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Our ref JP/IP/VB
Date 08 February 2021

Dear Parent/Carer

We hope you are all keeping safe and well at this difficult time and we are writing to you about the government's updated announcements of the new COVID-19 restrictions.

In Parliament on 27 January 2021, the Prime Minister stated that the country's efforts so far appear to have reduced the R rate, but that if the country relaxes the measures too soon, then there remains a risk of infections spreading and the NHS coming under still greater pressure. Therefore, we are seeking your support for schools to safely manage the numbers of children attending and to help reduce the overall number of social contacts in our communities which is a vital intervention in the context of current high prevalence of COVID-19.

Since the beginning of this lockdown period in early January, school attendance has continued to remain much lower than in normal times and we thank you for your support. We recognise that school attendance varies between individual schools and on different days, but demand for school places has increased over the last couple of weeks. Whilst each individual school's circumstances will differ, we have asked schools to consider a variety of factors to help them to manage the numbers of young people accessing a school place and thereby reduce the numbers of social contacts within the community. These factors include the number of vulnerable children, the numbers of critical worker children, school staffing, safe availability of spaces and the availability of remote learning.

Therefore, the government's advice from 8 January 2021 remains in place. This says,

'Children with at least one parent or carer who is a critical worker can go to school or college if required, but parents and carers should keep their children at home if they can.'

And on 3 February 2021, government guidance for critical workers says,

'Your child's school or college will speak to you to identify whether your child needs to attend. You should keep your child at home if you can.'

Your child's school does not have a discretion over who is a critical worker since the government has identified these. Critical worker jobs and roles are listed on the additional sheet. In addition, if your child meets one of the criteria for being a vulnerable learner then they can also access a school place and should be encouraged to do so. Your school may also be in contact with you if they believe your child meets the criteria about being a vulnerable learner. The definition of these children is also included on the additional sheet attached to this letter. In addition, please also contact your school if you need to know more about the remote learning offer from your school.

We know some parents and carers who are critical workers will not welcome the request not to use a school place if they can keep their child at home but it is necessary if we are to successfully reduce social contacts and lessen the chances of the transmission of the virus. By doing so, both the county and the country may exit from this period of lockdown in a stronger position to move forward. Therefore, we would appreciate you working with your child's school about how you can support your child's learning at home including by maximising remote learning.

Yours sincerely

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