

5th January 2021

Dear Families,

You will have received my letter earlier today regarding last night's announcement and I would like to apologise again for any inconvenience caused by the late notice about today's school closure. We took the day to take stock of the current situation, gain further clarity about the government's position and to make plans that we hope work for our whole school community. I would like to thank you for your understanding and patience during this time, as I know that many of you will be understandably anxious about what the coming weeks and months will bring.

The latest government guidance can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/prime-minister-announces-national-lockdown>; and also in the following government document: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-educational-provision/guidance-for-schools-colleges-and-local-authorities-on-maintaining-educational-provision#vulnerable-children-and-young-people>. In addition to adhering to this guidance, it was extremely important for us to hear from you, our families, to understand what you personally want for your children in the coming weeks. We were able to speak individually to almost every one of you and, once we had a sense of how all families were feeling, we set about the day with one clear purpose - to do what was needed to adhere to the current government directive, whilst looking after the whole Riverside School community in as best, and safe a way as we possibly could, given the context and the circumstances that we are in. Approximately 170 families (55% of our pupil population) were keen for their child to come into school and this knowledge shaped our following actions.

We have been able to reduce class sizes in the vast majority of cases, meaning there will be fewer people (children and adults) in classes, and in the majority of cases, pupils will remain in existing classes with familiar staff. This has not been possible across the board, but we are confident that any changes to children's usual arrangements will be managed effectively. All children will attend the site they currently attend. The majority of children will be attending on a full time basis, but where class numbers were particularly high, where classrooms are smaller or where there were additional staffing capacity considerations, we have had to offer some children part-time, rather than full-time places at this stage. As you can imagine, this presented a logistical challenge and I hope that what we have been able to offer, if you requested face-to-face education, works for you. Of course, for families who are keeping their child at home at the moment, we will continue to support you and your child as required.

You will be aware from yesterday's letter that as infection rates continue to rise locally, we had already reviewed our precautionary measures to reduce risk as much as possible. Measures include classes remaining separate during the school day (for lesson times, playtimes, lunchtime, etc); extremely restricted access to shared spaces (eg soft play, sensory rooms) on all sites; and

no mixing of staff across classes to cover staff absence. Staffing capacity remains one of our biggest challenges, as we currently have a number of staff self-isolating for a range of reasons, reflecting the increased transmission and infection rates locally.

This final point links to previous letters in which I have shared with you that in common with schools up and down the country, maintaining safe staffing levels has remained a challenge from the outset. We have always been open and honest about the fact that if staffing ratios drop to a level that we deem to be unsafe, that we would, as a last resort, have to close classes until staffing levels are sufficient. These decisions will only ever be taken as a last resort and, by definition, there is unlikely to be much notice given (potentially, even first thing on the morning for that day). For this reason, please ensure that your contact details are up to date in case we need to call you and in case your child is already on the way into school and please consider in advance what contingency arrangements may be needed to collect your child. This position remains the same, regardless of the new system we have in place, as does our responsibility to send home pupils and staff should they come into close contact with a confirmed positive case.

So, from tomorrow, we are in a position to welcome back all children whose families requested this and we are really looking forward to seeing them again. I will just add, based on recent events, that should anything change, we will of course have to respond accordingly and our commitment will always be to do whatever we can to keep our school community as safe as possible. We will continue to work through these challenges together, and we will get through this.

With very best wishes,



Steve Solomons
Headteacher