

3rd April 2020

Dear Families,

I am writing to let you know the school's current position on the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

In my last letter, I ended with the words: "Your children are wonderful and we care very much about them, your families and yourselves. We are sorry for any inconvenience caused and we hope that you understand our position in these challenging times. Please look after yourselves and we will be thinking of you in the coming weeks". I can promise you that nothing has changed.

It has been lovely to receive so many photos of your children at home and we will be sharing these later today on our Website and Facebook page. However, we also know and fully acknowledge that the past couple of weeks will have been really tough for so many of you, for so many different reasons, and we know that this may well continue as we approach the two-week Easter break.

These are clearly unprecedented times and there are uncertain times ahead. Advice changes on a regular basis and guidance has at times appeared contradictory and confusing (for example, information around whether special schools should remain open; how children are classified as "vulnerable"; and rules around social distancing). We know that some of these issues have created additional anxieties in already challenging circumstances.

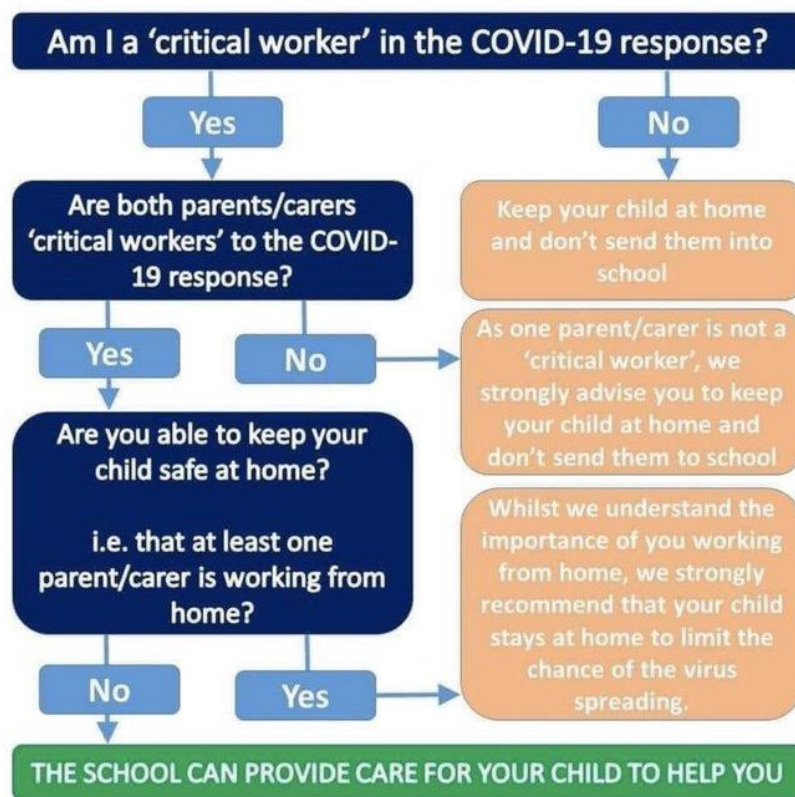
I wrote last time that "Your children are precious" and they really are. As a school, our position has always been, and remains, to follow the medical advice. The overriding message from the government is clear, that: "Every child who can be safely cared for at home should be, to limit the chance of the virus spreading" and "the fewer children making the journey to school, and the fewer children in educational settings, the lower the risk that the virus can spread and infect vulnerable individuals in wider society". The government has also asked schools "to provide child care for a limited number of children – those who are particularly vulnerable and those whose parents are critical to the COVID-19 response and cannot be safely cared for at home".

We know that many of our children have underlying health needs, including respiratory conditions, and for these children, the virus presents a significant risk. We also acknowledge that many of our children find it hard to adopt safe self-care hygiene strategies or social distancing practices as defined by Public Health England and require significant physical contact to access provision or have their personal and/or intimate care needs met. A key risk is that staff or children could, unwittingly, pass on, or contract the virus due to being unable to adhere to the social distancing advice outlined within the medical guidance. To reiterate, the latest advice is that every child who can safely be cared for at home should be, to limit the chance of the virus spreading. This is the reason we took the decision to close the school on Friday, 20th March for the final two weeks of term and why we took the decision last week to cancel Saturday and holiday clubs until further notice. This approach is being widely adopted by special schools both locally and nationally.

As I am sure you will appreciate, these decisions were not taken lightly and were based on the government's directive that "the single most important action we can all take, in fighting coronavirus, is to stay at home in order to protect the NHS and save lives".

It is recognised nationally that some exceptionally vulnerable children may be safer at school and we also know that a small number of our children’s parents are keyworkers critical to the COVID-19 response and have no other means to keep their child safe at home. Over the past fortnight, we have been providing support for a very small number of children as outlined above (ie those meeting critical care guidelines) and this support will be continuing throughout the Easter holidays for children in these two categories only, on a case-by-case basis.

The following flowchart has been produced and distributed widely and I hope you also find it useful.



As outlined previously, we have been adding content and resources to our website for you to share with your child and we will continue to update these on a regular basis. Please visit www.riversideschool.org.uk and access the **Information for Families > Coronavirus Home Resources** area for a wide range of songs, videos, games, activities and visual supports that we hope you will find useful. We hope that the contact you have had with your child’s class teacher over the past fortnight has worked for you and if you would like any further information or advice on any home learning related topics or resources, please contact them again. Their details can be found at: <https://www.riversideschool.org.uk/page/?title=Home+Learning+Contacts&pid=247>.

Regardless of the fact that we are now moving into the Easter holidays, given the exceptional circumstances, you can expect:

- Week of 6th April – contact from your child’s class teacher at least once a week, either through email or telephone (please let them know which you’d prefer);
- Week of 13th April – a weekly, personalised activity sheet, via email, to support your child’s learning at home.
- We know that some children and families are keen to communicate with other children in their class using technology and we are looking at the best way to facilitate this safely. Please let

your child's class teacher know if you would like to be involved in this and we will be in touch in due course.

If you require additional support from social care colleagues, please contact the Bromley Children's Disability Team on 020 8313 4511 or for out-of-hours emergencies only (5:00pm-8:30am and weekends) on 0300 303 8671. Alternatively, please email disabledchildrensteam@bromley.gov.uk.

If your child has medical needs and you require any additional support from our nursing colleagues, please contact them on 0300 330 5777.

For any queries about milk supplies, please contact your dietician.

You will also find a list of contacts who may be able to support at:
<https://www.riversideschool.org.uk/page/?title=Contacts&pid=246>.

We have been able to provide, through our catering contractors, food packs for families eligible for free school meals and have offered a delivery service for families unable to collect at school. Both collection and delivery services will continue next week and as in previous weeks, food packs can be collected from Riverside SPC on Tuesday 7th April between 10am-12pm. If you are unable to collect from school, please call 01689 870519 or email admin@riverside.bromley.sch.uk by 3pm on Monday 6th April and we will aim to deliver to you during the morning of Tuesday 7th April. You may be aware that the government are looking into a food voucher scheme for families eligible for free school meals who would prefer supermarket vouchers to prepared food packs. As a school, we are investigating this option and as these vouchers are only available for term-times, we will let you know soon whether they can be accessed in the future.

Given the uncertainties that still lie ahead, I am afraid that we are unable to say at this stage what the position will be after the Easter break. We will be in touch with you again by Tuesday 14th April and we really appreciate your patience and understanding during these testing times.

Finally, we want to reiterate our commitment to the safety of your children, the Riverside School community and wider society and we thank you for your understanding. We really do miss spending time with your children and hope to see them again soon but, in the meantime, on behalf of all of the staff at Riverside School, sending you all our love and best wishes.

Yours sincerely,



Steve Solomons
Headteacher