

Letter about the latest government announcement

Dear parent/carer,

I hope you and your family are keeping well.

You may be aware that last night Boris Johnson announced the latest changes to the unlocking of the roadmap. One of the announcements was around the use of face masks in schools. The decision has been made to allow schools to decide whether to continue wearing face masks. We would rather be safe than sorry and ensure that all members of TeamTanfield are as safe as possible. Therefore, I want to explain why we have chosen to continue using them for the time being.

Yesterday, there were 2357 cases recorded in the UK. This was 708 more cases than the previous Monday and 587 more cases than the day before. The County Durham average is 20 cases per 100,000 people and in the area of Stanley it is 25 cases per 100,000 people. This is an increase from 16 cases per 100,000 people last week.

If you remember back in September we made the decision to wear masks when other schools did not. I believe this has helped us to have very few cases of Covid-19 compared to other schools. We have had 7 cases since September. Last night I was talking to another headteacher within our Trust who has had 47 cases in the same time.

In a consensus statement published last Friday, the government's Scientific Pandemic Influenza Group on Modelling, Operational sub-group highlighted the "importance of maintaining current mitigation measures in schools, such as testing and mask wearing, in the coming months".

They pointed to an increase in lateral flow test positivity in schools, and a "modest" increase in positivity in school age children in the Office for National Statistics community infection survey in the period between schools reopening on March 8 and the Easter holidays.

I really hope that this latest stage of the unlocking won't lead to a further increase of cases but at this stage we don't want to change something that has been working. I want to ensure your child and family are as safe as possible and also all of our staff. Only 5.8% of our staff have been fully vaccinated and there are 42.3% who are yet to receive their first vaccination. Therefore, they are still susceptible to catching the disease, especially if they were in a class with 20-30 students who are not wearing a mask.

We will continue to wear masks for the next few weeks, which will allow us to assess the impact of not wearing masks in other schools. If we have got this wrong and cases don't begin to spike again, we will also stop wearing them.

I hope you understand our stance and I want to thank you again for the tremendous support you have shown us so far. It really has made a difference. We will continue to keep you updated with any further developments. Until then, I wish you and your families all the best.

Take care and stay safe,