



Blackfen School for Girls

Raising aspirations - releasing potential

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Dear Parents and Carers,

I realise that it is a very challenging time for us all and we continue to see cases of Covid-19 in Bexley and London rise. Rest assured we will only contact you to self-isolate your son or daughter if they are a close contact of a confirmed case. We follow local health protection guidance to risk assess.

I am writing to keep you updated as we have now entered a second period of national lockdown. Under the guidance of the 4-week lockdown schools continue to be open for all students (see below). Apart from students self-isolating, the expectation is that all students attend apart from any student who is in the clinically extremely vulnerable category. The below is taken from the national guidance:

More evidence has emerged that shows there is a very low risk of children becoming very unwell from coronavirus (COVID-19), even for children with existing health conditions. Most children originally identified as clinically extremely vulnerable no longer need to follow original shielding advice. Parents should be advised to speak to their child's GP or specialist clinician if they have not already done so, to understand whether their child should still be classed as clinically extremely vulnerable.

Those children whose doctors have confirmed they are still clinically extremely vulnerable are advised not to attend childcare or nursery during the period this advice is in place.

Children who live with someone who is clinically extremely vulnerable, but who are not clinically extremely vulnerable themselves, should still attend education or childcare.

Parents of clinically extremely vulnerable children will be receiving a letter shortly confirming this advice.

Schools continue to remain open for all children and young people as they have since the start of the autumn term for the duration of the national restrictions.

Being at school is vital for children's education and for their wellbeing. Time spent out of school is detrimental for children's cognitive and academic development, particularly for disadvantaged children. This impact can affect both current levels of education, and children's future ability to learn. It continues to be our aim that all students, in all year groups, remain in school full-time.



At Blackfen school we continue to undertake risk assessments and implement the system of controls set out in the national guidance. These measures provide a framework for us to put in place proportionate protective measures for students and staff.

Face coverings

The below is from the national guidance:

In schools where students in year 7 and above are educated, face coverings should be worn by adults and students when moving around the premises, outside of classrooms, such as in corridors and communal areas where social distancing cannot easily be maintained. Some individuals are exempt from wearing face coverings and we expect adults and students to be sensitive to those needs.

Face coverings should also be worn by students in year 7 and above when travelling on dedicated school transport or any public transport to school.

In school, from Monday 16 November 2020, we have made the wearing of face coverings by students and staff compulsory at all times in the school unless they are in a lesson or sitting down eating at break and/or lunch. Students must be prepared to put their face covering on as soon as they enter the school gates if they are not already wearing one.

Hands, face and space

We all need to work together to ensure we are doing everything we can to help control the spread of the virus, including:

- making sure your daughter/son goes home straight after leaving the school and that social distancing is being maintained;
- ensuring that your daughter/son is wearing a face covering on public transport and in school;
- reinforcing the important message of washing and sanitising their hands often.

Visitors to the school

The guidance continues to state:

Settings should restrict all visits to the setting to those that are absolutely necessary.

The school has interpreted this as making sure that the only visitors on site are for specialist educational purposes or for contractual or health and safety reasons. Please do not visit the school site for any reason. If you need to speak to someone urgently please contact the student support officer in the school.

As I have made you aware in my letters, we have had some confirmed positive cases of students who attend the school, as would be expected. For transparency purposes I would like to report that we have had 3 confirmed positive cases since half term (year 8). We had 4 confirmed positive cases during half term (year 12) and we had 4 confirmed positive cases



during the last half term (years 8 and 10). I will continue to write to you with any information on any further confirmed positive cases as I am required to do by the local health protection team.

Remote learning policy

This policy has been approved by the governing body. I would like to draw your attention to the following within this policy.

The Remote Learning Policy does not normally apply in the event of a short-term student absence or for short-term school closures (e.g. as a result of inclement weather). Likewise, there is no obligation for the school to provide continuity of education to students who absent themselves from school with or without parental permission, in contravention to school or government guidance. This point also applies if parents choose to take students on holiday during term time or if parents made the decision, without prior agreement with the school, to absent their child from school 'as a precaution', against official guidance, in the event of an outbreak of infectious disease.

Email communication with teaching staff

By now you will have read the Remote Learning Policy which outlines how the school will endeavour to continue your child's education, in a remote context, should self-isolation be required or full school closure be directed by local arrangement or national government. I am grateful for your feedback about how these arrangements are working. However, teachers have reported a sharp increase in email communication from parents, carers and students during evenings, weekends and in the recent half term break.

The advantage of email communication for many of us, myself included, is its direct and quick access to the person concerned, at whatever time is convenient and by a variety of devices. But in the case of teaching staff and subject leaders, their main activity during the day takes place in classrooms and involves almost continuous contact with students and young people. In some cases, staff may not have a non-teaching session for three or four days, by which time, up to a hundred email messages may have arrived.

Teaching staff have been directed to prioritise marking, assessment and lesson planning in their non-teaching time. Parents, carers and students should follow the guidance in the Remote Learning Policy for email communication with staff:

- Teachers are available to reply to email enquiries from 8.30 am – 5.30 pm, unless they are teaching all day. They are not available after 5 pm, at the weekends or in the scheduled holidays, unless there is a safeguarding concern or a family crisis. In these cases, parents and students should contact the appropriate person as explained in Appendix A of the remote Learning Policy.
- There is no expectation for teachers to receive or respond to emails after 5pm.
- Teachers should ensure that communication with students and their parents and carers takes place from 8.00am to 5pm.

As we become acquainted with Microsoft Teams, the school's digital learning platform, may I also remind parents not to use this forum to contact your child's teachers, as your comments will not remain private or be kept from view from the rest of your child's teaching group.

I appreciate, more than ever, the challenges that we are facing at this present time and during this global pandemic. I also acknowledged that there a wide range of views and evidence to back up those views on what is happening in the UK and across the world. As Head Teacher, I will continue to work with the whole school community – staff, students, families and governors – to make sure the school is a safe, thriving and happy community for us all. I appreciate your ongoing support to ensure that this happens.

With my best wishes to you and your family at this time,

Matthew Brown
Head Teacher

