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5th January 2021

RE: Partial closure of school – Announcement by the Prime Minister on 4th January 2021

Dear Families

As you will all have heard from the Prime Minister last night, all schools are to close to all but a few pupils until February half term at the earliest. However, they are to remain open to the children of critical workers where no childcare is available and vulnerable children such as those with a social worker.

This action has been taken by the government, not because the new variant is any more dangerous to children, but rather to recognise and address the part schools have played in the spread of the virus to adults and older people who are much more at risk. This is to protect the NHS and its ability to cope with increasing numbers of cases needing hospital attention.

It is important that we play our part in minimising the spread of the virus whilst at the same time providing for the needs of our most vulnerable children. To do this, we have devised a clear rationale by which to prioritise the children. This is based on the level of vulnerability each individual child has, much as before when we were only open to a small number of pupils. So, the children of key workers who have no childcare, those children with social workers, who are in the care of the LA or have other underlying vulnerabilities will be prioritised for full time access to school. All other pupils will be supported through our remote learning offer.

Our admin team will be in contact with you to ensure you have access to Microsoft Teams so that your child's teacher is able to do some live teaching with your child. Your class teacher will also be in touch to let you know whether we are able to offer your child a place, but should you wish not to take the offer up, there will be no adverse consequences in terms of the Educational Welfare Service.

For those children able to attend, we are continuing with a normal school curriculum. This is not 'Educare' as it was last March. The children will still be required to wear school uniform, undertake their normal lessons, take their normal breaks and lunch times and generally keep to the structures and routines of the school day.

For those children on the home learning offer, we would encourage as much structure in the day as possible, and your class teachers will be in touch with schedules and work for the children to undertake, partly with class staff over Microsoft Teams, and partly in your own time and at your pace. Where practical, we would ask you to support us in this, but if you are unable to manage and get your child to engage we will be very understanding.

In terms of general COVID Secure procedures, you already know many of the precautions we have in place, such as face coverings for staff in all communal areas, handwashing routines, strict adherence to bubbles, extra cleaners during the day as well as at the end of the day, visitor protocols etc. but I also want to assure you that all additional practical actions are being taken to heighten our measures and protect the children, staff and yourselves.

You can help us protect everyone from the virus by rigorously following the government guidance, staying home and not mixing with other households outside your support bubbles.

I recognise there will be difficulties and lots of questions from you all, which I would ask that you direct in your class teacher's direction in the first instance. There will be some of you who would like a place but haven't been offered one at present. Please know that decisions have not been made lightly, and that they have been made based on the information we currently hold on your employment status from the survey just before Christmas. Only 42 families returned these forms (out of 97) so there will no doubt be some of you whose information is incorrect. If you fall into this category, please phone reception and update us on your employment and childcare status so we can re-assess if necessary.

As a point of reference, I am in the position of my five year old child not being offered a place at school, despite having no childcare and both me and my wife being full time head teachers. Both of my parents are over 70 and classed as Clinically Extremely Vulnerable. Life is going to be tough for a while, and until the spring at the earliest. I would highly recommend anyone who is offered a vaccination to take it up – not only to protect yourself, but so you don't put everyone you come into contact with at risk. The faster the population is vaccinated, the faster we can return to normal.

I am eternally grateful to your seemingly unending patience and support for us as a school, and it seems I may be calling on your compassion and assistance more than I would ever wish to during this ongoing pandemic.

If you have any questions about this, please don't hesitate to contact reception or your class staff in the first instance, and me if they cannot answer your specific query.

Thanks once again in advance.

Lee Earnshaw

Head Teacher