

# Highworth Combined School

Dear parents and carers

My apologies for the timing of this communication. I would not normally send a message so late in the evening, but these are exceptional circumstances.

It is with great regret that I need to tell you that school attendance will not go ahead as planned this week.

From the start of term on Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> January, the majority of pupils will need to stay at home to complete Remote Learning. We will be able to offer a place at school for children who are vulnerable and for those who have parents who are key workers. There are details at the bottom of this letter that explain how to go about arranging for your child to attend school if you believe that they need to. All the information that you need to start remote learning on Wednesday will be provided over the next couple of days. We will also let you know what to expect if your family qualifies for Benefits Related Free School Meals.

This change to plans has come about as a result of developments over the weekend. A significant number of teachers (but not all), acting on the advice of their union, have told me that they are not able to teach classes of children in person. The following explains their reasoning:

*'The most recent advice from SAGE is that schools should not open in January other than for children of key workers and vulnerable children. This is because the scientific advice is that it is not safe for schools to open. There are new variants of Covid-19 that are highly infectious and infection rates have increased significantly since schools closed.*

*I appreciate that measures have been in place since September to allow the school to open but according to SAGE those measures may no longer be sufficient. They state in their most recent report: -*

*The introduction of Tier 4 measures in England combined with the school holidays will be informative of the strength of measures required to control the new variant but analysis of this will not be possible until mid-January.'*

- *'The dangers that are preventing me from attending work are the risk of contracting coronavirus and or spreading coronavirus to others.*
- *The person(s) I am seeking to protect are myself, my family, our pupils, their families, my colleagues, their families and members of the public.*
- *I believe that this danger is serious because coronavirus infection is potentially fatal and has already resulted in more than 73,512 deaths in the UK with a significant up surge in recent weeks.*
- *I believe that, if I were to attend work, the danger would be imminent because before Christmas the highest infection rates were in children of school age, and the new variant may be more transmissible amongst students than previously.'*

The National Education Union has said that it will recommend teachers return to in person teaching in the following circumstances:

*'once SAGE is satisfied that the R rate has decreased, scientific advice has been produced on safety measures required to make schools more "Covid secure", risk assessments have been updated and any necessary further safety measures implemented.'*

David Thomas (Chair of Governors) and I have reviewed the school's risk assessment to identify if there are further control measures that could be implemented to reduce the risk to allow teachers to safely attend; sadly, with local infection rates at their current level, we have not been able to do so.

In light of the absence of so many teachers, we have had to make the difficult decision to change school operation as explained at the start of my letter. The situation will be reviewed on a weekly basis and I will update you on Friday 8<sup>th</sup> January upon school operation for week commencing 11<sup>th</sup> January.

I know that this letter will be met with relief by some families, but with concern and upset by others. This has been an incredibly difficult decision for teachers, all of whom put their own anxieties aside to deliver the very best of education to your children in the Autumn Term. They have agonised today and finally opted to take this action because they feel it is the only way to protect and keep safe our whole community. They have my full support, but I know how difficult this will be for some of you. If we can help you and your family, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

My very best wishes

Clare Pankhania

On site teaching for children who are vulnerable or who have key  
worker parents

Children will be able to attend school if one of the following is true:

- A social worker is currently supporting your family
- Your child has an EHCP
- You are a key worker who must attend their place of work and are therefore not available to care for your child at home

To arrange for your child to attend school, you must send an email to: [office@highworthcombined.co.uk](mailto:office@highworthcombined.co.uk)

Please include all of the following information:

Name of child

Class of child

Your name

Days and times of required attendance for this week only

(Provision will be available from 8am to 4.30pm from Wednesday  
6<sup>th</sup> January)