

December 2021

An important end of year update for parents and carers of children with additional needs

Dear Parents and Carers

We wanted to take the opportunity to update you on current Covid-19 response measures and how we are adapting to the challenges the pandemic continues to present in our communities, especially now winter and the Omicron Covid-19 variant are upon us. Please note, there is slightly different guidance for early years/primary, secondary aged children and children with additional needs, included with this letter is guidance specific to children with additional needs.

Testing

We understand that frequent national updates make it difficult to stay on top of guidance, so we have created a simple step by step flow chart, specifically for children with additional needs, to support you with each stage of the testing process. It can be found enclosed with this letter and on the Surrey County Council website [here](#). This testing guidance applies to all children with additional needs, regardless of their education setting, however general coronavirus guidance may differ between mainstream and specialist settings, so contact your child's school/setting for detailed information.

Below is a summary of the most important points to be aware of for **children with additional needs**:

- If your child develops Covid-19 symptoms, they should isolate and book a PCR test (a test that is sent to a lab)
 - Your child should stay at home and not have visitors (self-isolate) until you get the test result – they can only leave home to have the test
 - If you are unable to do a PCR test due to their disability, the child should isolate for 10 days
- As per DfE guidance, lateral flow tests generally shouldn't be used for children in Year 6 and below (unless specifically advised during an outbreak situation). **Do not use lateral flow tests on anyone displaying symptoms.** If your child develops Covid-19 symptoms, they should isolate and book a PCR test
- For pupils in Year 7 and above, staff and parents/carers, lateral flow tests should be used at least twice a week (if you don't have symptoms) to avoid people who are without symptoms unknowingly spreading the virus
 - If you are unable to do a lateral flow test due to the child's additional needs or disability, the child should continue to attend school (if they don't have symptoms)
- If you live in the same household as someone with Covid-19, you must stay at home and self-isolate, **unless you are fully vaccinated or aged under 18 years and 6 months.** Anyone that is identified as a suspected or confirmed case of the Omicron variant of Covid-19, is required to self-isolate for 10 days

Face coverings

The Department of Education recently issued the following guidance in relation to face coverings: *Where pupils in Year 7 and above are educated, we recommend that face coverings should be worn by pupils, staff and adult visitors when moving around the premises, outside of classrooms, such as in corridors and communal areas. This is a temporary measure. Pupils in these schools should also wear a face covering when travelling on public transport and dedicated transport to and from school. We do not advise that pupils and staff wear face coverings in classrooms.*

In primary schools, we recommend that face coverings should be worn by staff and adults (including visitors) when moving around in corridors and communal areas. Health advice continues to be that children in primary schools should not be asked to wear face coverings.

Guidance on exemptions and circumstances where people are not able to wear face coverings can be found [here](#).

Festive events

We thank you for your continuing support and patience, so that schools and education settings can be as safe as possible as we move into the challenges of the winter season. Schools and education settings are doing a fantastic job and working extremely hard to support the wider community with keeping Covid-19 rates down.

Across Surrey, infection rates are high and still rising, so we must remain cautious. The subject of festive gatherings in schools and settings is a difficult one as no one wants children to miss out on these enrichment activities, however we must continue to reduce the risks posed by Covid-19. Under current government guidance, events and gatherings are permitted, however schools and settings have been directed to fully risk assess events using the thresholds for additional action set out in the DfE contingency framework as a guide, and then make contingency plans for managing or cancelling activities. If a school or education setting therefore decides not to go ahead with scheduled activity, Surrey County Council will fully support this decision. If this is the case, the decision won't have been taken lightly, so we ask that you please support them. We thank leaders in schools and settings for the all the time and careful thought they are giving to these decisions. We also thank parents and carers for their support and patience, so that Surrey's children and education colleagues can be as safe as possible as we move into the challenges of the winter season.

Winter challenges

Whilst schools have worked hard to implement infection control measures, this term has still brought many challenges. The Government has made it clear to school and setting leaders that pupils' on-site attendance in schools and settings must remain an absolute priority. Consequently, school/setting leaders, with the support of the County Council, the UK Health Security Agency (previously known as Public Health England), NHS Test and Trace and the Department for Education, continue to review their risk assessments, and provide a rapid response to any increase in Covid-19 positive cases by implementing additional measures, when needed, to reduce transmission. Please be assured that any additional protective measures in schools and education settings will only be in place for the shortest amount of time possible.

We are committed to providing every child with the best possible learning experience. Our education leaders are responding to the impact of the pandemic by making adaptations to the curriculum, providing targeted support and offering enrichment opportunities where needed. We know that such adaptations, support and opportunities will need to continue into the future to achieve the best wellbeing and learning outcomes for your child.

Support

We recognise that some families are continuing to find these times extremely challenging, and we maintain our pledge to support you in any way we can. Please speak to your school with any concerns or issues, otherwise you may find these resources helpful:

- Information and services for young people in Surrey with special educational needs and disabilities, their families and professionals can be found on the [Surrey Local Offer website](#).
- If you have a concern about the development and/or learning needs of a child in Surrey, you can contact the Learners' Single Point of Access (L-SPA). It is open from 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday, all year round (except Bank Holidays) on 0300 200 1015.
- For parents/ carers looking for support with issues related to parenting there is the Children and Family Health Surrey advice line, 01883 340 922, that provides support on all aspects of child health, development, and parenting.
- For those families that are facing financial difficulty , you can find out about support available [here](#)

Working together

We are very pleased that most schools and education settings have remained open to all children and young people since the start of the academic year. We thank teachers and all school staff for their commitment to welcoming our children back to the richness of learning opportunities and experiences in their school or education setting.

Thank you also to all our parents and carers for your patience and support this term; we ask that this continues. We understand the anxiety that some parents/carers are feeling about the time their child was away from school, but also know how hard school leaders are working to mitigate that absence in different ways.

On behalf of all those working in the education sector in Surrey, we send Seasons Greetings to you and your family and wish you all a peaceful, healthy, safe and happy 2022.

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