

BIDWELL BROOK SCHOOL

SHINNER'S BRIDGE, DARTINGTON,
DEVON, TQ9 6JU
t: 01803 864120

e: admin@bidwellbrook.devon.sch.uk



ELLEN TINKHAM COLLEGE

BODLEY HOUSE, WAYSIDE CRESCENT, EXETER,
DEVON EX1 3LF
t: 01392 482533

e: college@ellentinkham.devon.sch.uk

MRS JACQUI WARNE - EXECUTIVE HEAD

ELLEN TINKHAM SCHOOL

HOLLOW LANE, EXETER, DEVON, EX1 3RW t: 01392 467168 e: school@ellentinkham.devon.sch.uk

4th January 2021

TO ALL FAMILIES ACROSS THE LEARN TO LIVE FEDERATION

Dear All,

January 2021 Additional Safety Measures

First of all and importantly, it is of the utmost importance that both families and colleagues know and understand that Senior Leaders and Governors are fully aware of the level of anxiety and uncertainty that we are all experiencing and that the safety of our community – children, young people and adults, is of the utmost importance.

As of today, the most recently calculated infection rates in Devon are significantly lower than in current Tier 4 areas (Devon having 129 cases per 100,000 as opposed to 800-1000 cases per 100,000 in Tier 4). Of course, this is not reason to be complacent, as these things can change very quickly indeed, and may have already done so!

We are doing all that we can to ensure your child/young person can continue to access school. This will be the case even in the event of further Tier restrictions and potential lockdown, unless it becomes unsafe or impossible, due to multiple infections in the school or dangerously low staffing levels.

During last term, I am happy to say that our attendance rates were consistently well above National average and I hope that this can continue to be the case. However, I am aware that the country has entered a new and worrying phase of the virus and I fully appreciate the hard decisions you are being forced to make on behalf of your child/young person. Any families choosing to keep their child at home for now will be able to have this authorised as an agreed leave of absence. You will not be prosecuted or penalised in any way and we will work with you to consider what we can do to support your child accessing education and hopefully returning to school as soon as possible.

“Bubbles”

For the next few weeks, we will button down to class bubbles from the previous Key Stage bubbles. I know this comes with some additional considerations and issues, but working as a class bubble means far less mixing of groups and is bound to be safer. Additional/supply staff will be allocated to classes who need it (maybe because they have staff members who are shielding) and Key Stage teams will be invited to work with our Human Resources Managers to get this balance right. We know that it will be harder to cover some of the rich, broad curriculum in class bubbles, that comes from mixed groups and experiential learning in the community, but right now, safety comes first. Structure and routine will be comforting to pupils and a focus on core knowledge and skills will be positive. Any staff who are shielding will be offering remote support and planning and will be able to support in generating content for online learning.

Our specialist QTVI and Speech & Language Therapist (Hilary Dovell and Bethan Scott) will be working remotely in order to be able to provide support across all settings and classes.

Where outdoor learning is possible and is safe to access, we will continue to encourage and support it as it is so important to pupils.

We will try to minimise the movement of personnel between classes and sites as far as possible, but some limited movement is essential to the role of some key staff. The majority of non-class-based staff will be allocated to classes where it is deemed they are needed most, for the next two weeks at which point we will review it. This may mean that some individual enrichment sessions may not be possible for a short while, or will happen differently.

The Hydrotherapy pools have been thoroughly risk assessed and are still considered safe to use, according to the most recent advice. This could change if we move into Tier 4 but that is not certain by any means. We will continue to provide this until we are told not to.

We are discouraging the use of shared equipment and instead classes will use a class allocation of equipment. This will include PE equipment for example. In this way, a class can still access PE activities during their hall time, but reduce the risk of using a shared space by having their own equipment. This will be sanitised at the end of the week and potentially swapped to allow different activities. Key Stage teams are working together on this.

Where lunch trollies are shared, staff will wear full PPE when collecting the trolley and serving food. This includes mask, gloves and an apron. Pupils will continue to eat in their classes.

Every weekend, the buildings will be “fogged” with an antiviral mist so that the buildings are thoroughly sanitised each week.

Testing

Special schools and Secondary schools are expected to set up regular testing for staff and pupils from this week. Our concern is that Covid-19 tests for the majority of our children and young people that involve poking a swab down their throat and up their nose is at least distressing and at worst, bordering on cruel. We are not at all happy with this and do not think it is a viable proposal – especially not if it is to be carried out every day in the event of a positive test! We therefore have an alternative proposal:

- Schools asked by the DfE to carry out testing (this includes our schools) are permitted to have additional INSET time to train and prepare. We have decided to take this time in smaller amounts rather than full days in order to roll out realistic testing that will protect our school communities. We propose that pupils finish at 2.15 pm on Fridays for this half term (we will of course keep this under review and if mass vaccination happens, we will revert to usual timings). This means that every Friday afternoon, we will be able to test every staff member using the lateral flow testing kits. The hall areas in each setting will be set up to allow this to happen without it impacting on pupils by losing essential spaces the rest of the time. If the test shows a positive result, that member of staff will be given an NHS test and will self-isolate until the result comes back.
- If a child is sent home ill, they can take one of our NHS test kits with them, if the family wishes. (If we run out, a standard test will need to be booked). The family can use their judgement as to whether they test their child, having the option to keep their child at home for 10 days if they do not wish to. Once again, I would ask that if your child/young person seems unwell, you take the precaution of keeping them at home so that you can assess whether they are showing Covid-19 symptoms.

- It is possible that some older students will be able to tolerate lateral flow testing. The decision for students (Secondary/FE only), to participate in the school lateral flow testing would be a decision for the family and young person and will not be imposed upon anyone.
- If there are any positive results, an NHS test must be carried out. Bubbles can only be closed on receipt of a positive NHS test and under the guidance of the local Health Protection Team. We will need to continue to close bubbles where a confirmed positive case has been identified, due to being unable to test pupils every day.
- We will continue to take the temperatures of staff and pupils every day.

PPE

All staff have a personal allocation of PPE. This includes a face shield and personal hand sanitiser. There are also stores of face masks, gloves and aprons available.

- Long-sleeved, more “hospital gown-like” aprons are on order at both schools for those teams who particularly need them.
- Non-medical face coverings will be worn by adults, certainly in corridors and small spaces, but it is increasingly likely in classrooms as well, with the risk of infection being so much higher than previously. “Which” has produced a useful article on the safest home-made coverings and if your child/young person can tolerate it, we will support them to wear one too, although this is not an expectation or a requirement.

Online Learning

For now, any pupils remaining at home can access learning activities on the existing Home Learning areas of our websites. From the end of this week, a new and exciting Federation-wide online learning platform is being launched. More information about that soon ...

I have just heard that Boris Johnson is due to address the nation this evening at 8 pm. Unless Boris says something specific about special schools, I am assuming the above will still stand, but if it doesn't, I will contact you all again tomorrow.

Yours faithfully



Jacqui Warne

Executive Head

