

IMPORTANT MESSAGE FROM ADRIAN

Sunday 22nd March

Dear Parents and Carers,

I wanted to write to update you on the current situation at Downs View following on from my letter on Friday evening. Last week changed daily both in terms of the national picture and what was directly affecting us.

It is important to emphasise the government guidance, including the information from the Prime Minister this evening in respect of the key messages to 'Stay at Home' and of social distancing to protect the vulnerable. The link below is to the government document revised on the 20th March to include children.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for-vulnerable-people/guidance-on-social-distancing-for-everyone-in-the-uk-and-protecting-older-people-and-vulnerable-adults>

Any child or young person with the following conditions should **stay at home** for the next 12 weeks :

- chronic (long-term) respiratory diseases, such as [asthma](#), [chronic obstructive pulmonary disease \(COPD\)](#), emphysema or [bronchitis](#)
- chronic heart disease, such as [heart failure](#)
- [chronic kidney disease](#)
- chronic liver disease, such as [hepatitis](#)
- chronic neurological conditions, such as [Parkinson's disease](#), [motor neurone disease](#), [multiple sclerosis \(MS\)](#),
- *a learning disability or cerebral palsy*
- [diabetes](#)
- problems with your spleen – for example, [sickle cell](#) disease or if you have had your spleen removed
- a weakened immune system as the result of conditions such as [HIV and AIDS](#), or medicines such as [steroid tablets](#) or [chemotherapy](#)
- being seriously overweight (a body mass index (BMI) of 40 or above)

There are some clinical conditions which will put your child at even higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19. We know that some parents have been contacted by their consultants and have spoken to us.

Children and young people falling into this group are:

- people who have received an organ transplant and remain on ongoing immunosuppression medication
- people with cancer who are undergoing active chemotherapy or radiotherapy
- people with cancers of the blood or bone marrow such as leukaemia who are at any stage of treatment

- people with severe chest conditions such as cystic fibrosis or severe asthma (requiring hospital admissions or courses of steroid tablets)
- people with severe diseases of body systems, such as severe kidney disease (dialysis)

I understand that the Government announcement that all pupils with an EHCP should continue to receive an education / care has caused confusion and an expectation that we cannot meet. The list of medical conditions requiring people to stay at home for 12 weeks covers all of our pupils, many have significant heart and lung conditions, so the EHCP comment contradicts this.

Staffing levels are currently such that we may not be able to provide a safe level of cover even for child care rather than education. Many staff are on self isolating schedules of 7, 14 and also 12 weeks (the latter because of their or others' very complex health needs). 7 staff in Woodingdean alone have indicated that they are having to self isolate in addition to those who were not present on Friday.

The Local Authority has offered 2 specialist teachers from the BHISS service who we have gladly accepted, but these staff do not know our children and cannot do specific duties like personal care. They will need support from Downs View staff to be successful.

This is a pandemic of a very serious illness and normality cannot continue across the world at the moment.

I completely understand the impact of your child being at home, they need routine and will get bored, and for many parents it is a terrifying and distressing thought. However we cannot provide a service without adequate staffing and if your child is on the self-isolating list of conditions, they should not be in school. **Again, the Prime Minister stated again today that those who can stay at home should stay at home.**

Whilst we are going to open tomorrow, I am sure that for Tuesday we will have to apply the keyworker/critical worker criteria to make sure we have enough staff available. Children and young people must be well. We will prioritise key worker children and young people who are not ill being in school/college, as their parents do not have the choice to keep them at home, they need to keep essential services going for our country.

We may be able to offer places where we can to families with other vulnerabilities, which we are working on with social care with to achieve.

This does not mean that all other families are not seen as needing school/college or support, we would never think that of any family, but we are in a crisis situation of only being able to offer minimal support. We will be in daily contact and you will have the activity packs to support you.

It is important to remember that we will need to be working day by day at the moment. I recognise that this is stressful for you, but there is no other option.

Staff who have had to go home to self isolate have been distressed at leaving our school community abruptly and without a timescale. I have reassured staff that whether they are here at school or staying at home we are all doing our bit to fight this virus and support our country. No-one has wanted to go.

I will continue to update you and reassure you that everyone here is doing their best for as many children and young people as possible, all of your children and you as families are equally precious and important to us.

If you are able to keep your child at home please do so but please let the office know as early as you can in the morning. Thank you.

Yours

Adrian Carver