

7<sup>th</sup> January 2021

Dear Parent/Carer,

I wish that I were sending you a message of good cheer as we begin a new year, but once again I find myself in the position of having to inform you about the 'extraordinary' arrangements in place in our TDET academies.

You will be aware that on Monday 4<sup>th</sup> January, the Prime Minister announced a national lockdown in order to reduce the spread of COVID-19, which has now come into effect. Full details of the lockdown restrictions including the stay-at-home message can be found at [www.gov.uk/guidance/national-lockdown-stay-at-home](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-lockdown-stay-at-home).

This central Government decision does not suggest that academies are no longer safe places for young people. In fact, we have received validation from external health and safety bodies about the excellent Covid-safe arrangements we have in place in all TDET academies, thanks to our dedicated TDET Health and Safety team.

Limiting attendance is about reducing the number of contacts that all of us have with people in other households. The new restrictions mean that our primary and secondary academies will remain open *only* for the children of critical workers and vulnerable children and young people to attend. All other pupils and students will receive remote education until at least February half term and must remain at home, in line with national guidance. I have set out further details below. Richard Barnes Academy will be open, but the number of places may be limited.

All academies may have reduced spaces due to staff illness and confirmed COVID-19 cases. I understand this will not be welcome news for many of you as parents and carers, but it is essential if we are to successfully protect the NHS and reduce the transmission of the virus. In Peterborough and Cambridgeshire, we have witnessed the growing pressure on our NHS hospitals and the wider health system during the past few weeks. We are not yet through these pressures, and our colleagues across Health and Social Care are working tirelessly to ensure the viability of our health services. We must play our part in supporting them.

#### **Children of critical workers**

TDET academies are remaining open to the children of workers who are critical to the COVID-19 response and EU transition response, who are unable to safely stay at home.

#### ***Please think carefully before sending your children back into school.***

We need to ensure that the number of children and young people accessing the offer of provision in an academy is kept to the lowest number possible, so that we can reduce household mixing and the risk of spreading coronavirus. As a result, academies will have a limit on the number of children they can safely support in their bubble arrangements. Therefore, even if you are a critical worker, if your child(ren) can remain at home rather than attend school, on some or all days, then they should. Please only use the offer of provision when it is crucial for you to undertake your critical role.

The list of critical workers can be found on the government website:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-educational-provision/guidance-for-schools-colleges-and-local-authorities-on-maintaining-educational-provision>

If your child's academy feels that your role does not fit the critical worker criteria, you may be asked to verify this with a letter from your employer detailing why you personally are critical to the COVID-19 response or EU Transition. If there is an alternative adult such as a partner or second parent who is not a critical worker, you may be asked why your child(ren) are not able to stay at home as per the Government's guidance. If the other adult is working at home or able to take leave from their non-critical job, this will be deemed as a safe alternative. Academies are open to provide education to enable critical workers to respond to the crucial role you will play in the response to the COVID-19 emergency, but you must also support your academy and only use this offer of support if you have no alternatives for childcare for your child(ren). Clearly the more children and young people that attend an education setting, the wider the risk of spreading the virus grows. It may be likely that some of our academies will not be able to accommodate all critical worker children and they will have to prioritise entry due to limited space. We trust that you will make the right decision based on your circumstances and not contribute unnecessarily to us having to make this difficult decision.

**Vulnerable children and young people – including those with education, health and care plans or a social worker.**

If your child has an education, health and care (EHC) plan and/or an allocated social worker, they should attend their academy. If you do decide to keep your child(ren) at home and you need additional support, please contact your academy and they will work with you to support you.

The Department for Education (DfE) definition of vulnerable children and young people who can access their school or college can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-educational-provision/guidance-for-schools-colleges-and-local-authorities-on-maintaining-educational-provision>

**Free School Meal Entitlement and Provision**

We understand that families continue to live in uncertain times, and many of you are facing changes to your financial circumstances as a result.

If you have not previously applied for free school meals, or your name has recently changed, and you now feel you may be eligible, please visit [www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/freeschoolmeals](http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/freeschoolmeals) to see if you meet the criteria and to apply online. If you have any queries in relation to free school meals entitlement, please contact the Education Welfare Benefits Team on [ewb.fsm@cambridgeshire.gov.uk](mailto:ewb.fsm@cambridgeshire.gov.uk) or telephone them on 01223 703200.

If you are currently in receipt of free school meals, your academy will be in contact to advise what provision is being offered to you during this period of remote learning.

**Government advice on leaving children unattended**

There is no law about when you can leave your child on their own, but it is an offence to leave them alone if it places them at risk. As parents, you should use your judgement on how mature your child is before you decide to leave them at home. If you are at all unsure, the NSPCC recommends that children under 12 are rarely mature enough to be left alone for a long period of time, children under 16 should not be left alone overnight and babies, toddlers and very young children should never be left alone.

### **Summer 2021 exams/assessments**

The Government has decided that, in the circumstances, it is not possible for GCSE, AS and A Level exams to go ahead in the summer as planned. They will be working with Ofqual (the organisation responsible for regulating qualifications,

examinations and assessments in England) to put in place alternative arrangements that will allow learners to progress fairly. The Secretary of State for Education announced in Parliament yesterday that primary school SATs will not take place this year. Your academy will be providing more information on these changes soon.

### **Remote Learning**

For children who are not accessing face to face teaching in their academy, you will have been notified of your academy's plan for delivering remote learning during this time. The Department for Education has published expectations on these arrangements:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/guidance-for-full-opening-schools#res>

If you are concerned about your child/ren's progress, access to a digital device or have a query over the content of remote learning, please contact your academy who will be happy to discuss this with you.

### **Childcare and Early Years**

Early years settings – including nurseries and school-based provision – can remain fully open during this period, but reception classes and higher year groups will remain closed. Parents can form a childcare bubble with one other consistent household for the purposes of informal childcare, where the children are under 14. This is mainly to enable parents to work and must not be used to enable social contact between adults. Some households will also be able to benefit from being in a support bubble. Details of support and childcare bubbles can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/making-a-childcare-bubble-with-another-household#what-a-childcarebubble-is>

Finally, I would like to thank you for your continued support of our TDET academies and your compliance with the wider national restrictions in place. Your messages of support and positive feedback for staff and senior leaders are much appreciated as they are trying their best to provide a good education for your child/ren. We are all human and it is tough for us all some days.

Whilst last year was extremely challenging for our parents, carers, children and academy staff, I was extremely proud to see how you all stepped up and faced the challenges head on. TDET academies have the best parents/carers!

I have every confidence that together we will all play our part to protect ourselves, those around us, and the NHS. Please stay safe.

Kind regards,



Julie Taylor