

13 December 2021

Dear Parents and Carers

I am writing to you once again as we head into the Christmas holiday and to thank you for the support that you have given to our schools as we all deal with the ongoing challenges caused by the COVID pandemic.

Our schools have had a very busy term working with your children to support them in their new year groups, engaging them in exciting activities to develop their skills and make up for lost learning as well as enabling them to spend time with their friends. They have also been enjoying activities preparing them for the festive season, although I know that your access to these has unfortunately been limited again this year. Schools are working hard to ensure that they follow rigorous infection control measures and far from being the Grinch in this scenario they are working hard to ensure that the children and the staff stay safe so that you can all have the best Christmas possible.

We have had Ofsted inspections in five of our schools this term. I had the privilege of joining the inspection teams in these schools and hearing the wonderful responses many of you made to the inspectors about how the schools have supported your children. The inspection teams have all been very positive about the quality of education provided in our schools, the attention the schools are paying to keeping your children safe and the very good behaviour and attitudes of your children. I was very proud of the staff and the children in these schools who used the opportunity to show the inspectors what they do so brilliantly every day.

Our schools have done an amazing job this term providing your children with great educational opportunities despite also managing a very high number of staff absences. We were all hoping that we could return to a greater semblance of normality, however as you all know we are now again in a situation where the government is increasing the restrictions due to the potential impact of the Omicron variant of the virus.

You will know from the press that Omicron is a new variant of coronavirus and early signs indicate that it is very transmissible. The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) is continuing to gather as much data and evidence to understand the new variant and will continue to provide guidance to schools as they have more evidence of its impact.

Close contacts will continue to be identified by NHS Test and Trace and if there is a case in one of our schools or in your community we will be advised of next steps by UKHSA on the basis of the information they hold at the time. The current guidance says that those identified as a close contact of a possible or confirmed case of the Omicron variant of COVID-19 must self-isolate for 10 days and book a PCR test. This measure currently applies to all contacts irrespective of age or vaccination status. The current advice is that children also have to self-isolate and book a PCR test if contacted by NHS Test and Trace, however at this stage we are not expected to send classes home unless advised to do so by UKHSA. Advice will continue to change and we all hope that the intended introduction of daily testing will be able to reduce isolation for many. I can assure you that we will be in regular contact with UKHSA and will follow their guidance to keep your children as safe as we possibly can whilst continuing to provide them with a high-quality education.

All the current prevention measures we are asked to follow for COVID-19 remain the best protection to take, so we encourage you to continue following the school and national guidance:

- Hands, face, space, and fresh air
- Test regularly, even if you're not showing symptoms, and remember to report your result
- Get vaccinated when eligible - first dose, second dose, booster, and flu jab
- Spot the symptoms, and do not send your child into school if symptomatic, or if they have had a positive LFD test. Self-isolate and book a PCR test instead.
- Wear masks in spaces where you are not able to socially distance

Due to the national advice to increase mask wearing all staff and pupils in Year 7 and above will wear masks in all communal areas in our schools, although not in classrooms, as advised in national guidance. As an extra precaution we encourage you to please wear masks at the gate and on the school site. We will also be reducing the number of visitors in our schools during the last week of term as an additional precautionary measure before Christmas.

Our schools remain open for all pupils; all pupils who are fit and well should attend school as normal unless they develop COVID-19 symptoms or are contacted by NHS Test and Trace and told to self-isolate.

We know that much will change over the Christmas holiday and there may well be new advice on the 4th January as there was last year. In order to ensure that whatever the government is proposing we are ready to welcome your children back safely we will have an INSET day in all of our schools on the 4th January and your children will not return to school until the 5th January to provide teachers with the time to prepare for whatever measures they are being asked to institute.

I do hope that you have a wonderful festive season and are able to enjoy the time with your friends and family. The government is advising that you take Lateral Flow tests before visiting relatives, particularly if any of them are vulnerable. I know that I am stocking up with Lateral Flow tests myself and plan to use them to keep my family and friends safe – I wonder how many stockings will have test kits and masks in them this year!

Once again, I thank you for your support and for your consideration of the wonderful staff in our schools at this time.

Enjoy the holiday and stay safe

Yours sincerely,



Mrs S M Samson
Chief Executive Officer
University of Chichester Academy Trust