**To           :              Headteachers; Chairs of Governors; Foundation Governors; Ex-officio clergy**

**From     :               Jeff Williams**

**Date      :               13th October 2020**

**Re           :              Diocesan CofE and Community/LA school visits to Church buildings for curriculum, seasonal and other events**

Dear colleagues

The information below has been sent to all ministers in both dioceses with other information regarding the use of church buildings generally.  This applies to Diocesan CofE schools, but also other schools within the Local Authorities.

While I’m sure you may find this disappointing, with the number of Covid cases rising exponentially, and more restrictions being placed on areas in the country, in terms of minimising risk and prioritising the health of children and adults, advice is that it is probably unwise and not appropriate to be planning any curriculum-related visits, worship or seasonal/festival visits this year – including Remembrance Day and Nativity/Christmas services.

We are currently planning a Christmas video that will have input from schools that wish to take part, but are also keen to hear from schools on how they are creatively planning Nativity and Christmas contributions to classes and those at home. More details will appear in one of the regular fortnightly emails from me.

**Q. What is the position with school groups coming into church for services or other activities?**

It is important to be aware that the specific rules permitting children to gather in year group or other extended “bubbles” only apply to school premises, and that if a school group comes into a church/churchyard, then the Covid church regulations are applicable.  Thus the permitted limit will be the PCC’s risk assessed building limit, and not the school’s agreed social bubble, and all children, regardless of age, are counted towards that maximum permitted number. The overall number of children, accompanying adults and adults from the church therefore must not exceed the building’s Covid limit. In any such visit, full cleaning will need to be observed, both before and after the visit , and within 72 hours of any other people entering the building. One way systems are advised, and detailed arrangements regarding the safe use of toilets will be required. Hand sanitisers must be available for all children and adults visiting.  While the 2metre rule may not be practicable in a school building, it must be applied in the church building for the children and adults. If a school group does visit the church, then primary school aged children do not need to wear masks, but older children and accompanying adults must.  In no cases may congregational singing of any form be permitted. If artefacts, items or other physical objects are being shown to the children, they must not be handed around or touched by the children or accompanying adults. Lists of all children and adults entering the building must be retained.

While appreciating that some schools want to resume annual or traditional events in church buildings, nevertheless **we remain in Pandemic conditions, and with increasing numbers of cases being reported, in such circumstances we advise that school visits to our churches, even for worship or nativity services are unlikely to be wise or appropriate this year.**

Thank you in anticipation for your understanding

Best wishes

Jeff

Jeff Williams

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