



ST HELENS
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Parent/Carer

People's Services

Atlas House
Corporation Street
St Helens
Merseyside
WA9 1LD

12 January 2021

Dear parent/carers

We hope this letter finds you and your families safe and well.

We want to provide you with an update on the situation across St Helens in relation to COVID-19.

Prior to Christmas we were successful in driving down the rate of infection across the borough and we would like to thank you for the part you played in this. However, since Christmas we have witnessed a significant rise in cases, especially in the last week. It is, therefore, of paramount importance that we continue to work together to stop these figures rising further.

As of 8th January, the weekly infection rate in St Helens stood at 849.5 per 100,000, that is over 1500 new cases in a week. We expect the levels to either rise or continue at these high rates over the coming weeks, until lockdown measures start to be realised in the rates. While at lower levels than some other age groups, the rate of young people aged 5 to 10 years having a positive coronavirus test has more than quadrupled over the last fortnight, to the highest levels since the pandemic began. This shows the importance of avoiding infections in younger age groups.

As you are very aware, in an attempt to control the spread of the virus across the country, the Prime Minister declared, on 4th January 2021, a national lockdown. It is vital that everyone follows the lockdown rules and makes every possible effort to stay at home.

As part of this announcement, the Prime Minister stated that schools would provide a remote learning offer and that only the children of critical workers and those deemed to be vulnerable should attend education on site. Our schools, with very little warning, worked tirelessly to put such provision in place. We are wholly grateful for their hard work and dedication.

Schools recognise that emergency provision is crucial for some families and they are doing all they can to accommodate need. However, with the rates as high as they are now, it is vital that we work together to keep the number of children in school at a minimum, in order to keep staff and those children in attendance as safe as possible. For this reason, we are appealing to parents/carers to only take up a place at school if it is **absolutely essential**.

On Friday 8th January, the government updated their guidance. It now states that even those who are critical workers keep their children at home if they can and only take up a place if they are working in a critical role and have no other childcare option available. It is hoped that such action will help to reduce the transmission rates.

A number of our school leaders have expressed concerns about the extremely high demand for places. This is putting them under greater pressure in delivering a remote offer to those at home and in ensuring they can adequately staff schools when staff have to self-isolate or are absent for other reasons.

School leaders know their communities well, they have put in place rigorous risk assessments, but they are trying to respond to an ever-changing situation. We would ask that you respect the very difficult circumstances in which they are working. The offer from schools may be subject to change according to staffing and changes in government guidance and we would ask for your patience whilst schools determine how many children they can safely accommodate.

Schools will, however, continue to provide high quality remote learning and will ensure the pastoral needs of children and young people are met as best they can.

Thank you for your continued support. We appreciate that this is a very difficult time for all but hopefully, by working together, we can keep one another safe, protect our NHS and drive the infection levels down once again.

Yours faithfully



Susan Forster
Director of Public Health



Jim Leivers
Director of Children and Young People's Services