



Thursday 24th June 2021

Dear Parents and Carers,

Bubble Closures – Important Letter

First and foremost I do hope that everyone is well. I am very aware of how disappointing it has been for parents, including our Year 5 parents late last night, to receive my letters informing you of bubble closures. This was the case last week for Reception and Nursery, and like Year 5, these bubbles have already closed twice before.

My concerns

I am writing to you now having spent much of this morning seeking external advice about the number of children that have to isolate in the event of a positive case. This is because I am extremely concerned about the huge disruption these bubble closures are having on our school community. Unfortunately, we have found that we are receiving conflicting advice from PHE and the DfE and similarly, advice given by Track and Trace also differs when individuals have contact with them about their own situation. This has been hugely frustrating for us, and I know that in turn this is hugely frustrating for parents. Another concern is that, through no fault of your own, many parents are unaware of the many steps we have to go through when learning of a positive case and so you may be left concerned or confused about decisions taken. Typically, we seem to find out about a positive test result late at night or early in the morning when it is more difficult to get all the information we need. I want to ensure that all parents are fully aware of the situation regarding bubble closures and update you on my lengthy call this morning with the DfE, so that you are aware of what we have been required to do in the event of a positive case, but also what will happen going forward.

Our arrangements

Firstly, you will be aware that children are organised into Year Group bubbles and not class bubbles here at Barrow Hedges. This is because of the way the curriculum is delivered, but also because of other practical arrangements that have to be in place. There are a multitude of examples, including, but not limited to, lunchtime arrangements meaning that the whole cohort is together (we



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would not be able to accommodate separate classes), swimming - where half the cohort must go together, Y6 PE which is delivered once a week to a group of 45, but most significantly, that the delivery of our catch up/recovery curriculum (to ensure that learning is personalised following school closure) is most often done across the cohort - additional teachers have been employed and TAs are being utilised to lead booster groups and interventions. Additionally, our before school and after school tutoring sees children grouped from across a year group in order to close gaps in their learning. It would be impossible and impractical to have class bubbles at Barrow Hedges.

Actions in the event of a positive case

When we learn of a positive case, we have to then determine who has been in contact with that person and consider different types of contact with multiple individuals. There are a range of considerations, including whether people have been face to face, spoken with one another, been within one metre within different time periods (1 minute, 2 minutes or 15 minutes), been within two metres, (again depending on timescales) as well as whether the contact was indoors or outdoors. As I am sure you can imagine, this takes a great deal of time because we have to go through each member of staff within the bubble. If I am notified of a positive result late at night, then these conversations aren't always possible until the next morning. This is why, for example, it took some time to determine what we needed to do about our Nursery closure last week. We sent our text before school to save parents the trouble of coming in only to have to come and collect their child later but before we could take the relevant advice. Please be assured that any bubble closure is done with a very heavy heart and we would never take any decision lightly. In fact, the letter to Nursery parents last Thursday was sent later at 10am because we were were doing our utmost to try and keep the Nursery open.

Up and until this point, for the aforementioned reasons about our school organisation, we have always been advised that where a child or adult tests positive, we are to close the whole year group bubble. More recently, the current variant of the virus has also been a factor as it is clear that this is particularly transmissible. In May, we saw first-hand the impact of one positive case in our Year 5 bubble and how other positive cases followed even though the children were in a different class.

We have been advised that where Reception children are concerned, the whole bubble would always need to close, due to the children's age and the close contact they have with one another and the adults who teach them and this has been stipulated to me again this morning.

Staff in bubbles

Some parents have asked about staff working across bubbles - while we keep this to the very minimum, this must be the case in some areas of the school, including across Early Years. Given that we were only able to open a morning Nursery class this year, but with Nursery staff contracted for the full day, our Nursery staff work in Reception in the afternoons. They provide excellent support to the children, again helping them to close gaps in their learning. At this time of year in particular, Early Years teachers always work collaboratively for transition, but especially this year as there is a new EYFS curriculum in place from September 2021 which they are all being trained together on. The government guidance for schools accounts for this, otherwise the vast majority of schools would probably not have been able to re-open in the first place. We would not be able to

open our school and teach our curriculum and abide by the necessary requirements (e.g. the statutory provision of Planning, Preparation and Assessment time for all teachers and lunchtime supervision, to name just two further examples) without several members of staff teaching across different bubbles.

The relevant extract from the DfE guidance is here:

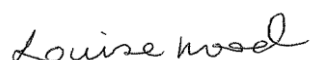
All teachers and other staff can operate across different classes and year groups in order to facilitate the delivery of the school timetable. This will be particularly important for secondary schools. Where staff need to move between classes and year groups, they should try and keep their distance from pupils and other staff as much as they can, ideally 2 metres from other adults. Again, we recognise this is not likely to be possible with younger children and teachers in primary schools can still work across groups if that is needed to enable a full educational offer.

What next? Arrangements for future bubble closures

As stated above, the advice we have received to date has been conflicting and resulted in us closing whole cohort bubbles. However, I have now been able to establish that moving forwards, we will be able to only close Year 1 to Year 6 bubbles to those children and staff who have had close contact with the affected person. For this reason, I am delighted that we are able to have Cedar and Beech classes return to school tomorrow and that children in those classes do not need to isolate. We will of course continue to operate as Year Group bubbles just as we are now, but because we are able to closely track and evidence which adults and children have had contact, we hopefully won't have so much disruption, not only to schooling, but also to the much needed social events and activities that families participate in during their own time.

I appreciate that this is a long letter but feel it is important to ensure that parents are updated on this situation. It has been a very testing time of late but you have my assurance that your child's education and wellbeing is always at the heart of our decisions. It is also clear that unfortunately, cases of Covid are on the rise again and obviously the health and safety of our community is paramount and so I must continue to follow advice and instruction given to me. We are, I am sure, all looking forward to the confirmation from the government of revised arrangements so that we can enjoy happier times ahead.

Yours sincerely,



Louise Wood
Headteacher