



Langley Road,
Newton Hall,
Durham,
DH1 5LP

Headteacher : Mrs. L. Frazer B.A. (Hons.)

Deputy Headteacher (Acting): Mrs A. Cooke B.Ed. (Hons.)

Tel: 0191 3861203

Email: newtonhall@durhamlearning.net

Website: durhamnewtonhall.durham.sch.uk

Dear Parents, Carers and Guardians

Further to my correspondence over the course of the last week, our Chair and Vice Chair of Governors and I are writing to provide you with an update on how our school is responding to meeting our responsibilities during the current national lockdown.

We have had to make some very difficult decisions since the beginning of the pandemic and particularly since the announcement of the latest lockdown. We feel it is important to clarify the range of factors that we have taken into account in making these, and ask for your understanding at this very challenging time.

Firstly, we reiterate our thanks to you for your ongoing support during these unprecedented times. Please be assured that our Governing Body and whole staff team remain committed to providing the very best learning opportunities for all of our children during the pandemic; as well as fulfilling our legal obligations to protect our staff and children's health, safety and wellbeing; supporting our families; and playing our part in reducing transmission of COVID-19.

The difficult decisions that it has been necessary to make are based on our individual school risk assessment. As you know, we are a small school with a small staff team. As part of our on-going risk assessment we need to continually review and strike a careful balance between the range of responsibilities that we hold as a school, to reduce our risk to our children, staff and wider community to the lowest reasonably practicable level, which is in line with national policy.

School places:

We accepted almost 40% of our children into school when we partially re-opened on Wednesday 5th January following the Prime Minister's announcement that all schools would close from this date to the vast majority of children as part of the national lockdown. The number of parents requesting places over the remainder of last week increased. We continued to review our risk assessment and concluded that this was not sustainable; we were not reducing our risk to the lowest reasonably practicable level; our business continuity arrangement needs to more adaptable to provide cover in case of absence; and we could not offer the required equitable level of education to school based and home learners.

We appreciate the interdependencies for our families between our school and Blue Coat, and Mrs Frazer and Mrs Grieve continue to discuss provision across our respective schools. However, as part of this we had to make the extremely difficult decision to review our provision of school places based on our school's risk assessment.

We have carefully followed national guidance and guidance from our professional bodies in doing so. We have taken a range of factors into account including need for places; the size of our staff team; the size and layout of our setting and ability to comply with COVID secure practices including social distancing; and how we provide learning for all of our children.

We have now agreed on the number of school places that we can currently offer, and we have taken steps to work with our families to allocate these. We have followed guidance in allocating places; this includes having to prioritise families who meet vulnerable criteria status, followed by families whose parents' jobs meet the criteria set by the Government as critical to the COVID-19 response, and where they need to work outside of their home to do their job. Due to the context of our school community and reflecting on the risks we face, we have had to further prioritise allocation of places to families who meet the above criteria and where both parents' jobs require them to work outside of their home.

You should now have received text communication from school to confirm whether we can allocate your child/children with a place from Monday 18th January. If you have not received confirmation, please contact school by email.

We fully appreciate that all of our families are facing their own unique challenges. Our approach is intended to strike the balance and support us to fulfil our school ambition and obligation to provide school places as well as safeguard our children, staff and the wider community while also providing an equitable level of provision for our children learning at home.

Home learning:

By making the difficult decision regarding allocation of places, it will enable all of our children to continue to follow the same curriculum and receive the same learning content whether learning in school or at home. We will continue to review how we are providing this and will continue to welcome feedback from parents, carers and guardians. We will have staff dedicated to home based learning for each year group on a daily basis from Monday to ensure that families at home are appropriately supported and have access to teaching staff for support. As always, please contact your allocated staff member within school hours for help and support.

COVID-19 measures:

We will continue to take steps in school to prevent and manage transmission, including through social distancing where possible; ventilation; cleaning and hygiene practices. We would like to reinforce our ask that where our children are attending school:

- that parents, carers and guardians please drop off and collect strictly at the allocated time to avoid congestion in our small space outside the school gates, and that you depart immediately to reduce risk of transmission;
- that you maintain at least 2 meters distance and please wear face coverings at these times;
- that children wash their hands before school and when you arrive home;
- that children wear clean clothes each day;
- that children **do not** attend school if they or anyone in their household(s) or bubble is displaying COVID-19 symptoms, is awaiting a test result or has received a positive test result. Children **must stay at home** for at least 10 days from the onset of their symptoms or the symptoms of the person testing positive within their household or bubble. If they go on to develop their own symptoms when isolating as a household (including bubble) contact, then they must stay at home for an additional 10 days: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection>

Process for review:

Mrs Frazer and the staff team have worked with families to ensure that our information, including contact information, is up to date and accurate. If you believe that our records need to be updated or your situation changes please contact us by email: newtonhall@durhamlearning.net so that we can arrange to have an individual conversation with you.

As we noted earlier, the pandemic continues to evolve and expectations of and guidance for schools will inevitably continue to change. We will continue to meet as Headteacher, Chair and Vice Chair of Governors to review the situation in school and ensure that our risk assessment ensures that we are compliant with the range of factors that we need to take into account, and importantly that we are continuing to reduce our risk to the lowest reasonably practicable level. Our letter sets out our current position. We will update you as promptly as possible if we need to make any changes.

Contacting school:

If you need to discuss an urgent matter, please telephone school and staff on site will endeavour to respond as quickly as possible. If staff are unable to answer your call please leave a message and someone will return your call as soon as possible. Otherwise, please contact the school by email and the team will respond as soon as possible.

Once again, we appreciate your on-going support and understanding, and will continue to make every effort possible to ensure the very best learning opportunities for all of our children during the pandemic alongside reducing our risk to the lowest reasonably practicable level.

Stay safe.

Best wishes

Mrs. L. Frazer

Darren Maw

Angela Hall

Headteacher

Chair of Governors

Vice Chair of Governors

Useful links:

Household isolation guidance: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection>

Bubble guidance (including isolation guidance):

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/making-a-childcare-bubble-with-another-household>

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/making-a-support-bubble-with-another-household#if-you-share-custody-of-your-child-with-someone-you-do-not-live-with>

Durham County Council - including where to access testing and how to get support for isolation:

<https://www.durham.gov.uk/coronavirus>

