

January 3rd 2021

Dear Parents and Guardians

Whilst I would like to wish you all a happy new year I am aware that the COVID situation is impacting on that and causing anxiety and concern to you all. Please may I reassure you that the Trust Board are working closely with the head teachers of our schools to ensure that the health and well-being of our pupils and our staff is as protected as possible.

You will all be aware that Gloucestershire has moved into Tier 4. Whilst the infection rate for Gloucestershire remains relatively low compared to other Tier 4 areas the situation is still highly concerning as Gloucestershire hospitals are currently at full capacity with a shortage of intensive care beds. It is therefore vital that schools and families cooperate with the aim of keeping the infection rate as low as possible. At present the infection rate for Gloucestershire is 225 people per 100k of the population, against an England average of 422 people per 100k, and London with 831 people per 100k.

Whilst it is our intention that our schools remain open to as many pupils as possible this may not actually be feasible all the time. Each school has a COVID risk assessment in place that can be accessed on the school website, this outlines the risks and how the schools are mitigating those risks. Ultimately however we can only open to pupils if we have sufficient staff to ensure the safety of pupils. This will inevitably be impacted by staff absence due to COVID related illness and risk assessment issues. We will also need to take into consideration if the staff present in schools have the specialist training and skill set for identified pupils. Further to this some staff may be unable to work if their own child's school is forced to close a class or year group etc and they cannot find adequate childcare. All of these factors will need consideration on a daily basis by the head teachers. When necessary we will prioritise which pupils are able to access school, commencing with the children of frontline workers and pupils with safeguarding plans. Any closures will be communicated to you by the head teacher of your child's school.

As you will be aware from the national news the COVID situation changes daily and head teachers are having to react to this. Unfortunately this may result in short notice closures and changes to opening times etc. As a Trust we apologise for the inevitable inconvenience that this will cause our families and assure you that such decisions will not be taken lightly. All our staff are extremely committed to our pupils and will want their classes open whenever feasible, however this cannot be at the expense of the health and safety and wellbeing of either pupils or staff. Some staff have been advised to work from home by

SAND Academies Trust

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their unions as schools cannot guarantee their safety and this decision is respected by the Trust.

Headteachers are working hard with their senior leaders to establish COVID testing in schools for staff and pupils where appropriate. This testing is not mandatory, meaning that schools do not have to carry out the tests and parents do not have to agree to the tests. Head teachers will be contacting you this week to request permission for your child to be tested in school, or to explain why it is not considered feasible or in the child's best interest to be tested in school. This is also dependent on the tests being delivered to schools this week by the Department for Education.

I am aware that some parents will be concerned about the spread of COVID in schools, especially with pupils who do not understand social distancing and where the risk of close contact cannot be guaranteed. No parent will be penalised if they decide they do not want their child to attend school and remote learning will be available for your child in this situation.

Food vouchers will be sent to families whose child is entitled to free school meals if their class, department or school is forced to close for a period of time. Your child's school will send these home to you. School meals will be provided as normal when schools are open unless the catering service cannot function due to staff shortage linked to COVID. In such a case you will be requested to send a packed lunch in for your child.

I apologise in advance for any enforced closures over coming weeks and for any resulting difficulty and inconvenience. I reiterate that such closures will only occur if we cannot ensure safe staffing levels in schools or where there are positive COVID cases in the bubble your child is in.

I sincerely thank you for your continued support for the schools during this unprecedented COVID time.

With regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Lyn Dance". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Lyn Dance
CEO SAND Academies Trust