



# The Westminster School

*Safe, Happy and Learning Together*

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Dear Parents/Carers

## Whole School COVID Closure

This will be my final COVID letter of the academic year. I am sorry to say that the whole school will now be closed until September 2021. COVID has made its way into the Senior Leadership Team of the school. Therefore, the ship we were sailing is now rudderless and without enough crew to weather the storm. A ship without a captain is not permitted to sail, particularly when the seas are as treacherous as they are.

Today, as with every day over the past month, has been a real challenge. We received more reported cases and it would appear COVID is spreading throughout the school. This has had a direct impact on the **operational viability of the school** and the ability to keep everyone safe, let alone ensuring purposeful learning happens. We have worked tirelessly each and every day to ensure we can continue to stay open, but our efforts now just aren't good enough.

If you do develop symptoms over the next week please continue to contact the school as I still have responsibility to inform Public Health and the Department of Education.

This is not the end of the academic year we all wanted. The effects will be far reaching, and we will have a lot of work to do with our young people in September 2021. We will ensure the start of next academic year is a welcoming and exciting allowing for a return to routines for our young people.

## COVID and Vaccine

We all know that COVID is here to stay, we are going to need to live with it, but we need to limit the impact it has next academic year, as what we have been doing isn't sustainable and has a profound impact on all of our lives and the education of our young people. If our young people and their families qualify for the COVID vaccine, I would urge you to have it. The more people who receive the vaccine over the summer will have a positive impact next academic year. The control measures and government policy for next year pin everything on vaccine up-take, which includes young people. Isolation and closure of bubbles will not impact significantly if everyone who qualifies for the vaccine has it. I appreciate it is your choice and if you need more material in order to make an informed decision go to [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) vaccines - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk).

As I stated yesterday, I am in constant contact with Public Health Sandwell and community transition rates are higher than the national average and therefore we are increased risk of contracting COVID. We are not the only school to close this week or even today, and we won't be the last. Despite government rhetoric about face masks, I would urge you to continue to keep yourselves safe by wearing face coverings when you are in the community. The science suggests that it will help limit the spread of the virus and prevent you from contracting it and becoming ill.

## Next Year

Next academic year and as we approach winter we will see an increase in the number of respiratory infections, influenza and COVID. This is because people have been isolating for a significant period of



time and consequently their immunity will be weakened. If your child is unwell (I am not just talking about COVID) they need to stay off school until they are better. It might just look like a chest infection or mild flu symptoms, but it moves the same way as COVID and it will spread like wildfire around the school population. We have some medically vulnerable young people and staff and it is unfair to put them at risk. I need everyone to play their role in this in order for the school to run smoothly next academic year.

I will write to you again next week with information regarding the new academic year. This will include academic year start dates, our continued COVID control measures and any other updates.

### **Free-School Meals**

If you are eligible for Free-School Meals you will have received information from us about our voucher scheme and these will be coming out to you within the next 24 hours to spend at a local supermarket of your choice. We will also be conducting welfare calls to a select number of families in the coming days to ensure everyone is safe and well.

### **Online Learning**

Live lessons will continue throughout this period through Microsoft Teams and Evidence for Learning (EfL) or our YouTube channel. If you have any queries regarding EfL or accessing the content, please contact us [services@westminster.sandwell.sch.uk](mailto:services@westminster.sandwell.sch.uk). We do not have the capacity to deliver any devices however you are able to access the content through Xbox, PlayStation, Smart TV or Mobile Phone.

### **Symptoms and Testing**

**Please do not send your child into school if they are symptomatic. It has a profound impact on the safe running of the school and puts us all at risk. Next year will be no different; if they have symptoms they will need to return home and we will appeal to you to get a PCR test. Lateral Flow Tests (LFT) cannot be used where a person has symptoms - they are only for use where a person has no symptoms. The impact of your child not getting a test means that we have to treat the case as positive and follow track and trace and isolation guidelines.**

I know the process of COVID testing is invasive. Consequently, we have no plans to LFT our young people next academic year. We will provide you with testing kits for you to use at home at the start of the year if supply and demand allows for it. If you need any LFT kits in the interim please go to [Collect rapid Covid-19 tests for use at home | Sandwell Council](#)

I know it has been a tough time for everyone, I know some of the decisions made have a profound impact on our young people and families. Every decision made has been done so in the best interests of the young people and staff in order to keep everyone safe.

Finally, I would just like to thank you for all for your support, patience, understanding and tolerance. This has truly been the most challenging year of my professional career. I could not have done it without the hard work and resilience of the whole team.

I will write to you again at the start of next week with information about next academic year.

If you have any further concerns or questions, please contact the Senior Leadership Team on [headteacher@westminster.sandwell.sch.uk](mailto:headteacher@westminster.sandwell.sch.uk).

Thank you for your continued help and support. Keep safe.

Yours faithfully

Mr O M Flowers  
Head Teacher