to keep our children and staff safe. **To knowingly introduce infection into our schools is unacceptable and will always be challenged and we continue with our protective measures for the good of the whole school community. Please support us in what we are trying to achieve to keep everyone safe.**

Children

- Children will now be allowed to attend outdoor sporting activities across our schools and beyond.
- We will reinstate assemblies in the hall for key stages and for the whole school Special Mentions assemblies.
- We will endeavour to safeguard your children by informing you of positive cases in their class, so that you can make informed decisions about your child's health.
- We will continue to support children's social and emotional mental health and the impact of the pandemic on them through our Happy Minds strategy.

Parents

- From Easter we will hold our Easter Services in our churches and invite parents into school (if the number of infections remains low.)
- Parents will be invited in for special events and workshops in a 'stepped approach' to returning to normal over the summer term.
- We will not be asking you to test your children, but will still need you to keep your child at home if they are symptomatic or if there is Covid in the household. Please support us in keeping our most vulnerable children and staff safe.
- Parents of children who are to attend the March residential to Stratford will be asked to test them, this is because children from our four schools will be mixing.
- We encourage you to protect you and your family through the **adult and child vaccination programme and getting boosters.**

School and Staff

- We will not ask staff to wear masks or social distance but we will continue to monitor their health and well-being within the demands of the Living with Covid strategy and report this back to the LA/PHE.
- Staff will be able to meet across the academy to progress their outstanding collaborative practice.
- Our staff are **still testing until the end of March 2022 and then it will be at their own discretion, as is mask wearing.**
- Additional deep cleaning will continue twice a day and on a Friday afternoon
- We continue with our early finish on a Friday. Please see the accompanying leaflet regarding our plans.
- We will continue with our individual school organisation for start times, staggered breaks and lunch times and health and hygiene regimes.
- We will continue with the hand washing regime in school throughout the day.
- Classroom ventilation remains an important measure and we have purchased air purifiers for all our classrooms.
- Outdoor learning will remain a key feature of our curriculum, interaction across the classes will be controlled and considered.
- In the event of an outbreak we will take advice from Public Health Rotherham.
- Remote Learning would immediately resume if necessary.

As you can see from the above we are still very concerned with regard to the on-going impact of the pandemic and remain as committed as ever to the health and wellbeing of all our children, families and our staff. We would like to thank parents for working with us over the last two years, and especially this very challenging term, to enable us to continue to offer such a rich and diverse curriculum and outstanding teaching and learning.

Please note attendance at school is mandatory for all children and as always first day callouts will be in place. In line with other infectious diseases you are asked to notify us of your child's illness and work with us if there is Covid in your household.

Please be kind and patient as we find our way through 'Living **Safely** with Covid-19' and while we assess the impact of lifting national restrictions, many people are anxious and we are always here to support you. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any queries.

Finally, we have planned a term that will be full of wonderful learning and adventures for your children. Our staff will continue to do what they always do - be dedicated to giving the very best education possible to your children.

I am extremely proud of our Willow Tree family!

Kind regards

Mrs J K Fearnley
Executive Head Teacher

Mr A Trueman
Chair of the Trust

Mrs J Cook
Head of School

