



Hello Everyone,

By now you will all be aware that the Omicron variant of Covid 19 is in New Zealand and that it is expected to circulate rapidly. The government is attempting to slow the transmission of the virus so that our health system can cope with the large numbers of people expected to contract the virus.

Whilst the virus may not lead to the need for medical assistance for many, for some including the elderly, those with underlying health problems, and the unvaccinated, the virus can lead to severe illness and so managing the spread of the virus, as far as possible, will enable those people and others to be cared for and supported as necessary.

The best way to be protected from the worse affects of the virus is to be fully vaccinated and, when you are eligible, to get a booster shot. I encourage everyone that is not yet vaccinated to do so urgently. Additionally, we should all be doing our best to support the 'slowing down' of the spread of the virus by practicing social distancing, using the Covid tracer app, and wearing an appropriate mask when in the company of others, in particular when indoors.

The government have now advised that they wish schools, as far as possible, to remain open even should the virus be in its community. With this in mind, and the goal of slowing the transmission of the virus down, they have announced new requirements for the wearing of masks in schools. All children in Year 4 and above (unless they are in a class that contains a mix of children that includes children in Year 3 or below) must wear a mask when travelling on the school bus and when inside at school. All school staff covered by the Covid 19 vaccine mandates must also wear a mask when inside.

What this means for us is that any children aged 9 years old or above must wear a mask at school when inside. The government have made it very clear that this is not negotiable and given that the wearing of masks is designed to protect children, their teachers, their families and communities we support this initiative.

We understand that this can sound daunting but I am confident that we can make it work. Our plan is to take advantage of the balance of the summer ensuring that each day has a strong mix of being inside (where masks must be worn) and working outside (where masks are not required). We will also schedule short 'mask breaks' during the day and of course we have a terms worth of swimming ahead of us too. Lunch and playtime will be outside and these will also provide a break from children wearing masks.

Challenges such as this new one appear to be problematic at first glance but with a bit of creativity and a positive approach we will get there. Hopefully, this little act will help to keep our children and community safe from the worse effects of Covid 19 and will allow us all the opportunity to contribute to making our way through this phase of the pandemic.

So, from Wednesday the 2nd of February 2022 when school recommences please ensure that your child wears a mask on the bus and when they enter school. Cloth masks are not permitted, and it is recommended that a Type IIR/Level 2 mask or above is worn. This includes the widely available 'blue mask'.

Thank you for your understanding and support, we look forward to welcoming children back to school next Wednesday. Please get in touch should you have any questions or concerns. There will be further updates regarding the return to school in the next few days – please look out for them and share them widely.

Kind regards,

Paul Barker,
Principal,
Kaeo School.