

February half term marks the half way point of the school year so what better excuse to reflect on the efforts of all our school, nursery and college staff and the hard work of children and young people.

Educational settings have been open throughout the whole pandemic and have done everything possible to keep children and young people safe and in school as much as possible. They played an absolutely vital role in keeping the country going and in recent weeks and months they've kept that tremendous effort going.

All through the pandemic, the council's Public Health and Education teams have worked closely with schools to offer support, including with testing on site for pupils and staff to find positive cases and substantially reduce the further spread of the virus.

During January 28,878 tests for 9,201 pupils and staff were completed at primary and secondary schools in St Helens, with 1,671 positive cases identified. It's been a huge effort.

Over the winter many schools have had to re-establish social distancing and bring back class bubbles as well as continuing with other measures such as regular sanitisation of all communal areas and staggering break and lunch times for both pupils and staff.

We should never forget the effort of all frontline keyworkers in the last two years, and teachers, nursery staff, teaching assistants, lecturers, school office staff, cleaners, midday supervisors and caretakers deserve all our thanks.

And all our children and young people deserve our admiration too – they've coped fantastically well with so much disruption to their school and home lives. I hope they all have a great half term!

SPACE/BULLET?

I was shocked and saddened last week to hear that Brian Leyland has passed away. Brian was the driving force behind the Book Stop, the new community owned book shop in St Helens town centre. He was also the author of the book 'St Helens: The Great and the Good' which is a must-read, fascinating and lively account of notable local people.

I had the pleasure of meeting Brian on several occasions and he was always positive and passionate about St Helens and its potential, and he worked so hard to make the Book Stop a reality.

My condolences go to all his family and loved ones. He will be greatly missed by everyone who knew him.

Best wishes to all Star readers.