



3 January 2021

Dear Parents and Carers

Yesterday, The National Education Union wrote to all its members working in Primary Schools advising them not to return to face-to-face teaching on Monday 4 January.

This is due to the rising rates of COVID19 in the South East of England. They have told their members:

"We understand that SAGE has advised the Government that schools should move to remote learning in order to help reduce the rate of spread of the Covid-19 virus.

The advice given by SAGE has only been adopted in relation to secondary schools and to primary schools in some Tier 4 areas. Given the overall increase in infection rates, however, we believe it is unsafe for schools and colleges to reopen in any area at present."

Dr Mary Bousted, the Joint General-Secretary of the National Education Union (NEU) has said:

"We realise that this late notice is a huge inconvenience for parents and for head teachers. The fault, however, is of the Government's own making and is a result of their inability to understand data, their indecisiveness, and their reckless approach to their central duty - to safeguard public health."

Today the Prime Minister has said: stronger measures may be required in parts of the country in the coming weeks. He said this included the possibility of keeping schools closed, although this is not "something we want to do".

Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer has called for new England-wide restrictions within 24 hours. Sir Keir said coronavirus was "clearly out of control" and it was "inevitable more schools are going to have to close."

It comes as the UK recorded more than 50,000 new confirmed Covid cases for the sixth day in a row, with 54,990 announced on Sunday.

As Bracknell Forest is in a Tier 4 area and the rates of infection are rising, a large majority of school staff at Great Hollands Primary School have written to me today advising that they will be following this guidance from the union. This has come on top of already low staffing levels due to staff needing to self-isolate.

As a result, I am informing you that the school will be closed to all pupils on Monday 4 January for an emergency INSET.

The day will be used to put in place plans to support our families via remote learning as well as ensuring that we are able to support our vulnerable children and those from families where parents are Critical Workers.

From Tuesday 5 January, the school will be open for children with social workers, children with Educational Health Care Plans and for children who have parents that are Critical Workers. However, please be aware that it may be necessary to prioritise Critical Worker pupils due to staffing shortages.

Please use the following Survey Monkey link to register your child for this emergency provision if you work in health, social care, education, childcare or key public services and require a Critical Worker place for your child/ren. Please be aware that if necessary there will be priority given to health care and social service staff.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/EmergencyProvisionGHPS2021>

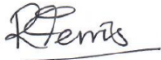
The school day from 5 January for vulnerable and Critical Worker pupils will start at 9.00am and end 3.00pm Monday - Friday until further notice. Further details will be provided once your place has been secured on the Critical Worker list.

I am informing you of these changes as soon as possible. I realise that this will cause immense disruption to you, and for this, I am sorry. This advice from unions only appeared yesterday and staff have contacted me with their decisions today. I know this news will be frustrating, but I ask you to try and appreciate the feelings of the staff; they genuinely feel that their health and is not being recognised or valued by the government. They have shown their tireless commitment to your children throughout the Autumn term, but they do feel this new situation, with the new variant, is different.

Please log onto Google Classroom to access both immediate work for your child to undertake and to see new work as it is published from Tuesday onwards. Phase Leaders will be contacting you soon to outline the remote learning offer for each phase of the school. General guidance for this can also be found on the COVID section of our website.

I have included the union's views below as well as the letter I received from staff today. Again, I can only apologise for the short notice of these events which are beyond my control.

Yours sincerely



Richard Ferris
Headteacher

Comments from School Unions:

The National Education Union (NEU), which represents the majority of teachers, has called for all English primary schools to move online and advised its members it is not safe to return to classrooms on Monday.

In a statement, the union said: "This is a step we take with huge reluctance. But this Government is failing to protect children, their families and our communities."

"And it is failing in its duty of care to education staff who have worked tirelessly to look after children during this pandemic."

The union said that while children may not become ill with Covid-19, they can still spread it to others. The statement continued: "If Government does not act to follow the science, we must."

Minutes from a meeting between the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (Sage) and ministers on December 22 revealed members had warned that schools needed to be closed to bring down transmission.

The NEU's joint general secretary Dr Mary Bousted said: "Whilst we are calling on the Government to take the right steps, as a responsible union we cannot simply agree that the Government's wrong steps should be implemented.

"That is why we are doing our job as a union by informing our members that they have a legal right to refuse to work in unsafe conditions which are a danger to their health and to the health of their school communities and more generally.

"We are informing our members of their legal right to protection to be guided by the science."

The general secretary of the NASUWT union, Dr Patrick Roach, called for an immediate nationwide move to remote education due to safety concerns.

Dr Roach said: "There is genuine concern that schools and colleges are not able to reopen fully and safely at this time.

"The NASUWT remains of the view that schools, colleges and other settings should only remain open to all pupils where it is safe for them to do so.

"The NASUWT will not hesitate to take appropriate action in order to protect members whose safety is put at risk as a result of the failure of employers or the Government to ensure safe working conditions in schools and colleges."

Unison head of education Jon Richards also called for the delayed opening of schools.

Mr Richards said: "Ministers have had weeks to get this right instead of leaving parents, staff and whole communities confused.

"The Government is alienating the profession, failing children and being reckless with the safety of the whole school community."

Paul Whiteman, National Association Head teachers

NEU Letter for GHPS:

Dear Mr R Ferris,

Re: Health & Safety

We are writing to you following the increase in transmission and infection rates currently recorded across England.

You are, we are sure, aware that you have legal duties to protect the health, safety and welfare of your staff and pupils. Those duties arise under the following legislation: -

- Sections 2 and 3 of the Health & Safety Act 1974
- Regulations 3 and 8 of the Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations 1999
- Regulation 4 of the Personal Protective Equipment at Work Regulations 1992
- Regulation 4 of the Workplace (Health, Safety & Welfare) Regulations 1992
- Regulation 7 of the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002

The most recent advice from SAGE is that schools should not open in January¹ 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.

We 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.

Based on the above we do not believe that it is safe for us to return to teaching full classes at Great Hollands Primary School.

If we do attend Great Holland Primary School we believe that this will present a **serious** and **imminent** danger to my health and safety.

We are therefore writing to inform you that we are exercising our contractual right not to attend an unsafe place of work. We believe that not attending work in the current circumstances is an appropriate step for us to take for the following reasons:

1. The **dangers** that are preventing us from attending work are the risk of contracting coronavirus and or spreading coronavirus to others.
2. The **person(s)** we are seeking to protect are ourselves, our families, our pupils, their families, our colleagues, their families and members of the public.
3. We 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.

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/948606/s0991-sage-meeting-74-covid-19.pdf

4. We believe that, if we 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.
5. We will be happy to return to the workplace 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.

In the meantime, we are of course willing to carry out any of our duties that can be undertaken from home, including planning, preparing and delivering on-line learning including supporting colleagues; and being in school supporting the learning of key worker and vulnerable children where necessary.