

Tuesday, 05 January 2021

Dear families,

We are only on day 2 of the new school term, and we've already seen major changes to Government education policy, with the announcement last night of a third national lockdown and a direction for mainstream schools to close for the majority of pupils until at least the February half term. Our sincerest wish is that the Government would have taken action over the weekend to stop there being such confusion for schools and families, but yet again we find ourselves finding out about changes at 8pm, along with the rest of the nation.

No guidance for schools has been published at the time of writing this letter, which means we are not clear on how the Government is directing special schools to respond.

We know we are expected to remain open, and the children of key workers remain a priority for in-school attendance. We are sorry we have had to close today: however, it was the only responsible course of action available to us, as we expect to have huge staffing disruption as other schools in the area struggle to meet key worker demand. All it takes is for one school to fail to put an offer in place, and the domino effect hits the wider schools network.

Our aim was to avoid further last minute change for families today, so that we have the time, space and certainty to put a consistent offer in place from tomorrow. Believe us when we say that we were not expecting last night's announcement, after a weekend of legal threats by the Government to force all schools to open yesterday for all pupils.

Whilst we have a legal duty to follow Government guidance, once it arrives, we also know that the longer we wait the more uncertainty there is for all families and our pupils. In the first national lockdown, many families preferred to keep children at home as they felt this was safer, and we fully understood that.

What we know already is that it will be highly unlikely we can provide a full time, in-school offer for all pupils at the same time and this will certainly not be the same as non-lockdown times. We have staff who are required to shield from today and many others will naturally be anxious about being in crowded classrooms. We are sure many of you will feel the same about your child.

It is possible that pupil attendance in school will now be optional for parents. It is also possible that parents may be able to request a leave of absence for their child. In both

Learning together; to be the best we can be.

cases, we anticipate children will still be required to undertake home learning, as they have had to whenever a bubble has had to self-isolate.

To ensure we have a means of opening to as many pupils as possible tomorrow, we need to get an understanding of what families want and are willing to consider as we continue to work together to do the best we can. To that end, school staff will be contacting you today to ask:

- if you want your child to attend full time during this lockdown or would prefer to keep them at home;
- if you would be prepared to consider reduced provision for your child, and if so, what would that ideally look like for you.

Things can and will change over the next 6 weeks, so we would like to plan with families for two week blocks at a time, with families always having the option to approach us if their circumstances change in that period.

We are exploring how we can continue to support families eligible for free school meals where your preference is to keep your child at home.

Our achievements in the first national lockdown were rooted in the excellent relationships we have with parents and carers, and we will continue to root our decision making in our shared value of child-centeredness.

It is highly likely that we will have to write to you with more updates as we become aware of them – we apologise in advance for any confusion this may cause. We would never choose to manage our schools this way in response to such a chaotic environment, but these are exceptional times we live in.

Thank you for your support and understanding. Please call school if you have any questions or concerns, at any time.

Yours faithfully,



Warren Carratt
Chief Executive Officer



Luci Windle
Executive Headteacher