

5th January 2021

Dear Families,

Firstly, I would like to apologise again for the late notice that Riverside School would be closed today, Tuesday 5th January. This decision was not taken lightly, as we know that many of our pupils were looking forward to returning to school and that you, their families, were expecting this to happen, particularly having received my letter detailing arrangements just a few hours beforehand.

As you will know, the Prime Minister announced shortly after 8pm last night that schools across the UK would be closing and unlike in previous communications before, during, and after Christmas, there was no specific mention of special schools. Whilst mention was made of children of critical workers and the term "vulnerable" has also been referred to in some communications, last night's announcement that the whole country would be going into lockdown took centre stage.

We fully acknowledge that had this announcement been made earlier, we would have been able to inform you sooner, before, perhaps, sending my letter yesterday afternoon. Following the announcement, we wanted, and needed, to discuss the implications for the whole school community – pupils, families and staff, before making a decision about today and beyond. We wanted to take this more measured and deliberate approach, rather than sending you an immediate message, without giving the matter further thought. We do acknowledge, however, that the additional time taken may have made things difficult for you today, and for that, once again, we apologise. However, I think it would be fair to say that the timing of the PM's announcement did not help in terms of the school's extensive plans for reopening, the subsequent change of position and the implications and impact this would have for all of us.

I also know that a number of you had been in touch prior to the announcement and also following it, to inform us that you would not be sending your child into school at the present time. In light of last night's announcement, and as referred to in my earlier letter, we fully understand and would support any families who choose not to send their child into school whilst transmission and infection rates are so high.

Today, we will continue to make further representation in order to gain greater clarity from the government and we will, of course be guided by changing legislation as well as staffing capacity, given that we currently have a number of staff self-isolating for a range of reasons. This reflects the increased transmission and infection rates locally and continues to present a very real challenge for us in terms of staffing classes safely.

I will write again to you later with an update and you may need to anticipate changes from the plans we had previously shared with you about a full reopening. We will, of course, continue to make decisions based on the safety of our whole school community as well as the wider community, and as we are all aware, this latest full lockdown has presented everyone with significant challenges.

Thank you very much for your understanding as we work through these challenges and we will be in touch again later today.

With very best wishes,

Steve Solomons
Headteacher