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Creating Priority Groups for Children in School

Parents,

Schools have a challenge at the moment, limiting the spread of the virus whilst balancing the needs of critical workers and protecting pupils and staff. New guidance came out to schools on Thursday, January 7th, which has given some clarity. The school's risk assessment determines school's ability to accommodate pupils and as we have recently experienced, identified risks can change quickly so it is essential for school to be prepared for higher levels of risk.

This week we have five times as many children in school as we did in the first week of the first lockdown, positive case data around school rose by 50% this week to 441 per 100,000 (increased to 538 on Sunday) and we have a more virulent strain of the virus. The data is not going in the right direction so we need to assess where we are and plan for more difficult times. Please read this letter carefully. I have used quotation marks or boxes where information is taken straight from the guidance to schools.

Employers must protect people from harm. This includes taking reasonable steps to protect staff, pupils and others from coronavirus (COVID-19) within the education setting. It is a legal requirement that schools should revisit and update their risk assessments. It is good practice to treat risk assessments as a "living document" which is kept under review, especially having regard to changing circumstances.

Our essential measures to minimise risk include:

- ✓ a requirement that people stay at home if they:
 - are ill with virus symptoms
 - have tested positive, even if asymptomatic
 - have been advised by NHS Test and Trace to do so
 - are household members of a positive case, even if that case is asymptomatic
 - are required to self-isolate for travel-related reasons
- ✓ robust hand and respiratory hygiene
- ✓ enhanced cleaning and ventilation arrangements
- ✓ active engagement with NHS Test and Trace
- ✓ formal consideration of how to reduce contacts and maximise distancing between those in school wherever possible
 - minimise the potential for contamination so far as is reasonably practicable
 - keeping children in consistent groups
 - avoiding contact between groups
 - arranging classrooms with forward facing desks
 - staff maintaining distance from pupils and other staff as much as possible

Where school staff are able to work from home, they are doing so. The office staff are working remotely from home and telephone calls are re-directed. Generally, we have one teacher and one teaching assistant per year group in school with additional staff to meet the needs of the

vulnerable and younger children. The remaining teaching and support staff are supporting children's home learning, from home.

From Monday, although each year group will remain in a bubble for the purposes of track and trace, to minimise contact, children in Years 2,3,4,5,6 will be seated 2 meters apart leading to a maximum of 12 children in a classroom. When necessary or prudent, the children will be spread over two rooms to minimise the potential for spread of infection. Although the number of positive test results for children may be low, testing is highlighting the frequency of asymptomatic cases and we have experience in school of the spread of infection between children and to adults and how debilitating this virus can be. Schools are also 'vectors of transmission.'

Teaching assistants may also be deployed to lead groups or cover lessons, under the direction and supervision of a qualified, or nominated, teacher (under the Education (Specified Work) (England) Regulations 2012 for maintained schools and non-maintained special schools and in accordance with the freedoms provided under the funding agreement for academies).

Parents cannot assume that when children are in school they are always with a teacher.

We have resisted limiting attendance at schools and colleges until now, but in the face of the rapidly rising numbers of cases across the country and intense pressure on the NHS, we now need to use every lever at our disposal to reduce contacts outside households wherever possible. In all cases, provision must continue to be made on-site for vulnerable children and the children of critical workers to safeguard their welfare and ensure essential services can continue to function.

As previously noted, we have five times the number of children as we did previously at this point in the first lockdown. There appears to be a more relaxed approach to this lockdown nationally which is being reported in the media, however, we have more cases locally and a more transmissible variant. Great Wood needs to review the children in school against the new guidance and be prepared for the possibility of a rapidly changing situation. Perhaps a future risk assessment will lead to a need to reduce numbers, in school or within a year group, due to new information or reduced staff capacity.

Under the rules of the current lockdown, vulnerable pupils and the children of key workers can continue to attend school. The guidance acknowledges that every school "will have a different number of children of critical workers who need to attend", and stresses that it is "important that on-site provision is provided for these pupils".

It clarifies, "Children with at least one parent or carer who is a critical worker can go to school if required. This includes parents who may be working from home."

The definition of critical workers is outlined in

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-educational-provision/guidance-for-schools-colleges-and-local-authorities-on-maintaining-educational-provision>

These are "**parents whose work is critical to the coronavirus (COVID-19) and EU transition response** and include those who work in health and social care and in other key sectors".

There is a list of the types of work in the link. It is not critical to the coronavirus response for an employee of a garden centre which is still allowed to be at open to be at work, nor critical to the coronavirus response for an electrician to work on building a new estate.

Schools should speak to parents and carers to identify who needs to go to school. If it proves necessary, schools can ask for simple evidence

Parents and carers who are critical workers “should keep their children at home if they can.”

The definition of vulnerable children and young people “includes children who have a social worker, an education, health and care plan (EHCP) or who may be vulnerable for another reason at local discretion.”

As a school we will do our part to keep critical services running and provide for vulnerable children. We thank those parents who are already following the guidance and are keeping children at home either full-time or part time. We would prefer for every child to be in school with teaching staff and know that being in school for every child would be better than at home for their learning and their social and emotional development, but it will defeat the purpose of the lockdown if we are too relaxed about social mixing. We have to ensure that those in school are eligible and have to plan for the possible limiting of places at school due to future risk assessments. Therefore we will be placing all children on our Critical Worker and Vulnerable Register into priority groupings.

Lancashire authority supports the identification of Key Critical Workers. Great Wood School governors support this letter and that the categorisation of pupils is prepared.

Parents who have identified themselves as key workers are asked to contact us identifying the group you think you are by emailing office@greatwood.lancs.sch.uk ONLY.

Priority	Summary	To Include:
A	Vulnerable Children	Children who have an Educational Health Care Plan or have a named social worker.
B	Key Critical Workers with no alternative	Both parents or the single parent: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NHS frontline clinical staff or administrators e.g. NHS 911 whose work is critical during the pandemic • First Responders • Police officers and some civilian police staff • Firefighters • Those in NHS support services needed to help hospitals and clinics running • School/nursery staff who are attending on site provision at their own schools
C	Key Critical workers with critical worker partner	One parent is a Key Critical Worker as listed above and the other parent’s work is critical to the coronavirus or EU response but the role is not in the key critical worker list
D	Critical Worker working outside home with no alternative	The work of both parents or a single parent is critical to the coronavirus and EU response and the work is outside the home
E	Critical Worker working at home with no alternative	The work of both parents or a single parent is critical to the coronavirus and EU response
F	Critical Worker working outside home	The work of one parent is critical to the coronavirus and EU response and the work is outside the home
G	Critical Worker	The work of one parent is critical to the coronavirus and EU response
X	Vulnerable at the school’s discretion	Children the school judges to be vulnerable – prioritised on an individual basis. This group includes children where school has not been able to provide support to access on-line learning.

When you share your priority group (e.g. Group G - Critical Worker) we will confirm this before placing them in that group. We have previous emails from quite a lot of you; if you want to re-send that at the time of sharing your grouping, it would help us do this more quickly.

Parents may have considered their job had 'key worker' status as they were working in an essential service that is allowed to be open or because their job fit into one of the categories listed. We need plumbers to make repairs in emergencies which would be critical but just because a job is on the list of key workers doesn't give the status; it is whether the role being performed is critical to the coronavirus response. The fact that an essential service is open such as a garden centre does not mean that work at the garden centre is critical to the coronavirus response.

Working in a supermarket, or a care home is critical to the coronavirus response but not a Key Critical Worker role as in group B and C.

We have been asked to stay at home and only leave if we have to. It is the same for children. The aim is to reduce social contacts. We know that many parents are only requesting places at school on the days when they have no alternative and this helps with capacity. However, if you have already requested a key worker place for your child but after reading this realise that you won't be able to demonstrate you as parents(s) fit into one of the categories above, please let us know and their name will be taken off the register. If you are a parent whose child would be eligible for a school place but have not requested one, it is also helpful for school to be aware of your child's status – in case of an emergency.

I will be contacting parents, for whom we don't already have easily found confirmation information, to confirm the priority group of each child. Some employers have been helpful and have already provided letters, for example I was sent a copy of a letter from an insurance firm confirming that the work being completed by the named person was critical to the EU response. If you have the information and proof easily at hand and can re-send it, please do so. I have allocated until Wednesday to put the children into groups so we can get registers sorted for the following week, so the sooner you contact us with the category you fit into the better.

Many parents have already indicated from a form we created before the new guidance came out whether you had a regular working pattern, or whether you would need to book places for changing days. If you haven't already told us, please do so.

Currently, we can accommodate the children on the register in Years 1,2,3,4,5,6 above so there will be no change to next week's registers unless you as parents realise your child isn't eligible. In reception, we have had some requests since we completed the registers on Friday which would take us over half of the children in school on some days. We imagine some families may be contacting us to let us know that they won't be able to evidence that their work is 'critical to the coronavirus response' or their child can't be cared for at home, so hope to be able to accommodate the new families as they can evidence their status.

We hope that the spread of the virus is limited to manageable levels and we will not have to limit access to places at school beyond the current guidelines. However, through this process, we will have confirmed all children in school are eligible and we will be prepared for difficult times with greater risks.

Thank you for your understanding. It will be another busy week. This too, will pass.

John Ross

Headteacher