

November 2021

Dear Parents and Carers

COVID-19 – School events and Parent/Carer attendance

I would like to take this opportunity to say a big thank you to you and your family for all you have done and continue to do to help us reduce the risk of COVID-19 in Gateshead. I appreciate just how difficult it has been through all the different stages and challenges of this pandemic.

We all want to see as many of our children and young people in school as possible and having as 'normal' and positive a school experience as we can manage. Much as we would all like it to be, the pandemic is not over. Whilst it is clear that the vaccination programme is effective in preventing serious disease and deaths, the vaccine is never going to stop all transmission, and resultant harm, on its own.

Although cases in school age children across Gateshead had reduced, the number of COVID-19 infections in this age group has again started to increase in recent days following the return from half term. In the last four weeks just over 20% of infections were in those aged 5-14 years old and we are subsequently seeing cases transfer into older age groups. Therefore, we are still advising schools to remain cautious in their approaches to managing COVID 19 within the school setting.

Schools are not being asked to cancel events that take place in school, such as Christmas parties and concerts. Individual schools will make the decision whether these events can be safely managed within their school, in line with their individual unique risk assessment. However, we are advising that these, and other activities, do not currently take place as whole school events.

Since schools returned in September 2021, we have advised them to continue to limit visitors to the school to those who are classed as essential e.g., for educational/curriculum purposes, to support pupils, or where a virtual meeting is not practicable. This again would be for each individual school to decide whether a visitor is essential.

However, we have advised schools that parents/carers/other visitors are not invited to attend non-essential indoor events such as assemblies, concerts, and Christmas events, at this time. Whilst we understand that this is disappointing for parents/carers, our schools have a duty to protect all children and staff whilst attending their settings. Any advice given to schools is to try and minimise the risk of transmission within their setting as much as practicably possible. Although we know that many social settings are open to the public, we have a duty to reduce the risk for our children, staff and wider community.

We continue to closely monitor the number of COVID-19 infections and keep advice and guidance under review.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alice Wiseman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Alice Wiseman
Director of Public Health