

# Attendance Information - Covid-19

## Return to School March 2021

Please take the time to read this document as it contains vital information.

The government guidance on managing Covid-19 is extensive (it is also evolving regularly and may require further updates of this policy) but we have tried to give you some practical examples so that families are clear about when not to send their children to school, when to self-isolate and what procedures should be followed to inform the school.

Please keep this document handy for reference in case you need to apply the guidance to your household. It is essential that all the families of all the children at the school respect this guidance in full.

Here at Rathfern, the health and safety of children, school staff and their families is our top priority and we completely understand that there may be concerns regarding Covid-19 during this uncertain and difficult time.

I would like to reassure you that Rathfern has a number of strict measures in place to protect our children, staff and families by helping prevent the spread of the virus, which all families with children at the school are expected to uphold.

Whilst we appreciate how worrying these times can be, we are following all government guidelines and are acting on the advice of Public Health England and the DFE.

### **Does my child have to attend school as of 8<sup>th</sup> March 2021?**

Under the current updated DFE guidance, as of 8<sup>th</sup> March 2021, pupil attendance is now **mandatory** and the usual rules on attendance apply – please see our attendance policy for further details.

Therefore, all children, in all year groups, are expected to attend school from 8<sup>th</sup> March 2021 unless you fall into specific categories which will be explained in this policy.

### **Punctuality**

Although we are currently operating a 'staggered start' in the mornings, normal punctuality rules still apply. Please see the school website for the time your child/ren are expected to arrive.

Children **must not** be late to school as they are missing invaluable learning time, their arrival may cause disruption to the class and most importantly, there is a potential risk of mixing with other bubbles if they do not arrive on time.

### **Where does my child go if they are late in the morning and their gate is shut?**

Firstly, children must not be late because this reduces learning time and disrupts the other pupils who are already in lesson. However, if a child is unavoidably late (and their gate is shut), they **must** go to the school office and explain why they are late and see the Attendance Officer who will help them sign in. This is because they will be marked as absent on the register if it has already been taken by the class teacher and the Attendance Officer will then change the mark to present once they are signed in. They will then have to wait in reception while a member of staff from their class is called to collect them. This is to avoid any potential mixing of bubbles with children who are taking part in PE lessons in the hall or playgrounds.

### **My child is unwell, what do I do?**

You must contact the school office by phone, leaving a message on the absence line or emailing by **8.45am**. Please leave a specific message explaining the reason for absence. Simply saying your child is 'unwell' will result in a call from the Attendance Officer.

### **POSSIBLE COVID-19 ILLNESS**

If your child has **ANY** COVID-19 symptom, he/she **MUST NOT** come into school.

The main symptoms are:

- a fever,
- a new or continuous cough
- or has lost their sense of taste or smell

You are advised to call NHS 111 or 119, who will advise you on whether you need to take a Covid test. **SIBLINGS** in the same household **MUST NOT** come to school. When a parent/carer calls the school to report a case of COVID-19 or suspected COVID-19, they must give the names of all the children in the household as they will all need to self-isolate.

Tests can be booked online through the NHS testing and tracing for coronavirus website, or ordered by telephone via NHS 119 for those without access to the internet. Most tests are returned within 24 hrs when a booking is made.

When a test is booked, the school **must** be informed and we **must** be updated as to whether the test is negative or positive. Children cannot return to school without prior communication regarding the test result.

If a child tests **negative**, they can stop self-isolating and return to school if they are well enough to do so. Other members of their household can also stop self-isolating.

If a child tests **positive**, they should follow the 'stay at home: guidance for households with possible or confirmed coronavirus (COVID-19) infection' and must continue to self-isolate for 10 days from the onset of their symptoms and return to school only if they do not have symptoms other than cough or loss of sense of smell/taste. (This is because a cough or anosmia can last for several weeks once the infection has gone.)

The 10 day period starts from the day when they first became ill or the date of the test. (If symptoms begin after the test, this becomes day 1 and the 10 days starts from the onset of symptoms). Other members of their household should continue self-isolating for the full 14 days.

Cases of Coronavirus known to the school will be treated confidentially.

## **NON COVID-19 ILLNESS**

For a non COVID-19 illness, normal rules and procedures would apply. Children are expected to attend school unless they are too unwell to do so.

The number and lengths of illnesses are strictly monitored and if a child's absence falls below expected levels, it will be followed up with our normal procedures.

However, please note, if a suspected non-COVID illness presents with ANY COVID symptom: i.e: fever/continuous cough/loss of taste and smell, self-isolation **must** begin and the school **must** be informed. (Two examples are given below to illustrate this point)

- A test must be taken and the result shared with the school before the child can return. This must be treated as COVID-19 illness until a negative test has been returned. After a negative test, children should only return if they are well. Examples: If your child has cold symptoms and a temperature, a COVID-19 test will be advised to be taken and COVID - 19 policy above followed until COVID-19 is ruled out. (Reason - a temperature is a COVID19 symptom.)
- If you think your child has flu, a COVID test will be advised to be taken and COVID-19 policy above followed until COVID-19 ruled out. (Reason - COVID-19 causes fever and cough as seen with flu symptoms)

### **One of my children has a COVID symptom, can his/her sibling come to school?**

No. Siblings must not come into school if their brother/sister shows symptoms and or has a positive test. The sibling(s) must self-isolate for a minimum of 10 days only returning at the end of day 10.

If the test is negative for the child where symptoms originated (and the child is well), all may return to school and the period of self-isolation will end.

Please contact the school to update us before your child/children returns.

### **A member of the household is ill with COVID-19 symptoms, but my child has no symptoms, can they come in?**

If a member of the household displays symptoms, any children would need to self-isolate for 10 days. This means they should not come to school until the self-isolation period is complete. If the child displays no symptoms during this time, he/she would return to school from day 10 (assuming all symptoms have gone completely).

### **My child has a cough, can they come in?**

If the cough is a new continuous cough (ie a COVID-19 symptom) the child and household should be at home self-isolating until a COVID test has determined the next steps. (See item 6 above)

If you are unsure about your child's cough, we are advising you keep your child home for the first day to monitor symptoms and contact either your GP or NHS 111/119 who can advise you.

Please contact the school office/Attendance Officer with the outcome of the call.

### **NHS test and trace have contacted you**

If your household is told by NHS test and trace to self-isolate, the self-isolation guidance **must** be followed by the household (this will be for 10 days). Please contact the school office/attendance officer and notify us **immediately**. Any children in school when the call is received would need to be sent home straight away. If you are told to self-isolate, children **MUST NOT** come to school until 10 days have passed.

## **My child or a member of the household received a shielding letter from the government. What should I do?**

Current shielding guidance is for everyone in England who has been identified as clinically extremely vulnerable. If your child is in this group, you will previously have received a letter from the NHS or from your GP telling you this. You may have also been advised to shield in the past.

You can find guidance for shielding on the Gov website.

Current shielding guidance applies to clinically extremely vulnerable individuals only.

**Others living in a household with someone who is clinically extremely vulnerable are not advised to follow this guidance. This means that children living with someone who is clinically extremely vulnerable should be attending school.** They should instead follow the general advice and regulations set out in the national lockdown guidance that came into effect on 5 January 2021. If a child living with someone who is clinically extremely vulnerable does not attend school, we will follow this up with normal attendance procedures.

As the knowledge of COVID-19 has grown, it is now known that very few children and young people are at highest risk of severe illness due to the virus. Doctors have therefore been reviewing all children and young people who were initially identified as clinically extremely vulnerable to confirm whether they are still thought to be at highest risk. If you have already discussed this with your child's doctors and they have confirmed your child is still considered clinically extremely vulnerable, your child should follow the current shielding advice.

Under the current national lockdown, children will learn remotely until 8th March 2021, except for vulnerable children and the children of critical workers who may still attend school.

**Clinically extremely vulnerable children and young people should not attend school or other educational settings**, because the risk of exposure to the virus in the community is high.

Families will receive a letter if they are required to shield again that parents will be able to share with the school.

If your child is advised to shield later this year, please share this information with us so that we can support your child's education remotely. Please give us copies of any documentation that you receive.

## **Will legal action be taken if I do not send my child to school?**

Parents and schools have a legal duty to ensure all children are in school.

It is the parents' duty to ensure that their child of compulsory school age attends regularly at the school where the child is a registered pupil and **continued unauthorised absence could lead to the Local Authority taking legal action.**

This is in accordance with both our usual Attendance Policy with the Attendance and Welfare guidance from the Local Authority.

Of course this is a situation which we want to avoid by supporting and working with our families as best we can before a pupils attendance, and subsequently, their attainment are affected further.

We will liaise with families using our normal procedures but if children are persistently absent without appropriate supporting evidence, the Local Authority will be informed and fines and or court action are possible.

Absences relating to coronavirus **do not** count as non-attendance and therefore **does not** reduce a child's attendance percentage.

Repeated general illness (not Coronavirus related) will contribute to bring down a child's attendance percentage and will be investigated as per our normal procedures.

## **I have heard there is a positive case of a child at the school. What happens now?**

In the case of the school being informed of a positive Covid test result, we will report this to the Local Public Health Protection team.

We will notify the parents of the affected bubble(s) where they will be asked to be collect their child and their child will self-isolate for 10 days.

The Local Public Health Protection team may also contact the school if a positive case comes through NHS Test and Trace and in that instance they will advise which children or adults have been in close proximity to an affected person and who should be sent home. We will contact directly the families of affected children should this occur.

## **My child was not in the affected bubble but I am afraid to send my child to school in incase they catch the virus. What Should I do?**

Whilst we understand your concerns and are sympathetic, current DFE guidance says children **MUST** attend school unless they have valid reason not to.

Following government advice, pupils are taught in year group bubbles to help minimize the risk of contracting and spreading the virus. We follow strict measures to protect our

pupils and staff, including the non-mixing of bubbles, therefore the risk of your child contracting the virus from the affected bubble is extremely low.

If a bubble is sent home, these absences would be **authorized** and marked with a special code which **does not** impact on their attendance percentage.

If children are absent (due to fears relating to COVID) but are not part of the bubble that has been sent home, this would be considered an **unauthorised** absence and normal absence procedures with regards to non-attendance would apply.

Please be reassured that the school is taking considerable measures to keep staff and students safe.

As well as robust absence reporting procedures to keep COVID-19 off site, the school has implemented:

- Year group bubbles
- One way system in and around the school
- Reduced student movement between lessons using a fixed classroom base as far as is possible with regards to delivery of the curriculum
- Increased handwashing/hand sanitizing measures
- Staggered drop off and pick up times
- Increased cleaning

More detailed and extensive information on how the school is being made safe for all is detailed in the Covid-19 Parent Handbook which was sent to all parents at the start of the Autumn term 2020.

We strive to provide a safe environment in which our pupils feel happy and confident. As a school we are very empathetic towards medical conditions, including mental health and wellbeing and we aim to provide support for our pupils and their families who are experiencing anxiety and concern surrounding attending school and Covid-19. Please contact us to discuss any concerns you may have.

### **My child was sent home ill with suspected Coronavirus. How long do they stay off for?**

Unless there is a negative test, your child should be at home for 10 school days. The rest of the household would then begin a 14 day self-isolation. (See notes 6 above for more information and procedures with regards positive and negative tests.) Please note, if we are sending a child home with suspected Coronavirus, they must be collected by a parent or carer.

### **My child's bubble has been sent home. What happens now?**

A 10 day self-isolation period begins for all children in the bubble (the rest of each household does not need to self-isolate unless someone in the household shows symptoms, in which case the household must self-isolate).

Households should follow 'stay at home: guidance for households with possible or confirmed coronavirus (COVID-19) infection'. They should get a test, and: If the test delivers a negative result, they must remain in isolation for the remainder of the 10-day isolation period. This is because they could still develop the coronavirus (COVID-19) within the remaining days.

If the test result is **positive**, they should inform the school immediately, and must isolate for at least 10 days from the onset of their symptoms. Their household should self-isolate for at least 10 days from when the symptomatic person first had symptoms, following 'stay at home guidance for households with possible or confirmed coronavirus (COVID-19) infection'.

### **We are returning from abroad and now we have to quarantine. Can I end the quarantine early in the case of a negative test?**

No. You must follow the quarantine periods as laid out by the government and self-isolate for 10 days. This is because an infection may develop during this time. If you are returning from a country on the quarantine line (Please note that the guidance is ever changing at very short notice), it must be respected.

As per our normal policy, holidays are not permitted in term time unless it is under extraordinary circumstances. For this year, we would advise **not** booking holidays abroad at any point during the half term holidays or towards the end of the summer holidays until travel guidance is clarified, as a 10 day quarantine on upon your return would greatly impact on term time education.

Thank you for reading this document and please keep it handy for reference. Government guidance is expected to evolve through Spring/Summer 2021 and we will update parents with any changes.