



11 January 2021

Dear Parent / Carer,

We wanted to provide you with an update on the rapidly changing COVID-19 situation here in Knowsley.

Since Christmas, we have been seeing significant rises in the number of COVID-19 cases in the Borough and, over the last week or so, the rate of increase has been sharper than ever before.

We are clearly seeing the impact of the new variant of COVID-19 here in Knowsley and whilst we know this new variant doesn't result in more serious illness, we do know that it is more contagious. This means that we all must act now to stop these figures from rising any higher and the virus becoming completely uncontrolled.

You might recall that Knowsley was at the top of the national table for the rate of infection back in October last year. At that time, we had exceeded 700 cases per 100,000 people, and we saw that (rightly) as a serious situation.

So, it is all the more concerning to report that, as at 4 January 2021, the infection rate in Knowsley stood at **1,123.5 per 100,000** and our expectation is that these case levels will continue to rise for some time yet.

As you know, the Prime Minister announced a national lockdown on the evening of 4 January 2021, and it is really important that we all follow the lockdown rules and stay at home as much as possible.

Knowsley's schools have been remarkable throughout the whole pandemic – they worked tirelessly throughout last Monday evening (after the “last minute” announcement from the Prime Minister) to ensure that education provision can continue – either face-to-face or remotely. It is a challenging time for our local schools and for local families too and we appreciate the additional pressure many people are under at this time.

Once again Knowsley schools will remain open for the children of key workers and vulnerable children throughout this latest lockdown. We know that this emergency provision is absolutely essential for some families. However, with rates of the virus currently so high, it is important for schools to keep the numbers of children in school **as small as possible**. This will allow schools to limit the size of ‘bubbles’ and children and teachers mixing. As such, we would ask all parents / carers to take up these places only if it is absolutely necessary. This will lower the number of households mixing and reduce transmission of the virus.

In line with the most recent government guidance, issued on Friday 8th January, even if you are a critical worker, if your children can remain at home rather than attend school or Nursery, on some, or all days, then they should. Please only use the offer of provision when it is crucial



for you to undertake your critical role, and when you have no other childcare option available to you.

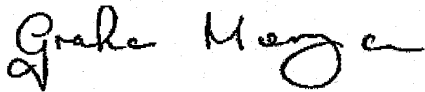
Many of our schools and settings are experiencing high demand for places; this is placing additional pressure on our schools to deliver high quality remote learning alongside on-site provision. Schools are also managing staff absence and isolation. This means that Head Teachers will need to prioritise access to on site education based on individual need, and on the safety of the school. It is essential that Heads can keep numbers within the school low. Head Teachers will need to make these decisions based on their own risk assessments and the availability of staff. The school offer will be subject to change, based on the availability of staff and government guidance – we ask for your patience and understanding with this.

Please remember for children not attending school, high quality remote education is being provided by schools to ensure that pupil learning can continue at home. School staff are available to support families with this.

It is also important for us to share with you that we are now seeing a spike in cases in young people aged 17-24 years. Unfortunately, this means that we will also undoubtedly see an increase in cases in other age groups as the virus moves through households. We know that the pandemic is impacting on young people in terms of disruption to their education, work, and social life, but, if you do have anyone in your household in this age group, please encourage them to stay at home too.

Thank you once again for your continued support during these challenging times. If everyone plays their part and follows the rules, we can once again, protect our NHS and get these infection levels down.

Yours faithfully,



Councillor Graham Morgan
Leader of Knowsley Council



Councillor Margaret Harvey
Cabinet Member for Children's Services