

**Acting Headteacher: Mrs Allison Shepherd**

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20th October 2020  
ref: Whole School

Dear Parents & Carers,

Orchard School as you are aware is currently closed to pupils for this week. This is due to a high rate of Covid-19 -related staff absences which I hope you appreciate is beyond our control. We have a number of members of staff who are or have been very ill, and we wish them well and a speedy and thorough recovery.

The Local Authority and Public Health are aware of this difficult situation and support the school in its decision to close. High levels of staff absence including staff in key roles such as senior staff and many members of the site team make it unsafe for pupils to be in school.

We will be making every effort to speak to all families across the week, and to support this, the Local Authority will also be making calls on our behalf. Some families will receive a call from an unknown number – Inclusion Support are helping with this task as we have such limited capacity. We will try to let families know if they are to expect a call from one of the I.S team over the coming days.

As it is half term break next week, we anticipate that if enough staff are well, we will be re-opening on 2<sup>nd</sup> November. However, this is subject to change as we will not know until late next week if staff are well enough to return to work or whether more staff have become ill - this in turn will impact on pupils returning in early November. We may, if necessary have to partially close and resume operating rota systems for attendance. This is not our preferred option, but unfortunately possibly unavoidable.

**If your child does become unwell and are showing Covid symptoms- always seek NHS 119 advice for this.**

It is absolutely vital that if you are contacted to collect your child during the day because they are unwell or begin to show symptoms, you make arrangements to collect your child IMMEDIATELY. I cannot stress enough how important this is.

Please continue to follow all government guidance for handwashing, respiratory hygiene and social distancing along with local lockdown instructions. Please be reminded that households within Sandwell MUST NOT mix. Please check local restrictions for other local authorities if you live outside of Sandwell.

I am also including a Local Authority letter regarding Halloween advice.

Thank you for your continued support in what I recognise is a very challenging time for everyone. These are unprecedented times and disruption to school life will be unavoidable.

Kind regards,

Allison Shepherd  
Acting Head Teacher



## Advice for Halloween - circulated by Sandwell Local Authority to all schools 20-10-20

You will probably be aware that the government has announced new coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions, naming Sandwell and many other areas in our region as a 'High Alert' zone. Unfortunately, we are seeing a rapid rise in the numbers of people being taken to hospital and dying after becoming infected.

With COVID-19 infection rates high across Sandwell, we therefore need to give some advice about Halloween.

At this time of year many families will be preparing for Halloween at the end of October. There is no reason why this annual event cannot be celebrated in your own home or garden with people you live with.

However, in light of the government restrictions because of the high infection rates, we believe it is far better for your children not to call at other houses to trick or treat as this will increase the risk of infection, either to your children and family or to people answering the door.

While we know this may be disappointing for some children who enjoy 'trick or treating', please stay safe, protect yourselves and others and look at alternative, safe ways to celebrate Halloween this year.

Remember, the more cases there are, the greater the risk of passing on the virus, especially to older and vulnerable people in your family or neighbourhood who are at a much higher risk of serious illness or death from COVID-19.

Please also be aware that the current government restrictions for Sandwell prevent people from different households mixing inside each other's homes. And people from different households are not allowed to meet outdoors in groups of more than six. Visit [www.sandwell.gov.uk/localrestrictions](http://www.sandwell.gov.uk/localrestrictions) for more details about the government restrictions.

We would like to thank all parents and carers for their ongoing support to schools this term. Schools have detailed infection control measures in place and, while we are seeing cases among some children and staff, the risk of an outbreak is significantly reduced by everyone following the guidance issued by your school, public health and the government.

If your child has been sent home to self-isolate because of a confirmed case in their school, please keep your children at home and play your part in stopping the spread of the virus.

Thank you again for your assistance during these difficult times.

