

1<sup>st</sup> January 2021

Dear Parents / Carers,

A happy new year to you all and we hope you have been able to enjoy the Christmas period safely. As you will be aware, Cheshire was placed in Tier 4 at midnight on 30th December. All the initial guidance was for mainstream schools and colleges and we were told to wait for specific Special School guidance which was published yesterday evening (31st December). We have been waiting for this guidance before contacting you so we could provide accurate advice and avoid any confusion. This full guidance is available on the DfE website if anyone wishes to read it but the main points are highlighted below:

- Pupils with EHC Plans are all categorised as vulnerable and therefore prioritised for face-to-face education. Not all Tier 4 areas are listed under the government's contingency framework where both primary and secondary schools will be closed (with the exception of vulnerable pupils and those whose parents are essential workers). Cheshire is not on this list and therefore as it stands, primary and special schools will remain open.
- Special schools will open as planned on Monday 4th January. This includes all secondary age pupils; 'alternative provision and special schools will all return to face-to-face education from the start of term as planned, with individual special schools being offered greater flexibility on face-to-face attendance of pupils and students in the first week of term. This will enable them to appropriately immobilise their mass testing program (DfE Coronavirus update 30th December).' If you wish for your child not to attend for the first week of the term, please email a leave of absence request directly to [head@deebanks.cheshire.sch.uk](mailto:head@deebanks.cheshire.sch.uk).
- We are fully up to date with guidance and information about introducing lateral flow testing in school. Schools have been encouraged to test all staff and pupils weekly. In the event of a positive result, this must be confirmed by a PCR test, if so, they will self-isolate for 10 days. Direct contacts of anyone testing positive can then be tested daily for seven days using the lateral flow testing in school. The aim of this is to prevent staff and pupils having to isolate and be absent from school unnecessarily. Testing however is voluntary and participation is optional.



- The testing program will be challenging to implement as specific roles and designated areas will need to be identified. Training is being provided by the DfE which we will be accessing on 4th and 5th January and after this we will have further clarity on how and when we can implement this in school. The government guidance for testing in special schools acknowledges that this will be a challenge and we may require support from volunteers and agency staff. It is also acknowledged that testing pupils with complex needs can be very difficult. We are extremely concerned about this in our school and wish to assure you that your child will not be tested without your consent and we will initially focus our efforts on implementing testing for staff.

We appreciate many of you will be very concerned about the recent rise in cases and having had a number of positive cases in school at the start of December (although due to our bubble system, seven classes remained unaffected). We can assure you that we have reviewed all guidance and risk assessments and are doing everything possible to keep everyone as safe as possible. Our risk assessment has been continually reviewed and was praised by the Local Authority's Health & Safety team. Our bubble system remains in place as do all other measures and if you wish to see a copy of our risk assessment, this can be obtained by emailing school ([admin@deebanks.cheshire.sch.uk](mailto:admin@deebanks.cheshire.sch.uk)). Please be aware that guidance is changing constantly, and we will update you if and when we receive information. We will continue to use email and text messages to provide updates or if circumstances change quickly as we do not have the capacity to phone all families.

Please be assured that our dedicated staff team are looking forward to welcoming your child back from Monday 4th and that despite ongoing challenges and pressures, there has been some amazing work happening in school. We value your ongoing support during this difficult time and look forward to a brighter 2021.

Best wishes,

**Judith McGuinness & Jo Williams**  
Headteacher & Deputy Headteacher