

## Guidance on Maintaining Staff in WeST Schools and Business Units Safely – Covid-19 (correct at 6<sup>th</sup> November 2020)

### Introduction:

In September when WeST welcomed back its pupils to school and when the levels of the virus were lower we did so under a Trust-wide risk assessment model (modelled on national guidance) with robust local versions in place to reflect the specific needs of each setting. We also undertook a number of individual risk assessments for staff, particularly where they are categorised as being at higher risk of severe illness from Coronavirus and put appropriate measures in place to mitigate the risks where possible.

On 5th November 2020, new Government restrictions came into effect with the aim of reducing Social transmission of Coronavirus within the population as a whole whilst maintaining the education of pupils as a high priority. This means we remain open and need to be appropriately staffed to meet the operational and educational needs of our schools and pupils. For those staff who are categorised as extremely clinically vulnerable, the Government have issued new guidance (see below).

WeST schools and business units will continually monitor their risk assessments to ensure they remains fit for purpose and are being followed appropriately by all staff.

### Staying at work:

Government restrictions state: "To help contain the virus, everyone who can work effectively from home must do so'... but...'Public sector employees working in essential services, including education settings, should continue to go into work. The risk of transmission can be substantially reduced if COVID-secure guidelines are followed closely. Extra consideration should be given to those people at higher risk."

It remains vital therefore, that everyone follows the latest guidance, and that staff remain vigilant when at school, and adhere to the Government restriction outside of school.

### Staff who are considered to be "extremely clinically vulnerable":

With effect from 5 November 2020, WeST staff who are defined on medical grounds as being extremely clinically vulnerable will work from home for the period until 2nd December 2020. Individuals in this group will be identified through a letter from the NHS or from their GP and may have been advised to shield in the past.

People in the same household who are not clinically extremely vulnerable can still attend work, in line with the new national restrictions.

CEV secondary teaching staff working at home will be expected to teach classes remotely in accordance with their normal timetable using locally agreed approaches. Ideally this should be live, but if this is not possible, lessons may be recorded in advance for delivery during the planned timetabled session. Schools will ensure staff are appropriately equipped to teach remotely.

CEV primary teaching staff working at home may be expected to teach in accordance with the West Remote Learning Guidance, Primary Appendix October 2020 and their normal working pattern. Reasonable alternative duties may be required such as; providing remote learning support for children not in their class, planning, preparation and assessment activity or administrative tasks in accordance with the particular needs of the school

The Learning Institute CEV academic professionals will be expected to continue to deliver sessions remotely in accordance with locally agreed and communicated practice.

All other CEV staff will be expected to perform their normal duties where this possible, or otherwise reasonable alternative duties for the benefit of the school/business unit. Such duties will be agreed and allocated in reference to their working pattern, grade and skillset.

Those with the following conditions fall into the clinically extremely vulnerable group:

- solid organ transplant recipients
- people with specific cancers:
  - people with cancer who are undergoing active chemotherapy
  - people with lung cancer who are undergoing radical radiotherapy
  - people with cancers of the blood or bone marrow such as leukaemia, lymphoma or myeloma who are at any stage of treatment
  - people having immunotherapy or other continuing antibody treatments for cancer
  - people having other targeted cancer treatments that can affect the immune system, such as protein kinase inhibitors or PARP inhibitors
  - people who have had bone marrow or stem cell transplants in the last 6 months or who are still taking immunosuppression drugs
- people with severe respiratory conditions including all cystic fibrosis, severe asthma and severe chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
- people with rare diseases that significantly increase the risk of infections (such as severe combined immunodeficiency (SCID), homozygous sickle cell)
- people on immunosuppression therapies sufficient to significantly increase risk of infection adults with Down's syndrome
- adults on dialysis or with chronic kidney disease (Stage 5)
- women who are pregnant with significant heart disease, congenital or acquired
- other people who have also been classed as clinically extremely vulnerable, based on clinical judgement and an assessment of their needs. GPs and hospital clinicians have been provided with guidance to support these decisions

Staff should provide evidence to support their CEV status as soon as possible and will be assisted to ensure this is GDPR compliant. Employees will not be permitted to continue to work from home unless confirmation from their GP or the NHS has been provided.

Staff who do not receive evidence of CEV status within a reasonable time frame but feel they fall into this category must discuss their concerns with, and seek clarification from, their GP or hospital clinician.

Until such time as their status is confirmed they can be expected to attend work. In the interim an individual risk assessment (see below) should be arranged.

All other staff should continue to attend work, including those living in a household with someone who is clinically extremely vulnerable.

### **Staff who remain “clinically vulnerable” or are over 60**

Where an individual has previously been identified as clinically vulnerable (but not extremely vulnerable) this means that they remain at higher risk of severe illness from coronavirus.

Although the government has not categorised those over 60 as clinically vulnerable (CV) it has clarified that they could also be at higher risk of severe illness from coronavirus. For this reason, the Trust has chosen to apply the same measures to any staff who are over 60 and/or CV.

Staff in this group are expected to attend work, unless their role can be performed satisfactorily from home or it is not possible for the setting to implement the adjustments required by the risk assessment (see below). Primarily this is a decision for the employer to make in consultation with the staff member.

Homeworking may be possible in a limited number of non-pupil-facing professional or administrative roles, but in general, staff in ‘education settings’ are expected to attend work to perform their duties and that includes individuals who are CV or over 60.

The CV and over 60 group should be especially careful, being diligent about social distancing and hand hygiene and will be supported in adhering to the Risk Assessment for their setting as well as having an individual risk assessment to mitigate the particular risks to them as much as possible.

Those in the following group count as clinically vulnerable:

- are 70 or older
- have a lung condition that’s not severe (such as asthma, COPD, emphysema or bronchitis)
- have heart disease (such as heart failure)
- have diabetes
- have chronic kidney disease
- have liver disease (such as hepatitis)

- have a condition affecting the brain or nerves (such as Parkinson's disease, motor neurone disease, multiple sclerosis or cerebral palsy)
- have a condition that means they have a high risk of getting infections
- are taking medicine that can affect the immune system (such as low doses of steroids)
- are very obese (a BMI of 40 or above)
- are pregnant

Pregnant staff must have an individual 'New and Expectant Mothers Risk Assessment incorporating COVID-19' (Appendix 1) and can attend work (unless they are classed as CEV due to the presence of an additional medical condition as outlined above).

This includes those over 28 weeks of pregnancy, who can also attend work, although there will be certain tasks that they should not perform as detailed by their risk assessment. Decisions made as part of any risk assessment must be reviewed regularly as circumstances may change as the pregnancy progresses and certainly at the 28-week point.

Where, due to the outcome of a risk assessment, CV staff are exceptionally deployed to work from home, the expectations for duties will reflect those of CEV staff (above).

### **Refusal to Attend Work:**

Staff who are CV or over 60, who, despite a thorough and proper risk assessment, feel unable to attend work, should be referred to their GP and/or OH for a medical assessment on fitness and in the meantime, should be advised to self-certify their absence.

Staff in this situation should also be encouraged to seek the support of their union or professional association.

Where there is no medical reason/evidence for non-attendance, the risk has been eliminated as much as is practicable, but an individual feels unable to sign the risk assessment or return to work, this should be discussed with the HR Team. Each case will be reviewed on an individual basis to see what, if any, support can be put in place to facilitate a return to work. This may exceptionally include an agreed period of unpaid leave, but ultimately the Trust may consider more formal action where appropriate.

### **Individual Risk Assessments:**

The Trust has been following a system of undertaking individual risk assessments for staff based on the scientific advice being given out nationally. Having initially been developed whilst individuals were asked to officially Shield, these were further amended upon opening in September 2020 following the pause of Shielding on 1 August.

In line with the new Guidance, it will be a requirement once more to revisit the risk assessments for those staff who are classed as Clinically Vulnerable (CV) and conduct new risk assessments for any staff over 60 who do not currently have one.

Dependent on the individual circumstances, health and needs of the staff member, the risk assessment will be more or less detailed. The aim of the risk assessment is to eliminate the risk where possible, or to reduce the risk to the lowest level possible, whilst ensuring that the school/business unit can operate appropriately for all pupils/students. An updated Risk Assessment Proforma is attached (Appendix 2).

### Support for Staff:

For those staff working at home, either as a result of CEV status or a risk assessment, contact arrangements should be agreed to receive updates and important information.

Maintaining contact is also key to check on wellbeing and ensure that staff do not feel isolated whilst colleagues remain in school.

The use of technology and virtual meetings remains a highly effective tool, and this should be continued so that all staff feel supported and included.

It is also vitally important that staff who are working at home continue to receive adequate supervision and management support to ensure that they are able to work at their best, and to ensure that they are not disadvantaged in performance considerations because they are not working in school.

The Trust fully appreciates that staff have been working extremely hard throughout the duration of this pandemic and are really keen to ensure that there is sufficient work-life balance and wellbeing support to all.

Resources available to us include:

- [extra mental health support for pupils and teachers](#)
- The [Education Support Partnership](#) helpline for school staff with targeted support for mental health and wellbeing.
- [Able Futures](#) - a mental health support service on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions.
- [5 ways to wellbeing](#) – a set of resources from Devon NHS Partnership Trust
- WeST staff have 24-hour telephone access to the DAS confidential counselling service on 0117 934 2121.
- The Wednesday Whistle includes weekly articles signposting to additional mental health wellbeing resources and materials; back issues are available via the WeST Staff Portal [WeST Staff Portal](#) (please contact your school/ business unit office or [HR@westst.org.uk](mailto:HR@westst.org.uk) for the username and password).
- We would always encourage staff to seek the additional support of their union or professional association.

Where any member of staff is in need of further support, they should speak to their line manager / headteacher, or contact a member of the HR Team at [HR@westst.org.uk](mailto:HR@westst.org.uk).