



The Academy at
St James
Aspire, Achieve, Believe

The Academy at St James
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Tuesday 12th January

Dear Parents/Carers,

Updated DFE guidance January 8th: critical workers should keep their children at home if they can. Please only use school places if you really need to & we will be here to help you out. This will help us to make sure those staff & students in school can be kept as safe as possible.

With the first week of Spring Term under our belts, we are glad that we are able to offer some 'live' teaching to all our pupils at home, whilst offering in-school provision for our vulnerable children and those from our critical worker families. We have been able to reach this point thanks to the tireless efforts of staff in preparing and improving our systems whilst adapting to ever-changing circumstances.

What is clear from last week, however, is that the number of pupils eligible to attend school under the critical worker provision is much higher than during the first lockdown. In March, we had on average between 12 and 20 pupils per day whilst last week we had up to 61 and this week we have had up to 79. We therefore need to ensure that we accommodate those most in need whilst recognising that we must continue to do everything that we can to keep staff and pupils as safe as possible in school in light of recent Coronavirus developments.

The National Lockdown announced by the Prime minister started on the 4 January, with a national direction to all English residents that: ***"You must stay at home. The single most important action we can all take is to stay at home to protect the NHS and save lives. You should follow this guidance immediately. This is the law"***.

As I am sure you will understand, running a dual system of educating and supervising children in school whilst providing remote learning to those children at home places an additional logistical staffing burden on the school as teachers are deployed to online teaching whilst staff are required in the classroom for those being educated in school.

As infection rates are not decreasing the government and DFE issued new guidance to try to minimise the number of children in schools in order to stop the rate of transmission getting worse. The guidance from the Department of Education was updated at 5.30 pm on Friday reiterating that whilst children with at least one parent or carer who is a critical worker can go to school **if required**, parents and carers who are critical workers should keep their children at home **if they can**.

It is our desire to accommodate parents' needs as far as possible whilst keeping children and staff in school safe but, just like other schools, we are balancing difficult priorities. While we have carried out all the required risk assessments and put the relevant procedures in place to keep school safe, we recognise that younger children in particular find it very difficult, if not impossible, to maintain social distancing. For this reason, if we can find

ways to reduce the number of children in school, especially in the younger groups, this would reduce even further the risk of spreading infection.

Please take some time today if you can to review your own situation and consider where you can reduce your need. If you have someone at home who is able to look after your child/ children, we would ask that the children remain at home. Please contact school if you would like to discuss this further.

As a school, we would love nothing more than having all our children back in school. We, more than anyone, understand the long term damage of children not being in school and it is tempting to bend the rules so we can accommodate as many children as possible. However, we have a moral responsibility to our community to reduce the spread of the virus and we can only do this by limiting the amount of households mixing as much as possible. The extremely rapid rate of transmission of the virus at the moment means that we must do everything we can to protect our school community: pupils, parents and staff alike.

Therefore, that is why we have worked hard to provide live learning for all our children at home and these lessons have been very successful. We held a zoom meeting for parents yesterday where we got valuable feedback about how we can continue to improve. All our children should be able to participate every day as we have put systems in place to ensure all our children have access to a device. If you are having any difficulties with the live learning and online learning, then please contact the school office or your class teachers so we can offer support. Please bear with us as we all adjust to a new way of teaching.

Thank you in advance for your help and support with this matter. The messages we received last week from a number of parents showing their support really did make a difference to staff morale during a very difficult week. Thank you so much - your support means a great deal to all of us.

Kind regards

Chris Tolson

Headteacher