

15th May 2020

Dear Families,

I am writing further to my letter dated 11th May to let you know the school's current position on the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Over the past few days, there has been more speculation about a phased reopening of schools nationally with mainstream Primary schools asked to prioritise children in their reception year, Year 1 and Year 6 and mainstream Secondary schools asked to offer some additional support for pupils in Year 10 and Year 12. There has been no definitive guidance to Special schools, other than to "work towards welcoming back as many children and young people as can be safely catered for in their setting" and that "decisions about attendance are informed by existing risk assessments" (from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-educational-and-childcare-settings-to-prepare-for-wider-opening-from-1-june-2020>)

Our position has always been to follow the government and medical advice, hence closing the school for the majority of pupils from 23rd March, whilst still offering school-based support for children whose parents are critical to the COVID-19 response and children who may be particularly vulnerable at home. We have also acknowledged that, as the weeks have passed, a number of families have requested school-based support as a result of changing circumstances at home and, by applying the Local Authority's Collaborative Risk Assessment Model, we have been able to offer some school-based support to increasing numbers of families in recent weeks.

We fully acknowledge that this has been an extremely challenging time for all of you and would like to reiterate the point that you are doing an incredible job. We hope that the contact you have had with your child's class team, the activity ideas and the other types of personalised support have helped you during these unprecedented times.

It would be fair to say that no one really knows what the coming weeks and months will bring and this uncertainty can create real anxiety. As a school, our commitment has always been, and always will be, to support you however best we can in the circumstances and we have always tried to do the right thing at the right time. For that reason, we have been looking at how we can provide you, and your children, with a little more clarity and certainty in these uncertain times.

We know that many of you are planning to keep your children at home at the moment. We completely understand and respect your decision to do so and we will continue to offer you the type of support that makes the biggest difference to you and your child. We also know that some of you may be keen for your child to return to school, albeit on a part-time basis, after half term. I am therefore writing to ask you to let us know whether you would be interested in your child receiving some school-based support in the second half of this Summer Term. In order to inform your decision-making, it is only fair to outline what this offer could look like. It is also right to say that, at this stage, we cannot promise anything – what we are doing is asking families whether they would be interested and once we have collated your responses, we will explore what we may be able to provide. There is a link at the bottom of this letter which invites you to respond to the following question: "Would you like your child to spend some time in school during the second half of the

Summer Term?" and to inform your response, we thought it would be useful to provide some further information at this stage:

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, the importance of strict social distancing in schools (as well as in society) has been stressed and this has come with the recognition that social distancing in schools, particularly in special schools, is almost impossible to achieve. This remains the case and the latest guidance suggests that "where children cannot be kept at a safe distance apart, practitioners should exercise judgement in ensuring the highest standards of safety are maintained". Whilst we will continue to do our very best to maintain social distancing practices in school, it is not possible to guarantee this in our context. We also acknowledge that many children find it hard to adopt safe self-care hygiene strategies and require significant physical contact to have their personal care needs met. This means that there will always be the risk that staff or children could, unwittingly, pass on, or contract the virus.

We will of course, do everything we can to keep everyone safe, and the safety of the whole Riverside School community will remain paramount in the weeks and months ahead. We will therefore implement a range of protective and preventative measures to reduce risks as much as we can, although we cannot eliminate all risks. These measures will include:

- Encouraging social distancing as far as is practicable, given our pupils' needs;
- Ensuring regular and increased cleaning in classrooms and shared spaces;
- Encouraging frequent hand washing and good hygiene practices;
- Reducing times when pupils could potentially congregate, such as arrival and departure times;
- Utilising outdoor space where possible;
- Providing visual reminders and prompts to support children in their understanding of new practices (which we hope will also support their understanding about similar measures in the community, eg floor markings);

We feel that it is also important to make you aware that:

- We will try to match children with familiar class staff but this may not always be possible;
- We will try to place children in their own classrooms but this may not always be possible;
- Provision is likely to be part-time, in light of the numbers of children we can safely accommodate in the building at any one time;
- The school day may be slightly staggered or shortened to reduce numbers of children arriving / leaving at the same time.
- Children will be in smaller groups and although we will try to group them with familiar peers, there will need to be some flexibility with groupings;
- We will be offering a restricted curriculum (for example we will not be swimming; leaving the school building; or holding events such as assemblies);
- There may be restricted access to specialist rooms such as soft play or sensory rooms;
- Staff will be wearing personal, protective equipment (PPE) at times;
- Provision is likely to be solely based at the SPC site, regardless of where children currently attend.

- Provision will be reviewed on a regular basis and will follow medical advice. If advice changes, we have a responsibility to respond accordingly.

Please now click on the link below which invites you to respond to the following question: "Would you like your child to spend some time in school during the second half of the Summer Term?" Please tick **one** of the following four boxes on the form:

1. Yes, I would like my child to spend some time in school during the second half of the Summer Term; or

2. No, I would not like my child to spend some time in school during the second half of the Summer Term.

We understand that you may have further questions before responding, and if this is the case, please tick the box that says:

3. I would not like my child to spend some time in school in June but may wish to review this in July.

We also recognise that you may be reluctant to send your child in yet but may wish to reconsider later in the term and if this is the case, please tick the box that says:

4. I would like further information before responding.

Please write your questions in the box and we will contact you as soon as possible.

[**CLICK HERE To Submit Your Answers**](#)

This phased response will be possible, subject to any changing medical advice that we would need to adhere to.

The fundamental principle that underpins our position is that we want to do what we can to support you and your child in as many ways as possible, be that at home or in school, and as long as we can do this safely, we will endeavour to do so. Please ensure that you respond by **9:00am on Tuesday 19th May** and, once we have a sense of numbers and needs, we will provide you with further information by Friday 22nd May.

I ended my last letter with the line: "we, like you, look forward to welcoming your children back to school, as soon as it is safe to do so". This remains the case and if we can offer you something that will help ease the current challenges, in a safe and responsible way, then that is what we will always try to do.

Sending you all my very best wishes,



Steve Solomons
Headteacher