

10<sup>th</sup> December 2020

Dear Families,

I hope that you are all safe and well as we edge towards the end of what has been a particularly busy and unique term.

I am writing to you a day earlier than usual as there are a few points that I wanted to bring to your attention as early as possible.

I wrote to you on 13<sup>th</sup> November, 20<sup>th</sup> November and 27<sup>th</sup> November to inform you that there had been no positive cases at Riverside School during those three weeks. We received confirmation last night of a positive case in our Early Years bubble at Riverside SPC and pupils and staff from that bubble will need to self-isolate for 14 days. We are sorry that they will be missing the end of term and we will be thinking of them all as we try and recreate as much festive spirit as we can, albeit remotely.

We know that, locally, a large number of schools have had to close classes, bubbles and, in some cases, the whole school due to positive cases and this would appear to be an upward trend at the moment. We will, of course, remain extremely vigilant and we will be increasing our precautionary measures even further next week to reduce risk as much as we possibly can in the run-up to Christmas.

Our commitment to you has been to keep our lines of communication open and transparent from the outset and in one of my earlier letters of this term, I included the following paragraph in the Question and Answer section:

***What will happen if adult:child ratios drop as a result of staff having to self-isolate whilst waiting for a test result?***

*We sincerely hope that the national testing arrangements will improve so that our staff do not have to stay at home for extended periods of time whilst waiting for a test result. As a school, we remain totally committed to doing everything within our power and control to keep classes and bubbles open and children attending school, but your child's safety is our top priority so if staffing ratios drop to what we deem to be an unsafe level, we will have to look at a range of options, including the possibility that we may need to close a class until staffing ratios are safe. This step would only be taken as a very last resort, however, we wanted to be open with you from the outset should this eventuality occur.*

***Taken from letter sent to families on 22.9.20***

In the past couple of days, we have been affected by a large number of staff having to self-isolate for different reasons and, having used all our contingency arrangements, have had to reduce the number of days that pupils can attend school in just three classes. This has been for safety

reasons, when we simply have not been able to staff those classes safely without compromising the security of our bubble system. Whilst, of course, we hope that we do not have to apply this to other classes in the final few days of term, our priority has always been, and will remain, safety first, so if we have to reduce the number of days that your child is able to come in, then we thank you in advance for your understanding. These decisions will only ever be taken as a last resort and, by definition, there is unlikely to be much notice given. For this reason, please ensure that you are contactable by phone in the coming days, in case we need to call you.

A few families have been in touch to ask whether we would authorise their child's absence from school for the remainder of term, to ensure that they do not risk coming into contact with anyone who may subsequently test positive, and by doing so, run the risk of their child and themselves having to self-isolate over Christmas. I can confirm that should any families wish to keep their child at home for the remainder of the term for this reason, we will authorise this. Please contact us if this is a decision you wish to take and your child's class teacher will be in touch to ask whether you would like any home learning support until we break up.

Finally, you may have seen in the press that schools have been given the opportunity to break up on Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> December, rather than Friday 18<sup>th</sup> December. The reason for this is that school leaders are responsible for assisting in the contact tracing process, should there be any positive cases reported in the school. Public Health England have asked school leaders to remain contactable for six days after the final day of school, so that they can assist with contact tracing if necessary. This six day period would have ended on Christmas Eve, and to support school leaders in not having to work on Christmas Eve, the earlier finish day has been offered. For us, however, we are happy to continue to assist with any potential contact tracing until Christmas Eve if required and we are therefore pleased to say that **we plan to remain open** on Friday 18<sup>th</sup> December.

If you require clarification about anything in this letter, please do not hesitate to contact the school and we hope that by sending this letter to you in good time, we have been able to clarify the school's position in the light of the ever-changing landscape.

As always, our ARCHITECT values:

*Aspiration Resilience Creativity Humility Integrity Trust Enthusiasm Courage Teamwork*

will continue to shape our decision-making. Thank you for trusting us.

With kindest regards,



Steve Solomons  
Headteacher