

21st October 2021

Dear Parents and Carers,

I am writing in reply to the criticism the Academy has received via Social Media about our response to yesterday's correspondence regarding a rise in Covid-19 cases at the Academy.

Firstly, at all times we have been in direct contact with Public Health England and Track and Trace who now lead nationally on the responses that schools make. After yesterday's phone call they ran through a risk assessment process and advised that we send out the letter and that letter was to go to all parents across the Academy. They currently grade schools related to the number of confirmed cases they have. Blue, Amber or Red. Brookside is currently still a 'Blue' school. Some criticism said that parents were not informed about cases in their Year Group; again Public Health England would only consider a Year Group closing if it became Red. Guidance has significantly changed since the early days of the pandemic, when we were told we had to close even with minimal cases within a 'Bubble'. Now the message for us all is to self-isolate only in very specific circumstances, this is particularly true of children under the age of 18.

In some of the criticism we have been asked to give out numbers of cases. This is really difficult for a number of reasons. Parents, staff and families have asked us not to report it which is their right. You only need to watch the news each evening to see that not only Nationally but in Mendip, cases have risen rapidly. We also have to be mindful that many cases in younger children are asymptomatic. Schools, businesses, emergency services are being hit hard once again. We cannot escape this fact. I am unsure what giving out numbers would achieve. As I have said, Public Health England and Track and Trace know our numbers and they are the body the government has asked to act on developing cases, advising schools and child care settings what to do next.

In the latest guidance from the government they are clear that:

'The overarching objective is to maximize the number of children and young people in face to face education and minimize any disruption, in a way that best manages the COVID-19 risk.'

Gov.UK Contingency framework: education and child care settings – 13th October 2021.

Please trust us when I say that we are doing everything we can to keep us all as safe as is possible. I want to take this opportunity to thank the incredible staff we have at Brookside who have done everything they can to be in school to organise, teach and care for children throughout this term. Many of them have the same worries and anxieties that you yourselves have and they know the risks they face each and every day. Not one has shirked their responsibilities and they have put children front and centre. Therefore, reading the school shaming letters and out of context conversations, have upset many of them because we are doing what we are told to do in the best interests of children's futures. Their education has been hit hard by this pandemic and they will not get a second chance at their vital primary education. I understand that we have loved ones that we worry about, many of our staff are in this situation and have had to make incredible sacrifices this term. I wish it was not so, but this is the incredibly challenging situation we are in. School shaming us, through posting another schools letter (having spoken to the School in question they have since rescinded the letter and are unhappy with who and why it was sent to them) only makes the situation harder for us all.

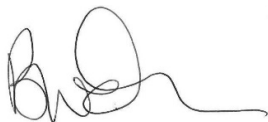
Sometimes I am criticised as being a little bit too political but this is a governmental policy and if you have concerns they should be directed towards your local MP, James Heapey, who has far better reach on this issue than we do.

I am sorry that I have addressed this criticism so publically and thank you to everyone who has worked with us and sent us messages of support throughout these ongoing challenges; we know this is NOT easy for any of us. However, when it is on Social Media we can either ignore it (and get criticised for not caring) or we have to address it as publically as it is announced.

I have been here for a long time now and anyone who knows me should know that I will always be available to listen to concerns and respond to them through an email, a chat at the start or end of the day or a telephone call.

Please stay safe and have a wonderful extra-long half term.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'BW', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Brian Walton