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Date: 10th February 2022

Dear Education and Early Years Leaders

Local public health advice is to continue the use of face coverings in communal areas due to high levels of COVID-19 infections in education and early years settings.

Thank you for your hard work to minimise the impact of COVID-19 in your settings over the first half of this term – I'm aware just how challenging this has been.

I am pleased to say that we are starting to see a decline in the number of COVID-19 cases among children and young people in Central Bedfordshire. Despite this, rates of infection remain very high and continue to cause significant disruption. There were over 2,000 cases amongst school-aged children in the week ending 6 February. At the time of writing, 88 (67%) schools and 16 (20%) early years settings in Central Bedfordshire are affected by outbreaks.

Given this position, I am advising that all education staff and pupils in Year 7 and above continue to adopt a policy of wearing face coverings in communal areas (including on school transport). It is important that we continue to be cautious as we go into the next half term, to make sure improvements in recent days are sustained and we prevent further outbreaks and the additional control measures these bring.

I remain concerned about the disruption that COVID-19 continues to cause to education and early years settings, and the consequent effect on people's health. Face coverings are an effective means to reduce the transmission and impact of the virus.

The recommendation applies to communal areas - including school transport - but does not apply to classrooms and other teaching spaces. This guidance is advisory, and whilst the wearing of face coverings should be encouraged, no student should be penalised if they do not comply.

I will keep my advice under review, and I may update it if the local epidemiology or national policy position changes. I will review the data 2 weeks into the next half term and provide an update in 3 weeks - i.e., this guidance is effective until Friday 11th March 2022.

I am conscious that the government has signalled that the legal duty to self-isolate may end later in February. My expectation is that this will be replaced with guidance to self-isolate, bringing the approach to COVID-19 in line with the approach for other infectious diseases.

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At this time of high transmission, it remains important that we also continue to:

- Promote twice-weekly lateral flow testing for staff and students (Year 7 and above). **I strongly recommend all eligible staff and students do an LFD test before they return to their setting after the half-term break.**
- Optimise ventilation in classrooms and heavily occupied spaces and take action to improve ventilation where appropriate.
- Encourage children and young people and staff to wash their hands regularly with soap or hand sanitiser.
- Support the roll-out of COVID-19 vaccinations for 12-15 and 16-17-year-olds, including hosting catch-up clinics and promoting the National Booking System, and continue to encourage staff to get vaccinated.

Thank you once again for all you are doing to prioritise the education, safety and wellbeing of our children and young people.

Yours faithfully



Vicky Head
Director of Public Health