

WESTGARTH WEEKLY



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Wednesday 9th November 2021

Dear Families,

Hoping you all enjoyed some family time over the half term break.

COVID 19 Risk Assessment Update

You will be aware that COVID 19 infection rates continue to be high nationally, and across both Redcar and Cleveland and Middlesbrough locally. In Redcar and Cleveland, in the two weeks leading up to 19th October, there were 1,363 positive cases, of which 48% were in children and young people aged 0-19 years old.

At Westgarth, unfortunately, infection rates have been much higher than the national average. Since September, there have been more than **50** positive cases in school, including **7** vaccinated staff working directly with the children. This continues to put a significant strain on our capacity in school, and we are aware that infection rates are likely to be even higher due to many children being asymptomatic whilst carrying the virus.

We are, therefore, grateful to families who are undertaking twice weekly lateral flow tests. We know that this is not pleasant for children, but it is an action that you can take to support us in trying to manage infection rates that are undoubtedly having a detrimental effect on the children's education as well as the wider health and wellbeing of children, staff and their families.

Redcar and Cleveland Local Authority has issued advice about additional measures that it now suggests affected schools take to tackle rising case rates in schools. We have had to make some very difficult decisions, as, like everyone, we had hoped to have a return to some semblance of normality for the children this term, but we need to balance this with the risk of more children missing face to face education and more staff being absent from the classroom. We are also very conscious of trying to protect all of our families from illness and isolation in the lead up to Christmas.

Please do not compare our approach and decisions to those taken in other schools. There are some local schools with minimal or no positive cases amongst children and staff who may decide to continue with planned events this term in a way that we are currently unable.



PCR Testing

We have been advised to introduce more rigorous identification and testing of close household contacts. If a positive COVID 19 case is identified in your household, we now ask that children undertake a **PCR test** (not lateral flow) and only return to school if the PCR test is negative. Please keep your child at home until the PCR test result is known. We then ask that daily lateral flow tests are undertaken **for 7 days**, and that children in affected households only attend school if their lateral flow test is negative.

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Autumn Term and Christmas Events

We have also been advised to limit visitors to school and to cancel events that bring lots of households together, such as Film Nights and Christmas performances, for the duration of this term. We have, therefore, taken the difficult decision to only hold Christmas family events remotely. We will still have festive celebrations within year groups and phases of school, but will only be able to share these with you as recordings, as we did last year. Similarly, we are unable to hold a "live" Christmas Market. Again, like last year, the children will engage in all of the planning, designing and marketing of products, and we will give you the opportunity to buy their products through ParentMail.

Please be assured that we will do our utmost to make the festive season as enjoyable as we can for the children.

We are still able to hold Christmas parties for the children in their year groups, and the Y5 Peat Rigg visit will go ahead, with the request for children to take a lateral flow test on the morning of their departure. More details to follow.

We realise how disappointing this is for families, as it is for us, when we were all looking forward to the opportunities Christmas normally affords for us to meet together as a community. However, I am sure you appreciate the reasoning for us following updated, local advice, and we thank you for your understanding and support in the challenging circumstances we face.



Staffing Update

Good luck to Mrs Curwen who leaves this week to begin her maternity leave. Mrs Boalch will be taking over class responsibility full-time from next week. We look forward to hearing news of a new arrival in the Curwen family in coming weeks!

Yours sincerely,

Mrs J Woodhead
Headteacher