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Company Number: 09484306

1<sup>st</sup> December 2021

Dear Parents and Carers,

### **Covid Update**

You may recall that I recently wrote to you with an update on our enhanced Covid safety measures in school, following updated advice from Public Health Dorset and BCP. For the past few weeks, we have had additional safety measures in place to try and minimise the spread of the virus in our schools, as much as possible.

You will also be aware that, at the weekend, the Prime Minister announced additional measures following the arrival of the new Omicron variant, and this has resulted in further Schools' Guidance, which was released yesterday. As such, I am writing to remind you and update you of the schools' additional measures which are now in place, and I ask that you please support us in keeping our schools open by carrying out the additional measures, as detailed below. **Please can I ask that you carefully read this letter - I appreciate that it is long - and please could I strongly urge you to follow new points 5 and 6, which I know will be a change for a number of you.**

### **Until the end of the Autumn Term**

1. Get a PCR test for everyone in your household if anyone has symptoms which might be COVID. There are lots of coughs and colds around at the moment, but if you have any symptoms get tested to rule out COVID-19. You can book a test online or by calling 119. You may be eligible for support from BCP or Dorset Council if you or your child need to self-isolate (for example, eligible individuals have received a one-off taxable payment of £500).
2. Keep your child at home if they have tested positive or have symptoms. This will be an authorised absence.
3. Children who have no symptoms but are waiting for a PCR test result are encouraged to take daily lateral flow tests. These children can still come to school but a daily test will help spot any COVID infection before the PCR result comes back. It is fine to use these lateral flow tests with younger children (if they allow you to do so, of course – for some children, this may not be appropriate and that is fine and understood). These tests are free and you can order them online or collect from a local pharmacy.
4. Siblings of children who are positive are also encouraged to take daily lateral flow tests. If one child in the household has tested positive, it is very possible that the other children at home will also become infected.



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Although siblings should continue to come to school, they can take daily lateral flow tests in order to identify COVID infection early (again, that is if lateral flow testing is appropriate for your child).

5. Test everyone in the household twice weekly with rapid lateral flow tests. Don't use a lateral flow test if you develop any symptoms, you must book a PCR test.

6. Use a face covering around the school gates. For example, at collection and drop off times. We also ask that any visitors to school wear their face covering when inside our premises again, until further notice.

### **Contact Tracing Update**

We have had a number of queries from parents as to our role in contact tracing and informing parents of positive cases, so I felt it important to share with you the updated guidance below, which also reflects the changes if someone tests positive with the Omicron variant.

- Tracing close contacts and isolation close contacts in schools are now identified by NHS Test and Trace and education settings are not expected to undertake contact tracing. As with positive cases in any other setting, NHS Test and Trace will work with the positive case and/or their parent to identify close contacts. Contacts from a school setting will only be traced by NHS Test and Trace where the positive case and/or their parent specifically identifies the individual as being a close contact. This is likely to be a small number of individuals who would be most at risk of contracting COVID-19 due to the nature of the close contact.
- All individuals who have been identified as a close contact of a suspected or confirmed case of the Omicron variant of COVID-19, irrespective of vaccination status and age, will be contacted directly and required to self-isolate immediately and asked to book a PCR test. They will be informed by the local health protection team or NHS Test and Trace if they fall into this category and provided details about self-isolation.
- School will be advised by a local Incident Management Team (IMT) investigating a suspected or confirmed case of the Omicron variant of COVID-19.
- For everyone else, isolation rules are unchanged. Individuals are not required to self-isolate if they live in the same household as someone with COVID-19 who is not a suspected or confirmed case of the Omicron variant, or are a close contact of someone with COVID-19 who is not a suspected or confirmed case of the Omicron variant, and any of the following apply:
  - they are fully vaccinated
  - they are below the age of 18 years and 6 months
  - they have taken part in or are currently part of an approved COVID-19 vaccine trial
  - they are not able to get vaccinated for medical reasons.
- Instead, they will be contacted by NHS Test and Trace, informed they have been in close contact with a positive case and advised to take a PCR test. We would encourage all individuals to take a PCR test if advised to do so. Staff who do not need to isolate, and children and young people aged under 18 years 6 months who usually attend school, and have been identified as a close contact of someone with COVID-19 who is not a suspected or confirmed case of the Omicron variant, should continue to attend school as normal.

### **If you or your child has had Covid**

Please be aware that you should not use LFD tests or take further PCR tests within 90 days of testing positive with Covid. This is because the readings on the test will likely show up as positive from the previous virus. Therefore, unless you or your child develops new symptoms, please do not use LFD tests or PCR tests if within 90 days of testing positive. Public health have asked me to ensure this is made clear to all staff, parents and pupils.



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## **Travelling from abroad**

I am sure that your child will not be going away in term time, but the guidance about returning to the UK from abroad has also been updated. All travellers arriving into the UK will need to isolate and get a PCR test by 'day two' after arrival. They may end their isolation once they receive a negative result. If the result is positive, they should continue to isolate and follow rules on isolation following a positive test. Unvaccinated arrivals aged over 18 will follow the existing, more onerous, testing and isolation regime. All Red list arrivals will enter quarantine.

## **Contacting parents about positive cases**

Where required for safety reasons, we will always advise parents about positive cases (and have done so twice this week already), otherwise there is no expectation to do so. The reason for this is that our enhanced measures and adherence of the guidance is clear and we have found that advising parents of individualised cases is most unhelpful, as it causes panic and concern, often leading to parents keeping their children off of school - which as you know, is against current statutory requirements. This approach has been supported by BCP.

I would please ask parents to try and understand and respect the very difficult position schools are in in terms of communicating individual cases to parents - not just because of matters of confidentiality, but due to the ripple of panic and worry that it causes. I would ask parents and carers to trust that, as schools, whose number one priority is the well-being of your children, we will always advise you of cases where any action is needed and that when we do not, it is for good reason. There is no 'secrecy' or hiding of the facts - it is simply a balance of keeping people safe and minimising panic, whilst always following the guidance of professionals.

I understand, being a parent myself, that anxiety levels are high and that parents are worried, but I would also like to reiterate that we have always put your children first, and not informing you of every single case in school does not change this. For example, since advising a group of parents of a number of cases within a class/year group and asking for children to be LFD or PCR tested, we have now been inundated with parents asking which children are positive - which we clearly are not permitted to share - and this is most unhelpful. I am in daily contact with Public Health and they are very happy with our approach, which we review daily. If they advised that we needed to inform parents of every positive case; or to close down year groups and move to remote learning; or to even close the school as a whole, then we would, of course, do so.

Where there have been some cases of multiple positive tests within a class in our schools, we have worked with PH Dorset and BCP Council to monitor, assess and manage. We have reviewed the remaining members of the classes concerned with BCP Council and have good measures in place to monitor for symptoms, carry out additional measures and have staff who are well and able to continue with teaching on site. As a result, BCP strongly recommends we keep those classes open and they will monitor daily to ensure this remains a safe environment. They confirm that we have all of the appropriate measures in place.

We are as always maintaining high standards of hygiene, following up or asking parents to follow up with PCR tests in the classes affected and are discussing with PH Dorset and BCP Council daily. Everyone in BCP and Dorset needs to be vigilant at the moment as there are many cases in school age children in all schools.



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I would ask you to trust us in our handling of the cases within our schools, and know that we will always do what is best for your children, and within the confines of the law. We have no reason to be secretive - we simply are following the guidance and doing our best to maintain as much normality as possible for the children whilst keeping up all the stringent safety measures in school throughout the day.

### **Christmas Events**

As we approach the Christmas break, we will also review the safety of holding our end of term festivities in person in the school itself. I have asked my Heads of School to review the case numbers in school three days before each event, when we will undertake a thorough risk assessment and make the decision as to whether the event will go ahead in person or virtually (or not at all). You may have seen the DfE publication that suggests that nativity plays and Christmas concerts should aim to go ahead, but clearly we will only do so if the risks can be mitigated and it is safe enough to do so.

Thank you for reading such a long letter today - and I completely appreciate the worry that you may be feeling as parents. I would simply ask that you trust us to do what we do best - which is care for your children in the best way we can - each and every day.

Best wishes to you all,

*Kate Carter*

Kate Carter  
CEO / Executive Head Teacher



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