

2nd September 2021

Dear Families,

I hope that you are all well and had a good summer. We are really looking forward to seeing your child again and whether they are returning to a different class or site or whether they are starting with us for the first time, we hope that the transition back to school is a smooth and successful one. The first few days back at school after a long break are always a time to settle in, re-establish and form new relationships with classmates and class staff, and importantly, filled with the sorts of experiences that we hope make your child really look forward to coming into school. We are delighted to be welcoming thirty new pupils, over our three sites and we hope that they, as well as yourselves, feel part of the Riverside School community as soon as possible. If there is anything that we can do to support you and your child at this time, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Over the past 18 months we have always tried to strike a balance between reporting regularly on COVID-related matters as well as keeping you up to date with other school initiatives and for my first letter of the term, I thought it was appropriate to share the school's current position on COVID-19 with you. As you can imagine, our preparation for the new term has included careful consideration of the latest guidance, balanced with consideration of our own operational arrangements to ensure our school remains a place of joy, laughter and safety. The key messages contained within the latest Department for Education guidance are:

- *The use of bubbles is no longer recommended and there are no restrictions on children mixing;*
- *Children and staff are no longer required to self-isolate if they live in the same household as someone with COVID-19, or are a close contact of someone with COVID-19, if any of the following apply: they are fully vaccinated; they are below the age of 18 years and 6 months; they have taken part in or are currently part of an approved COVID-19 vaccine trial; or they are not able to get vaccinated for medical reasons. Instead, they will be contacted by NHS Test and Trace, informed they have been in close contact with a positive case and advised to take a PCR test.*
- *Asymptomatic testing remains in place at this stage and staff and families have access to home-testing kits as required.*
- *Face coverings are no longer required for pupils, staff and visitors either in classrooms or in communal areas.*
- *Should there be an increase in positive cases within the school, schools should liaise closely with colleagues from Public Health and take any further action as recommended.*

If you would like to read the documents in full, please see the following links:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/schools-covid-19-operational-guidance> and <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-for-full-opening-special-schools-and-other-specialist-settings/send-and-specialist-settings-additional-covid-19-operational-guidance-applies-after-step-4>.

So, adhering to the guidance above as well as considering what has worked well for the whole school community over the past 18 months, these are the key changes to how we will be operating on all three sites from Friday 3rd September:

We will:

- Not require pupils, staff or visitors to wear masks or face coverings on school grounds;
- Continue to follow all the guidance as stipulated above regarding testing and self-isolation;

- Remove our previous "bubble" arrangements for the sharing of staff, shared spaces, playgrounds and lunchtime arrangements;
- Continue to review the reintroduction of larger school gatherings;
- Continue to review school trips on the basis of individual risk assessments;
- Always maintain open and transparent communication with you.

If you have any questions about the measures we are taking, please don't hesitate to get in touch. We will, of course continue to keep things under regular review and we will keep you fully informed should there be any changes.

One final thing that I would like to let you know about is the COVID-19 vaccination programme. You may be aware that the programme has now been extended to vulnerable 12-15 year olds and we have been working closely with our colleagues from the South East London Clinical Commissioning Group over the summer to see whether we can offer these in school, if this makes life a little bit easier for you and your child. I am pleased to say that we are in a position to facilitate vaccinations for all our children aged 12 upwards at school next Thursday 9th September, if this is something that you consent to. You should receive a call any day now from a local GP surgery to discuss this further and they will be able to answer any questions. They hope to be able to vaccinate all 12-19 year olds who have consent next Thursday 9th September, however, if they require a little more time, they will return to complete the vaccinations. As a school, we are very used to facilitating vaccinations and other medical interventions, so we feel confident that this process will run smoothly, and of course, class staff will support your child as required. So, at this stage, if your child is over 12 years old, please expect a call in the coming days and please use the opportunity to ask any questions that you may have. If your child has already received a vaccination, you can simply let them know.

For now though, it just remains for me to say that we can't wait to see your child tomorrow and we hope that their return to school runs smoothly for all of you. Our commitment to you, our Riverside families, remains to provide your precious children with an educational environment that truly values them for who they are and aims to give them every opportunity to Be All That They Can Be. Thank you, as always for trusting us and for working in partnership with us. Your children are the reason we jump out of bed in the mornings, and we can't wait to share many adventures with them in the weeks and months ahead. Here's to a healthy, happy and fun-filled Autumn Term ...

With very best wishes,



Steve Solomons
Headteacher