

5 July 2021

Dear parents and carers,

You might not be aware of this, but for fifteen months a Trust Board-convened group entitled 'CIRT' has been meeting – the **Critical Incident Response Team**, comprised of experienced trustees, headteachers and members of the central services team. I am immensely grateful for the commitment, energy and good judgement of the CIRT, which has sometimes had to make decisions on a very tight timescale.

As CEO I have of course dealt with some extremely difficult 'critical incidents' before, but never one so protracted.

In its last meeting on 29 June CIRT decided it was necessary to give parents a sense of the road map ahead. Firstly, our context. This data is taken from the Confederation of Schools Trusts update on Wednesday 30 June -

### **Attendance data**

The DfE has published [attendance data](#) at 29 June 2021. Covid-related pupil absence in state schools is increasing and is currently at its highest rate since schools reopened in March 2021.

COVID-related pupil absence in state-funded schools adjusted for year 11-13 pupils not expected to attend (off-site for approved purposes) was 5.1% on 24 June. This is up from 3.3% on 17 June and 1.2% on 10 June.

- In primary schools, COVID-related absence was 4.5% on 24 June, up from 2.7% on 17 June and 1.1% on 10<sup>th</sup> June.
- In secondary schools, COVID-related absence adjusted for Y11-13 not expected to attend was 6.2% on 24 June. This is up from 4.2% on 17 June and 1.4% on 10 June.

It is not surprising to learn that many schools have been heavily affected in recent days and that infections are rising. Four of our own schools this term have had 'bubble' issues with some learners having to revert to home-based working.

In the remainder of the school term we will reaffirm all our on-site risk assessments, in fact tightening them to earlier iterations in some instances.

In schools we only work with students for a *part* of their weekly time, yet Covid-19 is no respecter of location or risk assessments. Variant D is highly transmissible and gaining traction. We have had clear evidence this month of the spread of infection across and between schools due to parties and get-togethers which were not Covid-safe in our locality.

The bullet point summary of this letter is this, then: **we need to be very vigilant and risk-aware in the final two to three weeks of term.** There is particular sensitivity about the last week of term, as families will have many arrangements: holidays, weddings, birthday celebrations and other things to look forward to in later July and August. Yet a notification from the NHS app, or contact with someone infected could jeopardise all of this.

As someone just completing a week at home which was not planned, I beseech everyone to be especially careful in coming days; no one will enjoy having to plan and re-plan the first part of the holiday, and we can surely limit the damage here with pre-emptive action and safety consciousness.

The Government has indicated that it will proceed with the lightening of public health requirements from 19 July, nevertheless, in a school context we must be as safe as can be. I would suggest at home too.

From September it is likely that the word 'bubbles' will revert to its early usage. This is a work-in-progress for the Government, but **testing** is set to be underpinning efforts to retain virus control and safety. The virus will not have gone away, and schools will be learning how to live with it and limit its impact.

I would also like to thank you for your immense support and community-mindedness in the last year. The pandemic has tested us all, and we have not been found wanting. There is learning for us as well as real pain and suffering. The holidays are around the corner. Let's make sure they are not scuppered, and can be enjoyed; they will be needed as never before.

With exactly two months to the start of September, it is also fair to remember that a week is a long time in Covid. The Trust will continue now, in the holidays, and then term 1 to put safety first, and we are enlisting your support in doing this.

Take care and have a good week.

Yours sincerely,



Tim Withers

**Chief Executive Officer  
Palladian Academy Trust**