

11<sup>th</sup> January 2021

Dear parents and Carers,

Since the announcement of lockdown last Monday, our teams have worked incredibly hard to establish a safe opening plan for our young people. We had already been working over the holiday period to get testing in place, and plan a staggered reopening for our secondary provision when we had to change our plans.

We have 3 key aims during lockdown,

- To keep our students and staff as safe as possible
- To ensure that young people continue to work towards their EHCP outcomes
- To prevent transmission of covid in school and reduce community transmission of the virus

Government guidance issued after the lockdown stated that special schools would remain open. However, it also acknowledged that there may well be difficulties in achieving this. Staffing levels are our main constraint, as we have to keep our most vulnerable staff safe, and many staff are now having to work from home. We also made the decision to have smaller class groups as we did in the first lockdown, to support social distancing where possible, and restrict transmission rates.

This Covid strain is highly transmissible and locally we see numbers of hospital admissions are rising fast. The death rates recently are the highest we have seen. We have seen parents, pupils and staff being made very poorly with this disease and we need to act with caution.

With reduced staffing available, we have to prioritise which children we can offer a place. We have prioritised our most vulnerable and then, children of critical workers. The demands from this latter group have risen since lockdown 1 as the category has been expanded. We may find that we do not have the capacity to meet all the need. In some academies we are having to prioritise NHS and emergency services staff, then families where both parents are critical workers, and in some cases offer part time placements. We do understand how difficult this is for families who were looking forward to getting back to normal after the Christmas holidays. However, I would ask you all not to take a place in school unless it is absolutely necessary.

All our teams are doing their very best to ensure that those not in school have access to personalised learning. This will look different to mainstream schools and may differ between pupils in each school. Some may be accessing online lessons, online resources or home learning packs. Teachers and support staff will be in regular contact to see how they can support this activity. We do know how challenging this can be for families as many of our young people do not access learning easily in this way.

We hope that you understand our position and thank you for the support you have given our schools and their leaders during this difficult time. We will be reviewing our position as things change over the next few weeks, and will keep you informed.

Yours Sincerely,



Carolyn Morgan  
CEO



**ASH TREES**  
ACADEMY



**BARBARA PRIESTMAN**  
ACADEMY



**HOPE WOOD**  
ACADEMY



**PORTLAND**  
ACADEMY

T: 0333 999 1456  
E: [info@ascenttrust.org](mailto:info@ascenttrust.org)  
W: [www.ascenttrust.org](http://www.ascenttrust.org)