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Dear Parents and Carers,

I would like to draw your attention to a couple of recent updates concerning the Prime Minister's announcement of the New National Restrictions which came into force on Thursday 5th November and will last until Wednesday 2nd December;

1. National Restrictions
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/new-national-restrictions-from-5-november>
2. Education and childcare (gateway to different links)
<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus/education-and-childcare>
3. Updated guidance for school openings including self-isolation, shielding, tests for coronavirus, face coverings, assessment and exams:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/guidance-for-full-opening-schools>

The guidance about shielding has changed: Staff and children who are clinically vulnerable (CV) or have underlying health conditions but are not clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV), continue to attend work / school.

Guidance on shielding

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>

Those children whose doctors have confirmed they are still clinically extremely vulnerable are advised not to attend school while this advice is in place. Our schools will make appropriate arrangements to continue education at home for those children who need to stay at home. Children who live with someone who is clinically extremely vulnerable, but who are not clinically extremely vulnerable themselves, should still attend school.

We request that you to inform us about your child's new shielding letter or his/her doctors' advice to shield; sharing this information ensures the safety of your child.

Clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV)

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/people-at-higher-risk/whos-at-higher-risk-from-coronavirus/>

Staffing challenges

I would like to draw your attention to our staffing situation that is currently extremely tight. We have a number of staff shielding because they are CEV, some self-isolating because of COVID related reasons or having a sudden, unexpected illnesses or difficult family circumstances. This is alongside the 'normal' illnesses and absences.

Decisions to explore alternative schooling arrangements are based on carefully considered risk assessments. In these circumstances we always liaise with yourselves and with the Local Authority; a solution may be the temporary closure of a class, a combination of home school programmes and a rota based attendance at school or a part time timetable.

I must emphasise that the only reason why we may need to consider an alternative schooling arrangement for the whole class, is when limited staffing compromises the delivery of teaching and learning and/or impacts significantly and negatively on the health and safety of the provision.

Need for additional help

At these times of uncertainty, you may find yourself or a family you know needing some additional help. HertsHelp: www.hertshelp.net is the organisation that can support and help.

For example, if you are a family in need of support with food and other essentials, call 0300 123 4044 or email info@hertshelp.net. They are open 8am – 8pm, Monday - Friday and 10am - 6pm, Saturday and Sunday.

Please also remember that you can request vouchers for **Watford Foodbank** from myself or Darren.

You will also find many useful resources from Mind – 'Coronavirus and your wellbeing': <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing/>

You can contact myself, Darren or your child's teacher for further advice at any time. We are here to help and support you.

Free school meal vouchers

We are in the process of organising free school meal vouchers for those eligible families whose child has been shielding or who has not attended a temporary home schooling programme.

This academic year is proving to be very different to any that we could have expected. The COVID-19 virus is creating new ways for us to think about how to keep not only ourselves but also our families, friends, work colleagues and our students safe. Nobody can be safe by just relying on themselves. We need each other and in this uncharted territory we will all learn together when we work together.

I want to extend my gratitude to our wider community, - our parents' and their families, their children and my staff, for everybody's efforts, at this very difficult time, and the way in which they are being considerate of each other. Thank you for that.

Thank you for your continued support.
Take care.
Be safe.

Merja