

Learning delivered with

Text Linked Curriculum



Hillcrest Primary School

TLC

Headteacher: Mr Matthew Try
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20th October 2021

Dear Parent/Carer,

Hillcrest is now considered an 'Outbreak School' by Norfolk County Council

A Return to Staggered Starts - temporarily

Covid continues to play havoc with school life with the number of cases on the increase amongst children and staff.

At the last count we had 24 confirmed cases amongst the pupils in school across 7 classes. We continue to inform parents when a new class gets its first positive case so that parents of other children in that class can get their children tested in order to pick up the asymptomatic cases and therefore get a proper handle on the spread of the infection.

However, we aren't expecting parents of children in classes where there are multiple cases appearing over a short period of time to keep getting their children tested. For peace of mind they may wish to re-test or in the event that their own child has started developing symptoms after having previously tested negative they may wish to seek a further test.

Public Health England have been informed of our outbreak, as is the expectation when a school reaches 5 cases within one part of its building. We are obviously now well in excess of that.

Public Health England have recommended that additional measures are taken to stem the tide of the infection which is the reason for writing to parents today.

On the afternoon of Wednesday 20th October, having received the data from Public Health England, Norfolk County Council have classified Hillcrest as an Outbreak School, meaning that we can and should be taking ALL steps available to us to stem the spread of the infection across the school. All of the steps we are planning have the full support of the local authority.

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I can confirm that we will working hard to break the back of the spread of infection around the school by returning to a series of measures that will be similar to those experienced throughout last year.

However, we understand the pressures that these changes, particularly the staggered start times, may place on families and are keen to limit the impact on parents as much as possible. For that reason, we are not announcing a blanket return to social distancing restrictions throughout the rest of this term, but instead will be implementing these restrictions for a three week period from the moment we reopen after the half term break on Monday 1st November through to Friday 19th November.

If all goes well and the case numbers drop significantly during that period, we will return to normal operations on Monday 22nd November. However, a final decision will be taken on Wednesday 17th November with regards to whether the restrictions are extended beyond this three-week period.

We will be taking the following steps to help keep your children, staff and parents on site safe and healthy...

- A return to staggered starts (a full list of start and finish times can be found further down this letter);
- A return to the one-way system (although we will be keeping the Sandringham Drive gate open during this initial three-week period);
- The children will be managed in Year Group bubbles. This means that they can still benefit from collaborative projects and learning opportunities across their year group but they will not mix with any other year groups at any point;
- Staggered breaks and lunches;
- NO mixed year group after-school clubs (although a small number of single year group clubs will continue);
- Staff to wear face masks in all communal areas;
- NO face-to-face meetings in school;
- All communications with class teachers via email or Communication Book and not on the class doorstep;
- The front office to be closed again with all communications via phone or email.

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These measures are obviously on top of the measures that we have never stopped working on since the pandemic began. These are...

- Windows and doors open wherever possible to allow a flow of fresh air;
- Regular hand hygiene routines;
- Sanitising PE equipment after use;
- Enhanced cleaning routines across school but specifically of key touch points.

Unlike on the previous occasions when we have had to implement additional measures, we will not be limiting the children's access to the curriculum. They will continue to be taught the full breadth of the primary national curriculum.

Why are we implementing these measures?

I feel the need to justify why we are going down this route, especially as the staggered start times may be disruptive to some parent's routines.

- Although Covid produces largely mild symptoms in children, or indeed no symptoms, younger people can still get very poorly from developing the infection. However, I also accept that the same could be said for a cold, the flu or a sickness bug;
- The deal-breaker for schools when managing Covid outbreaks compared with colds, flu or sickness bugs, is the time that people have to isolate for when testing positive. If it was treated like any other illness where you are off school when you feel poorly and back at school when you feel better, this would not be an issue. We now have staff who have been fully vaccinated that are now testing positive. **If we allow Covid to rip through the school and staff members have to have 10 days off, there will not be enough staff to open the school;**
- The implementation of these measures over the past 18 months had kept the numbers of positive cases within school to a handful, with the majority of those cases identified being attributed to contacts that had taken place out of school. Therefore, community transmission within Hillcrest was minimal throughout the worst of the pandemic. We know these measures can work and we should be confident that these can continue to have a positive impact.

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We would encourage or urge parents to wear face masks whilst on site dropping their children off. However, we will not be enforcing this unless it is reintroduced by the government as a legal obligation between now and the 1st November, which we sincerely hope it will be.

Please do not ask if special arrangements can be put in place to care for your children in the event that the stagger does not work for you, as these requests will NOT be granted. As with every other occasion over the past 18 months where we have had to implement staggered starts, we cannot enter into special arrangements with individual families as it defeats the purpose of doing what we are trying to achieve.

We also need families to avoid coming on to site until the time that their class doors will open. Doors will not open until the time listed towards the end of this letter and there will be no 10-minute drop-off period before the official start time as we have at the moment. This is to avoid a blurring of the lines between each drop-off time which again, would defeat the purpose of having the stagger.

How does this fit with government guidance?

Government guidance is just that, 'guidance.'

It is my responsibility to risk assess the situation, take on board the majority of the guidance from government but ultimately do what I feel is best to keep the children and staff safe and to keep the school open.

There are elements of the government guidance and health guidelines that we are adhering to which I know some parents do not agree with and I can understand why as they make no sense.

If children do not have symptoms, we are allowing children to return to school whilst they wait for the result of their PCR test. This does sound odd as, clearly a proportion of those without symptoms are indeed testing positive and therefore mixing with others before finding out that they are actually positive. The guidelines state that we should be allowing

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those being tested to return to school whilst waiting for PCR test results. That is a section of guidance that we have been following as previously we have asked the children to return. However, as with the parental mask-wearing request earlier in this letter, I would encourage and urge parents to keep their children off school until they get their PCR test result.

Sadly, we have moved from a point in time where there was a lot of guidance and restrictions to very little guidance and restrictions and the net result is that Covid has spread like wildfire.

The new staggered start times to operate between Monday 1st November and Friday 19th November are as follows...

Year Group	Start Time	Finish Time
Reception	8.30am	3.05pm
Year 1	8.30am	3.05pm
Year 2	9.15am	3.50pm
Year 3	9.15am	3.50pm
Year 4	9.00am	3.35pm
Year 5	9.00am	3.35pm
Year 6	8.45am	3.20pm

Year 4 and 6 pupils should be dropped off and picked up on the KS2 playground, entering the building via the fire escape that leads out onto that playground. Year 5 should be dropped off and picked up on the orange paved area outside the main entrance to the 'i' Building.

Across the rest of the school, there will be clear markings indicating how close parents can get to classrooms. Please do not engage the teachers in conversation at the start of the day during this period.

I apologise that all of these steps are once again necessary. Some probably predicted this day would come during the Autumn whilst others may have been hopeful that we would never see restrictions again.

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I would remind parents that such measures also have their challenges for staff and none of us want to be in this position, which is why we need to try and keep these measures in place for as short a time as possible.

Although we cannot insist on this, we would request that ALL pupils across the school undertake a PCR test on Friday 29th or Saturday 30th October to ensure that everyone can be fully aware of the position at the start of the three-week period. We do not want to enter this next tricky period with cases circulating within any particular year group.

By hopefully limiting these measures to three weeks, we can get to grips with Covid and help make the run in to Christmas, and all of the events that we have planned, as normal for the children as possible.

However, in order to achieve that aim we need your support more now than ever.

Yours sincerely,

Mr Try