



# The Consortium Trust

*Where together excellence and pupils thrive*

24<sup>th</sup> January 2022

Dear Parents

## **Covid -19: Between a rock and a hard place.**

As a society the past 2 years has been a roller coaster of challenges, the Covid-19 pandemic has thrown up issues and concerns that we just wouldn't have even thought about before. As a Trust, a family of schools and nurseries, we have always been committed to doing the best that we can for our pupils and by extension the communities that we work in. I do want to make it really clear that we (that's all of us that work for Consortium Trust, from the CEO to the Midday Supervisor) really do understand the anxieties relating to Covid-19. Every corner of community has been affected in some way, as we are a community Trust we work and live in the same communities and share the same worries.

Throughout the pandemic there have been numerous iterations of Plan A, Plan B, Tier 1,2,3,4 and various other restrictions that have been placed on us, then withdrawn and in some cases reinstated! It has been a confusing journey, which has occasionally pitched shopper against shopkeeper, neighbour against neighbour and school against parent.

It has never been our intention to upset or cause distress to anyone be that pupil or parent – but we have often found ourselves between a rock and hard place. I hope that the majority of our parents and wider community feel that as a Trust we have navigated the ever changing Covid-19 regulations with diligence and respect. Of course, things go wrong and communication hasn't always been as effective as it could have been, everywhere, all of the time. But, I do believe that on balance we have done a good job and continued to deliver effective education in a safe environment.

As you will be aware the government has announced that it is its intention that the remaining restrictions will be removed when the Coronavirus Act lapses towards the end of March. Many of the restrictions and requirements that had been placed on society and more particularly on education have already been removed. There is a clear shift, in government policy, through directions that I receive from the Department for Education and medical advice from Public Health England that the pandemic is ending and Covid-19 is being treated as another 'flu-virus'. I am not going to argue whether that is the right decision, but it is a position that we 'together' will need to work with. The key document that we work to can be found here:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1048357/220119\\_Schools\\_guidance\\_January.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1048357/220119_Schools_guidance_January.pdf)

We always want to work with parents, we also know that children learn best when they are in school. School attendance in key and parents are legally required to ensure that their children receive an education. The Trust has a legal responsibility to monitor, and act on poor attendance. Through our engagement with you we always seek to avoid punitive actions, for example fining parents for not sending children to school. We do have a duty to evidence our decisions and that may require parents to supply us with medical evidence as to why a child is not at school.

As coronavirus is 'normalised' in law we have to adapt how we operationally manage it. It is clear in guidance currently schools no longer act as contact tracers and that duty has returned to the NHS. But, schools are busy places and are places where communicable disease can spread, so we will continue to advise of an 'outbreak' of any disease when certain thresholds are met and this is in discussion with colleagues in Local Health Protection Teams.

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As in any relationship, trust is important and it is no coincidence that we are a 'School Trust' we recognise that you entrust us with your most precious possession, your children. We take that duty very seriously. I would ask all our families to trust us to do the right thing, know that we care for your children and understand that we have to work within a legal framework that enshrines that duty of care. We are not out of the woods yet, Covid-19 will continue to have an impact.

But we want to focus our time and energy on providing your children the very best early years and primary education possible. We will no doubt find ourselves 'between a rock and a hard place' again in the future – but mutual respect and understanding will go a huge way to making things right.

Yours faithfully

Andrew Aalders-Dunthorne  
CEO & Principal