



KTS ACADEMY

Marshall Drive
Brotton
Saltburn
TS12 2UW
Tel: 01287 677265



e-mail: office@ktsacademy.org.uk
website: www.kts-academy.org.uk

Headteacher: Brian Richardson

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Dear families,

We had a frantic week last week, and I wanted to clarify what the procedures are from school's point of view regarding covid and positive cases.

I totally appreciate the disappointment and difficulties a call from school will bring when we have to ask you to isolate your child. It is not a call we ever want to make, and we have done everything possible within school to try and ensure we don't have to make that call. But as we knew in June, within our school (and all special schools) we can try and mitigate against the risks, but ultimately our children need high staffing levels and are unable to socially distance. It only needs one positive case to enter the school, and it will spread across the class and associated bubble. This is what happened last week, and why we had to make those phone calls, to isolate contacts and try and prevent further spread of the infection.

We are vigilant about symptoms. However, if a person displays symptoms, gets a test and the test returns positive, we then have to track back 48hrs from the onset of the symptoms to confirm close contacts. A person might have been within school for 48hrs before showing symptoms, and will have been infectious during that time. This adds to the number of staff and children that can be affected.

When I am notified of a positive case, it can be at any time of the day, 7 days a week. We have had notifications at 2am, 7.30am, 1pm and 2.50pm. We must then notify close contacts to isolate immediately, and that is why phone calls can be any time of any day. There is no good time for one of those calls, and I appreciate the shock and concern when receiving a call, however, we are following the government guidelines and are legally required to contact close contacts as soon as we are aware.

When I receive notification of a positive case:

I will notify the national and local public health team.

All close contacts of the positive case will be identified and asked to self-isolate – a standard letter from school will be sent to all close contacts, containing all the information that is needed to understand what the child and their household should do.

Every case that occurs in schools is different and I will work closely with public health to make sure they have identified all possible close contacts of a positive case within the guidance given.

Because each case is looked at individually, you can be sure that children and staff are not asked to self-isolate without a good reason. The number of people classed as 'close contacts' of a positive case



will be different for every case dependent on the activities of the person who has tested positive in the 48 hours prior to symptoms starting.

In extreme cases, a whole building, phase or the whole school may have to close because of a lack of appropriate staff or other organisational reasons. There are external factors which I cannot control, such as staff being informed by the track and trace app to isolate (not school related), staff's own children being sent home from school and told to isolate and therefore needed to care for them, family members testing positive and the whole family having to isolate etc. This is the extreme, and I will do everything I can to ensure this does not happen. However, it is a possibility of which you need to be aware.

If a child tests positive, we need to isolate the bus or taxi that the child has accessed, as minibuses and taxis are classed as close contact as all occupants are in an enclosed space and have been in close proximity for 15 mins or more.

What we are doing to reduce the risks:

Class groups are working within bubbles, often with one or 2 other class groups. This is to reduce pupil contacts across the general population of school, and to support with staffing so we are not having to take staff from other areas of the school in times of staff absence, which might increase the spread of infection.

Staff are having breaks and lunches with their own bubble staff only, to ensure contacts are not made across the whole school.

Lunches are being eaten in classrooms, to avoid mixing in the dining halls.

Playtimes are held within bubbles, again to avoid mixing across the general population.

Facemasks are worn in all public areas, corridors etc. by all staff and visitors.

Additional cleaning staff have been employed to keep public areas clean.

All outside visitors have been stopped, apart from health.

I hope the above helps to explain what we, as a school, are having to do. It won't make receiving a phone call from us any easier, but I trust you will understand why we are having to make that call.

Thank you for your kindness and support.

Yours sincerely,

Brian Richardson, head

