



10th March 2021

Dear parents/carers,

I thought it appropriate write to you all to clarify your questions and queries, as there are clearly some concerns.

All staff in school do lateral flow tests twice weekly: Friday evening (to give us the weekend to notify families if necessary) and Tuesday evening (as good a time as any). All tests were negative when we did them last weekend.

Last night, at 10.30pm, I received notification that one member of staff had tested positive on their lateral flow test. A positive LFT still needs to be confirmed by a PCR test, and sometimes lateral flows give inaccurate results. Until we know the results of the PCR test, we have to assume that the member of staff in question is positive (and then hope their test shows otherwise).

A positive LFT will result in self-isolation for any 'close contacts', and this is where the situation gets difficult. In reality, most teachers/TAs do not have close contact with many children BUT we would not like to categorically make the decision that they had not. Therefore, in the interests of the safety of all concerned, and following the guidance, we need to take the precautionary measure of self-isolating all pupils in the staff member in question's class. However, this does not mean that the whole bubble (R,1, 2 or 3,4,5,6) would need to close as the staff member had not had any contact with children in the other classes within that bubble. Whole bubble closure will only be required if a child in the bubble tests positive, as we cannot be sure which children have mixed on the playground, in the toilet etc. To date, only one child in school has tested positive.

Day-to-day management of school is currently a balancing act. We have to consider COVID security, general safety and supervision, teaching and learning, learning catch-up... Obviously, children's safety comes first.

The staff member in question covers planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time across school. PPA is a legal entitlement and so I cannot take it away (not that I would want to; the teachers already work many hours of their evenings and weekends, and to stop PPA would be unfair). One adult covering across school is not ideal, I know, but the only alternative we had was to buy separate supply teachers in. The issue then would be that they would be working in a number of schools – and not necessarily in Dudley, but also potentially Sandwell, Walsall, Wolverhampton or Birmingham (all of which have been 'hot spots'). I felt this was a greater risk than one known person working across our classes.

We made the decision to allow years 3-6 to form one bubble and they may mix outside on the playground. Again, this was a risk assessed decision. Staggering lunchtimes to keep Y3 and 4 separate from Y5 and 6 reduced the number of lunchtime staff available at any one time, thus spreading them more thinly and reducing the adult to child ratios and number of pairs of eyes supervising the children, and also adults to organise games etc. On this basis, I was more concerned that the potential accidents and incidents at lunchtime was a greater risk to the children's health and safety than COVID-19 (as I said, we have only had one pupil case that has affected us). I did consider allocating TAs to cover lunchtimes, but this would then mean them having to have their lunch breaks when the children were in class – and we really need our TAs to be in class doing the job they are paid for: helping the children to learn! I am

Thorns Primary School, Thorns Road, Quarry Bank, Brierley Hill, West Midlands, DY5 2JY

Tel: 01384 818285 Email: info@thorns-p.dudley.sch.uk Head Teacher: Mrs R Jordan



sure you agree that we must all work hard now to ensure that we help the children make as much progress as possible and for that we need teachers and TAs in classrooms.

I would like to assure you all that we are all taking this very seriously, and suggestions that staff are reckless and not keeping the children safe because they have tested positive for Covid, is hurtful and unfair to people who are working very hard to do their best for your children. I'm sure we all know people who have contracted COVID-19 and can't understand where they had it from. This is a time for working together, not for blame.

Best wishes,

R.L.Jordan

Rebecca Jordan
Head Teacher