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Hello everyone

Well we have finally reached the last week of term and the end of 2020. We are all pleased that we have managed to make it to the end of the year and hopefully for a well-earned break over the Christmas period. It has been a very interesting year for us all and one which has brought positives as well as all the underlying issues caused by covid. Hopefully 2021 will prove to be a better year for us all.

On a positive note the attendance for all pupils; those with EHCPs and vulnerable pupils has continued to improve and last week we were well above local and national averages. This is due to the hard work by all our schools and supported by Tracy McKeating's team to ensure that all our children are attending school where possible. A massive thank you to everyone who has supported our families.

At a recent Ofsted meeting, that one of our headteachers attended, it was indicated that behaviour has worsened in primary and secondary schools across the country. Although we are aware that children and young people are tiring due to the long term and the covid issues there has not been any indication that behaviour has worsened over the term. Sefton figures for fixed term and permanent exclusions as well as managed moves are still below where they were at this time last year.

We appreciate that schools have received notification yesterday about the impending move to regular testing in secondary schools in January and then rolling out to primary schools in February. We would urge you not to worry about this over the Christmas break. As yet the plans have not been finalised and no guidance has been received. As always, we will work with you to provide the best solution for your school. As far as we are aware this will not be compulsory for schools to undertake and the information does say it is not mandatory for pupils and staff. As soon as we have further information we will share it with you. We have passed on concerns to the DfE about the logistics of undertaking this and in a national meeting concerns were also raised.

Concerns have been raised by some headteachers about the need to be 'on call' during the first week of the holiday in case a member of staff or a pupil tests positive and everyone needs to be notified. Schools need to follow the government guidance and to use the procedures they have in place for the weekends and over the October half term holiday. It is not envisaged that there will be many cases and on average over the last week we have only had one school a day notify us of a positive case. Support will be available over the holidays from the PH Sefton team and from Tricia, **07813544809** if needed. At weekends and during the Council shutdown (24th December - 3rd January inclusive) Senior Public Health Staff will answer urgent queries and can be reached through the public.health@sefton.gov.uk or through the Council's Contact Centre, **0345 140 0845**. For urgent health protection issues the PHE Cheshire and Merseyside Health Protection Team can be contacted on 0344 225 0562 (option 0 then option 1) and out of hours on-call can be reached through 0151 434 4819.

Thirty-nine schools were selected for support through the mental health programme. It was great that so many schools expressed an interest. It is hoped that another bid will enable more schools to be involved at a future date. If your school can offer to be a placement school to provide a base for staff delivering the training, please email steve.gowland@sefton.gov.uk as soon as possible. Please can you remind all staff of the availability of support through QWell, which is available throughout the holidays. They can offer self-help, online counselling with a trained mental health and recommendations to support. We all know that staff are under increasing pressure and concerns may become apparent as they slowdown over the holidays. Please contact Emily Hawley at ehawley@kooth.com for further information or to book any QWell support.

We hope that you have managed to have some form of covid safe celebrations in school and that you all have a wonderful Christmas with your families.

We look forward to working together in 2021 to ensure that all our children and young people remain safe and are able to continue accessing a good curriculum and learning opportunities.

Regards



VICKY BUCHANAN
Executive Director of Children's
Social Care and Education



TRICIA DAVIES
Interim Head of Education