



## Brownlee Primary School

### COVID-19 Guidance Update 10<sup>th</sup> September 2021

Dear Parents,

Please find below some questions and answers which parents might find helpful. These answers are based on my understanding of the guidance and correspondence received today from the Public Health Agency, the Chief Medical Officer and the Minister of Education.

#### **1) How has the Public Health Agency guidance changed with regards to children in school?**

Up until today, if a child presented with COVID-19 symptoms, either at home or in school, they had to isolate and book a PCR test. If this test proved to be positive, then the whole class were identified as close contacts and they also had to isolate and book PCR tests on Day 2 and Day 8. Children could only return to school after they received a first negative PCR test result. Children who tested positive had to self-isolate for ten days from the date of the test.

The school had to do all the track and trace admin work and inform parents and the Public Health Agency (PHA) of positive cases. Schools were also responsible for informing parents of ongoing cases and deciding if children could attend school.

The PHA will now coordinate the track and trace for each case and will only contact schools if additional information is required. The PHA will also determine who is deemed to be a close contact and this will mean that perhaps only a few children in each class will have to get a PCR test as opposed to the whole year group and staff.

#### **2) Why has this change been made?**

The previous advice to schools led to huge numbers of children being sent for PCR tests and although there were many positive cases in schools, the vast majority of tests were negative. This caused the testing centres and PHA to be overwhelmed and children's education was also disrupted. Medical advice now suggests that COVID-19 is usually a relatively mild illness in children, similar to a bad cold or flu and it is also assumed that most of the staff working in schools and parents of pupils are now fully vaccinated. With 90% of adults vaccinated, this has also reduced the risk of serious illness as a result of infection.

The PHA has recognised that COVID-19 is an illness that is going to remain with us and society needs to be able to live with it, while at the same time, mitigating against the spread of infection as far as possible.

The Chief Medical Officer, Professor Sir Michael McBride, has stated in his letter to schools this morning that,

*“School attendance is vitally important for children and young people. Multiple sources of evidence show that a lack of schooling increases inequalities, reduces the life chances of children and can exacerbate physical and mental health issues.”*

### **3) What should I do if my child is unwell?**

I do not believe that children who are unwell should attend school as this can be unpleasant for them and also has the potential to spread the illness to others in the class. This applies to all sickness and not just COVID-19 symptoms. If your child is displaying symptoms which include a persistent cough, loss of taste and smell or a high temperature, it is advisable to book a PCR test. I will paste some links and phone numbers below for your convenience.

If your child has simply a runny nose following a bout of cold and otherwise feels fine, they can return to school. Having said that, please do not send a child to school with COVID-19 symptoms.

### **4) What happens if my child tests positive for COVID-19 or is identified as a close contact?**

If your child receives a positive PCR test result, please inform the school as soon as possible. This will help us with our cleaning routines for the specific classroom and communal areas where your child may have been. Please also inform us if the PHA has identified your child as a close contact. The PHA will also offer all advice regarding isolation periods.

### **5) What happens if there is a positive case of COVID-19 in my child's class?**

After a child's positive PCR test, the Public Health Agency (PHA) will ask the parents questions about the child's recent movements and friendship groups both inside and outside school. If the PHA considers these contacts of being at risk of contracting COVID-19 or if the PHA requires more information, then the school may be contacted. Only those children and adults in the school who are considered close contacts of the child who has COVID-19 will be asked to go and get a PCR test. This will mean that whole classes will not be sent for a test or have to miss school.

Parents will be informed that there has been a positive case in their child's class and if another child develops COVID-19 symptoms, the parents of that child should book a PCR test.

### **6) Will my child be marked absent if they have COVID-19 or are a close contact?**

It is hoped that the testing centres will experience reduced demand as a result of this new guidance to schools and therefore children who have to undergo a PCR test should receive the results quite quickly. This should mean that a prolonged period of absence will not be necessary. There is a special COVID-19 attendance code to cover such circumstances.

If your child has COVID-19 and has to isolate for ten days, then he/she will be recorded as being ill and an appropriate absence code and comment will be included to explain why they are not at school. Absence for these reasons will not be of any concern to the Education Welfare Officer during attendance audits.

**7) If my child has COVID-19 will work be sent home by the class teacher?**

Our school has invested heavily in online licences so there will be English and Maths activities for children to access for homework or if they are recovering from any illness but are able to do some school work. The work set will not be like that uploaded during the periods of lockdown as the teacher will also have a full-time commitment teaching the remainder of the class in school.

**8) If my child takes ill in school and is sent home, will siblings have to be sent home too?**

This has been our policy during the recent spike in cases, however, we will now only send a sibling home if parents request that we do so or the sibling is also displaying symptoms. Obviously each case may be different, however, siblings who are presenting as healthy will be able to remain in school.

**9) Where can I get further help and advice?**

Below are some links that you might find useful:

Identifying symptoms of COVID-19:

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-overview-and-advice#toc-0>

Information on Contact Tracing:

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-contact-tracing>

The Public Health Agency (PHA) COVID-19 website:

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-contact-tracing>

COVID-19 Helpline:

Telephone 111 or 119

Should any of this advice change or be extended in the days ahead, I will keep parents fully informed.

Yours sincerely,

Colin Elliott

Principal