

10th December 2021

Dear Families,

I hope that you and your loved ones are all well, despite the latest COVID developments that have, once again, brought uncertainty and changes to our everyday lives. As a school, we are no different and, as always, we are doing our best to manage this ever-changing situation.

You will be aware that we decided at the beginning of last week to change our plans for some of our end-of-term events and, rather than inviting families in, we decided to film the performances instead for you to enjoy at home. Despite the challenges of the past week, where a number of pupils and staff have not been able to be in school and therefore not feature in the performances, we look forward to sharing the Riverside Beckenham Show and Riverside SPC Primary show with you next week. We are still hopeful that the staff panto will be a live performance for small groups of pupils at a time and, again, this will be shared with you to enjoy with your child at home. You will also be aware that we have introduced a range of additional control measures to keep our whole school community as safe as possible in the run up to Christmas including: staff wearing face coverings in communal areas on all three sites; restricting the number of visitors coming into school unless considered absolutely essential; and increasing our precautionary control measures further where there are clusters of COVID cases in the school. With that in mind, and in line with our commitment to communicate frequently and openly with you about all COVID-related matters, I can confirm that we have had thirteen positive COVID cases this week. Of these cases, five have been at Riverside West Wickham, five at Riverside Beckenham and three at Riverside SPC.

We have always followed the latest guidance when responding to positive cases, which includes increasing control measures if the number of positive cases substantially increases, or reaches certain thresholds. For special schools, the threshold for taking further action is *“two pupils or staff, who are likely to have mixed closely, testing positive for COVID-19 within a ten-day period”*. For us, this applies to pupils or staff in the same class only. As in previous weeks, if there is **one** positive case in your child's class, we will call you and ask you to arrange for your child to have a PCR test as soon as possible. Your child can come into school whilst waiting for the results to come back.

Over the past week, there have been two or more cases in four classes across the school (two Riverside Beckenham classes, one Riverside West Wickham class and one Riverside SPC Primary class) and as a result, we have introduced some additional control measures in these four classes to reduce the risk of further transmission and to keep our wider school community as safe as possible. So, if there is **more than one** positive case in your child's class (meaning that there is a cluster or “outbreak” in the class):

- We will ask you to arrange for your child to have a PCR test as soon as possible (and if you are able, to collect your child for this reason).
- We will ask that your child remains at home until you receive confirmation of the test result. If the result is negative, your child can return to school and if the result is positive, your child will need to stay at home and self-isolate for ten days. Please let us know as soon as the result comes through.

- If the PCR result is negative, we will also ask you to carry out daily lateral flow testing for your child, so that they can continue to come into school (as we know that COVID can develop several days after the last contact with a positive case).
- If the daily lateral flow test result is negative, they can come into school but if it is positive, they must have a PCR test to confirm the result. They must not come into school until the result of the PCR test is known. If the PCR test result is negative, they can return to school and if it is positive, they must stay at home and self-isolate for ten days.
- If you feel that your child will not be able to tolerate a daily lateral flow test, then we would ask that your child stays at home until the tenth day after their last contact with the positive case in their class (we will provide details as necessary).
- In addition to any of the above, if your child has COVID symptoms, please do not send them into school and arrange for them to have a PCR test.
- In classes where there have been more than one positive case, there will be a small number of additional control measures in place in class, primarily around pupils not mixing freely with other classes.

As an additional consideration, the national guidance currently states that anyone who is identified as a close contact of a suspected or confirmed Omicron case must self-isolate for ten days, regardless of age or vaccination status. However, when setting out its new Plan B measures on Wednesday, the government stated that these rules will soon change and instead of self-isolation, close contacts of confirmed Omicron cases can carry out daily lateral flow tests instead of self-isolating. As a school, we are keeping a very close eye on this and will continue to adhere to latest guidance (and changing guidance) to inform our policy and practice.

We feel that the measures outlined above are proportionate to our current situation and for families with children in the four classes that have had more than one positive case, I would like to thank you very much indeed for your understanding and for the way you have all accepted and supported these measures.

I appreciate that this week's letter has been longer than usual, containing a lot of information in light of where we all find ourselves today. I hope that it is clear and if you have any questions, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

But to end, I want to come back to our core business, the reason we are all here, and that is to serve your children and yourselves; to provide them with school experiences that they look forward to, enjoy and remember, and to provide you with the confidence that their time in school is filled with joy, friendships and fun. We know that schools up and down the country are really struggling to see out the end of term, and it is certainly not quite the end of term that any of us would have anticipated, or planned for. However, we remain, as always, united as one Riverside School community, to do our very best for your children and yourselves, and I would like to thank everyone – pupils, families, staff, governors and multi-agency colleagues for standing together throughout what remains a challenging period. That's the Riverside Way.

Have a good weekend and with very best wishes,



Steve Solomons
Headteacher