

Dear pupils, parents and families,

As you will no doubt already be aware, we have a new covid variant – the Omicron (sounds like the baddie from a Marvel studios movie!), and I received an email from the DfE last night to instruct schools to move back to some form of enhanced mitigations and to review our risk assessments again in light of the potential difficulties the new covid variant **may** bring.

The wearing of a face-covering for all pupils (other than those exempt) is now mandatory in all communal areas of secondary schools, although not currently in classrooms - although anyone who wishes to wear a mask in classrooms is welcome to do so. I am therefore writing to all parents this morning asking you please to ensure that your child comes to school with a mask from tomorrow, and also to remind everyone that this is also compulsory on all school transport.

Obviously, the lateness of the notice means that this cannot be expected today, although already I note many pupils have indeed brought masks today (thank you to those parents who had already anticipated this!) While we are now trying to source further masks, it did become very expensive previously having to provide masks for pupils who arrived to school without one every day, and I would really rather spend education budget money on things that benefit your children's education. I therefore would strongly ask that pupils come to school with their own masks. If they do not we will be contacting parents to ask for your support in ensuring that they do.

It is important also to note that anyone confirmed to have caught the new Omicron variant will have to supply track and trace with information about close contacts. Those contacts will, unlike the present rules, then have to self-isolate for the 10-day period. As things stand at this current moment, that would apply equally to any pupils in school. It certainly feels like things are moving quickly again, so we do need to be prepared and we have been updating seating plans and contingency plans in readiness. The measures currently being reintroduced will be in place until Christmas at least, and we will also be reviewing other measures such as assemblies, external sports fixtures and large-scale events in the coming weeks as the situation develops – and we do have a contingency for reintroducing 'bubbles' quickly should the need arise (I fervently hope that the need will not arise!) Finally, we will be reminding pupils about the importance of frequent, thorough handwashing and staff will be keeping a close eye on ventilation levels wherever possible in classrooms, although we are limited by the freezing weather currently in the extent to which we can keep windows open.

I have been asked by the DfE and the Local Authority to remind all parents that attendance at school remains compulsory for all pupils who are well enough to attend. Although our attendance has recovered to 90% from the very low level we experienced during our covid outbreak in September/October, it is still over 4 percentage points lower than our normal level – which means an extra 40 or so pupils absent each day. Clearly this remains a worry for us, as we are absolutely clear that the best place for schoolchildren is in class and the knock-on impact to pupil learning caused by absence can be severe. If the difficulties we have faced together over the past twenty months or so have reinforced anything, it is the huge importance of regular school attendance for pupils' learning,

mental health and wellbeing. I certainly hope that we will see these attendance levels increase to our usual level soon.

If you have any queries or comments to share, as always please simply email me on alan.fletcher@kla.eastern-mat.co.uk and I will do my best to provide an answer.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alan Fletcher', written in a cursive style.

Alan Fletcher