

Frequently Asked Questions relating to Closing Bubbles and times of quarantine

These are questions that have arisen over the past number of weeks.

This is a very difficult period and in many ways we can only try as a school to do our best and follow the guidance we are given. The release of information, the actions that are required when a positive case is reported and the ongoing issues that we face as a community means that everything will never be ideal or right.

Why is the School in Bubbles?

The creation of Bubbles was recommended by the Department of Education and PHA to limit the opportunities for potential close contact with someone who has tested positive for Covid 19. The Sections were developed when the school was open during lockdown to support possible cross infection issues and then these Sections were adopted as the Bubbles when the school fully reopened this term.

The Bubbles are made up of the staff and pupils who work, learn and socialise in that area of the school. The size of the bubble is the equivalent to a full class in different educational settings of around 30 pupils. This is in line with the DE recommendations. This means that children can be supported by staff from across the bubble and not feel isolated or their learning negatively impacted through socially distancing measures that are impossible for the child to maintain.

The fundamental purpose of the Bubble is to ensure that the school can continue to provide the support for learning for as many pupils as possible throughout the pandemic without contributing to the community spread of Covid 19.

If the School was not in Bubbles, and we consider the nature of the spread of Covid 19, the impact on the school would be significant and one positive test result may result in the school being frequently closed for every child.

Why do all the classes within the Bubble have to close when there is a positive test result?

When a positive test result is reported the Bubble is closed immediately and an assessment is carried out with PHA. This risk assessment is built around this potential for close contact as it is impossible to track and trace the movements of individuals around the Bubble, the school can only try and ensure that the contact remains in that Bubble.

The school policy is therefore that due to the nature of the support our pupils require from staff and the possible close contact points throughout the education, care and emotional wellbeing of the pupils, the Bubble must close as the Principal and PHA cannot be certain that Close contact has not occurred in this area.

Why are the Bubbles not smaller?

If the Bubble was to remain in a class size, the Principal and PHA could not ensure that the spread of Covid 19 was contained with the Closure of that class due to how our school has to function. The school cannot operate in a situation that support cannot enter a classroom to help a child or that children are deprived of social interaction with other children. Toileting and class support as well as learning experiences and opportunities would be severely impacted.

The size of the Bubble is a balance between trying to stay open and limiting the spread of Covid 19.

The School is attempting to have as many pupils coming to school as possible. This is to ensure access for face to face learning for as many pupils as possible and to support pupil wellbeing as far as possible whilst providing an environment that is as safe as possible for all who access the school.

The Policy and Procedure is under constant review and discussed with PHA with each positive case to ensure best practice.

More information about the Bubbles is contained in the Arvalee School Re-Start Plan on our Web Site.

Why are we not informed who has tested positive?

PHA is very clear that this is a private issue and the information although shared with the school and PHA should remain confidential. With every positive test there is an individual who is unwell. The action taken under the joint assessment with the Principal to close the Bubble or keep the Bubble open, does not change with the disclosure of the identity of the person/s who have tested positive. This is highlighted through the workings of the PHA track and trace App system where a notification appears on your phone and you are informed to isolate without any details of who, where and/or when.

The school knows that this is a difficult time but no personal information can be given out.

Why is Arvalee School different from how other Schools, such as Primary Schools, operate?

Arvalee School has always approached the pandemic to focus on the wellbeing, learning and support needs of our own pupils. This has meant a different approach throughout lockdown, including opening for any child that needed support, and different arrangements regarding Bubbles and opportunities for social interaction with the best interests of the children at heart. It should be noted that each school operates slightly differently due to the nature of their school buildings, their environment and the learning needs of the pupils.

This is an extremely stressful and difficult time for all the Arvalee families and the school recognises this.

Do the school have Pupil Learning Packs ready in preparation for quarantine to occur?

The straight answer is 'yes'. Teachers have prepared learning activities in their class teams ready to be sent home but at times these need refreshed or there may have been an issue sending them out. If you have any issue the class Teacher will discuss this with you and get your child's learning pack sent out. The school uses both MicroSoft Teams and SeeSaw to support communication throughout these quarantine periods.

Why quarantine and what does this look like?

The PHA provides advice on this. The School policy is that when a positive case is reported in a Bubble, advice is sought from PHA, and if a Bubble closes, PHA will provide advice on the personal actions to be taken by each individual. The Bubble will open on the date given to the school by PHA. A letter will be sent from PHA to inform each parent.

How long will this policy be in place?

The Policy of working in Bubbles and Bubble closure when there is a report of a Positive Test Result to Covid 19 will continue as long as the restrictions are in place. The School continues to take its lead from the Department of Education and constantly reviews the actions taken to try and support families as much as we can. The School will constantly review its actions to try and stay open and to do what we can, with what we have to support the pupils.