

14th January 2021

Dear Parent/Carer,

I hope that all of our families are safe and well during this challenging time. I am writing to provide an update regarding the position of schools within The Bishop Wheeler Catholic Academy Trust and how we are responding to the current national lockdown. I would first of like to highlight how proud I am of the way that our schools have responded to the challenges provided. Remote learning is being provided to all of our year groups, along with places for vulnerable pupils and the children of critical workers. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all families for the support that you are providing to school and also to highlight the remarkable work of our staff and school leaders. The most important people to highlight are the pupils themselves, who are adapting well to the new way of learning and demonstrating incredible resilience.

We are all looking forward to the day, when our vibrant schools are fully open again and the face to face relationships that staff and pupils enjoy can resume. Unfortunately, we are not yet in that position and it is important to highlight the reason that the government announced the most recent restrictions. During his address on 4th January, the Prime Minister acknowledged that this decision had been taken due to the alarming rate at which the new Covid-19 variant is spreading. Scientists have also confirmed that the new variant is between 50 and 70 per cent more transmissible. This worrying development comes at a time when hospital admissions have risen and are significantly higher than at the peak of the virus in April 2020. Infections are rising in all areas of the country and tragically over a thousand deaths have been recorded in a number of recent days. The Prime Minister confirmed that the decision to close schools has been taken because “they act as vectors for transmission, causing the virus to spread between households.” It is perfectly clear that whilst children are largely unaffected by this disease, they can nonetheless spread it between themselves and on into their household.

With this information in mind, it is perfectly clear that the safest place for your child is at home. Not only is it the safest place, it is also essential that they remain at home in order to reduce mixing and the transmission of this disease between households. For some of you, we understand that your work is of critical importance and that this takes you out of the house where your work is essential in the fight against Covid-19. However, if you qualify as a Key Worker, but can manage to have your children at home, I would urge you to do this and let your child’s school know as soon as possible. Government guidance published on 7th January supports this point... “Parents and Carers who are Key Workers should keep their children at home if they can.” I would therefore like to highlight that **the purpose of this new national lockdown is to limit school attendance so that the number of contacts we have with people in other households is reduced. For this reason, I ask that parents seriously consider the necessity to send their child into school. It is imperative that children only attend school if it is essential to support critical work.**

Unlike the lockdown in March 2020, schools are now legally required to provide Remote Learning. This additional requirement, combined with keeping schools open for vulnerable pupils means that there is a significant additional pressure on schools. All staff are working incredibly hard to provide the very best quality of education they can online, as well as teaching pupils in school, undertaking remote pastoral work, preparing lessons and many other duties. Headteachers have the flexibility to make decisions regarding blended learning,

involving a combination of live and recorded lessons in order to maximise opportunities for learning. This will include a range of online resources taking into account the unique circumstances of the school, with effective blended learning involving a mixture of face to face and remote methods. This ensures that all schools within the Trust are effectively meeting the expectations of the Department for Education. Headteachers will continue to use their professional judgement in planning the remote learning of our pupils, in order to ensure that effective curriculum delivery is in place and that this meets the needs of all learners. In doing this, it is important to emphasise that they will need to take into account staffing capacity and the impact of providing for the increased number of pupils who are attending school, along with potential staff absence and the access to devices across all of our families.

The Headteachers within the Bishop Wheeler Trust meet on a regular basis and we will continue to review how we support the pupils who are attending school, in addition to developing our remote learning programme. I would like to thank you for your continued support of our schools and please do not hesitate to contact your child's school if we can be of any further assistance.

My very best wishes to you and your family.

Yours sincerely



Darren Beardsley

Interim CEO

The Bishop Wheeler Catholic Academy Trust