

18<sup>th</sup> December 2020

Dear Families,

It's hard to know where to start when trying to sum up the past year, so I'll start at the very beginning ...

**January** – We began the year with our Riverside Annual Conference, focussing on the theme of Wellbeing for the whole school community. Wellbeing has always been at the centre of our curriculum at Riverside School; with one of our pledges being “to influence of the world of specialist education by creating an innovative curriculum framework based around The Pursuit of Happiness”. Little did we realise then how important this would prove to be in the months ahead.



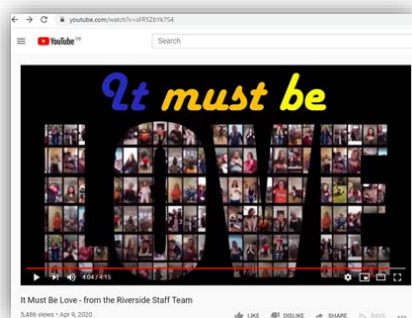
**February** – We celebrated Children’s Mental Health Week with a focus on “Finding your Brave”. Our pupils embraced the challenges to come out of their comfort zones, both at school and at home, and given that one of our core values is Courage, what better way to prepare for what was to come.



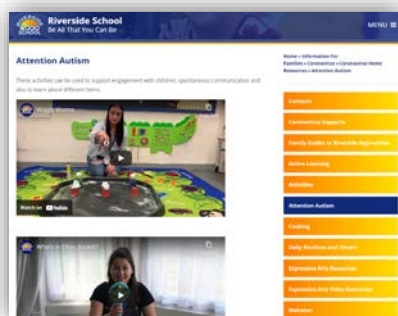
**March** – On March 20<sup>th</sup>, along with schools up and down the country, we had to close our doors for the majority of pupils. This wasn’t a matter of choice, it was something that we simply had to do. One sentiment that was shared that day will, I’m sure, remain with all of us.



**April** – We knew straight away how important it was to stay connected as a school community and thought long and hard about a song that would reflect how we felt. The opening lines are: “I never thought I'd miss you, half as much, as I do” and we meant every word.



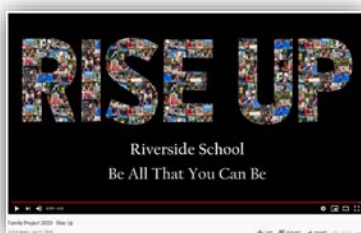
**May** – The concept of “home learning” was now in the spotlight more than ever before. This was often referred to as “remote learning” but we never used the word “remote” because we preferred to focus on the sense of connection with pupils and families, despite the physical distance between us. We filled up our website with resources and films that we hoped would make life just a little bit easier.



**June** – We were delighted to receive the Wellbeing Award in recognition of our commitment to emotional wellbeing and positive mental health across our school community. If ever there was a time to ensure that wellbeing remained at the forefront of our work, this was it.



**July** – This year’s Family Project was different to previous years, for obvious reasons. The opening lines in the film said it all: “Every one of us had to adapt to a very different way of life. A way of life that was unplanned, unexpected and uncertain. A way of life that would test the resolve, the resourcefulness and the resilience of us all”. In the most incredibly powerful way, you showed your optimism and your sense of hope. You, and your children inspired everyone who watched it – not a dry eye amongst them.



**August** – Despite everything going on, we were delighted to be given the opportunity to open a new site and preparations started at the end of the Summer Term and through the holidays, ready for a September launch. We opened our doors to 34 pupils at Riverside West Wickham on 7<sup>th</sup> September, a very special day for everyone associated with not just Riverside West Wickham but the whole Riverside School community. We are very much One School, on Three Sites, regardless of the current restrictions.



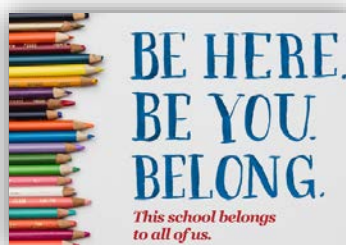
**September** – As pupils, families and staff adapted to being back at school, adjustments were made to keep the whole school community as safe as possible, whilst never compromising on the things that we passionately believe in. We have always wanted our school to be filled with joy, laughter and memorable experiences, and despite the obvious challenges, nothing has changed. The often seen rainbows, a symbol of hope and peace, were around for everyone to see.



**October** – In line with our focus on wellbeing, we celebrated World Mental Health Week by wearing yellow and spending the day experiencing everything from yoga to mindful colouring, happy discos to positivity post boxes. Whilst so many things continue to be affected and shaped by the pandemic, there is always time to stop, breathe and reflect on the important things in life.



**November** – Following Black History Month, we sent out our “Call to Action” and facilitated family and staff workshops to explore what inclusion really means for us at Riverside School. One of our strategic priorities is “to further strengthen a truly inclusive environment, in which the whole school community feel welcomed, valued and confident to bring their whole selves to the school”. Our Staff Conference Day on January 4<sup>th</sup> will act as a launch pad for this work and we look forward to sharing more about this important initiative in the new year.



**December** – And so, to the final month of the year. Christmas activities have looked and felt a little different, but alongside the natural anxieties that are out there, the festive spirit and joy has remained constant. It has certainly been a year filled with uncertainty and challenge, but like the rainbows of hope, the sense of togetherness, connection and community has got us through it.



None of us really know what 2021 has in store but one thing is certain ... our core values will continue to guide everything we do.

*Aspiration Resilience Creativity Humility Integrity Trust Enthusiasm Courage Teamwork*

They make up the acronym ARCHITECT to signify our passion for designing and building a school that will make an indelible mark on the world for generations to come; a school that will impact positively on everyone who enters, on people we may never meet, and in ways we may never know.

We hope that we have made a bit of a difference to you and your child over the past year and we will continue our relentless drive for excellence. Quite simply, your children deserve nothing less. They are a credit to you and an inspiration to us, and we are all looking forward to an even happier, and healthier 2021.

On behalf of everyone at Riverside School, we send you our very best wishes for the festive period.

With kindest regards,



Steve Solomons  
Headteacher