

Dear Families,

10<sup>th</sup> April 2020

You are all very much in my thoughts and those of my colleagues as we head towards what is supposed to be the long Easter weekend and the end of the school holiday. I know this is a terrible time for everyone, especially as several of you have reported having to cope with being ill from the virus. I have just finished my deliveries to many of you and seeing so many smiling faces will get me through the weekend.

As you know, the safest place to be is at home.

“Stay at home

Only go outside for food, health reasons or work (but only if you cannot work from home).

If you go out, stay 2 metres (6ft) away from other people at all times.

Wash your hands as soon as you get home.

Do not meet others, even friends or family

You can spread the virus if you don't have symptoms”

As hard as it has been to follow, these measures have been put in place to save lives and to protect the NHS. I imagine this has been hard to explain to your child/children without causing too much alarm. I want to direct you to Learning Disability Devon who have produced some easier read information which may help with this: <http://www.learningdisabilitydevon.org.uk/resources-category/coronavirus-information-to-help-you-stay-safe/>

Many of your children and family members are highly vulnerable and must stay at home until this horrible virus can be kicked out of our lives. This is bound to be really tough but there will be an end to it and I am committed to doing all we can to support you. I know it's not what you would really like to happen and what we are longing for, which is to get back to how things should be, welcoming our children and young people into school every day. But if we stick at it, stay at home and stay safe, we will be able to get back to normal sooner than if we take risks now.

Just because the buildings are mainly shut, it does not mean the school is not “open”. Right now, we are just having to work differently but we are very much here for you. We are making weekly phone calls to check in with you (some families prefer daily calls - please let us know what's best for you); the Home Learning areas on the websites are being updated every week with new content and if you are eligible for free school meals, you will be receiving vouchers. If you don't have a printer at home, or are struggling to access the Home Learning resources, mention it in the weekly phone call and we will post or deliver some physical resources to you. **I have also seen guidance that says you can use Direct Payments to buy equipment/technology to support your child's “education, entertainment and wellbeing”, by using Short Breaks allocation that you may otherwise be unable to use. This could mean being able to purchase IT equipment to help with Home Learning. I added a link to the full details of this policy to our website**

Some families have asked for “through the window” contact visits. We are happy to arrange that if you or your child would like it. We have also supported some families by picking up shopping when it’s been hard to get a delivery slot. Again, please let us know.

After Easter, we will not be able to fully open up the school buildings. The risk to the children, yourselves and the staff is too great. Depending on the numbers of staff I have available on any given day, we will be able to provide some childcare for families of essential key workers who absolutely cannot make other arrangements, and emergency respite days for children who are not safe to be at home all the time. Any children coming in to school will be in a single classroom with just one child and two members of staff. They will not mix with other children or staff because we have to keep the number of contacts to a minimum so that the risk of them coming home to you infected is kept as low as possible. I cannot guarantee that the staff will be their class staff and the staff will change regularly because we are working a shift pattern so that staff are also kept as safe as possible.

I won’t be asking my staff to place their children and other schools’ staff at risk by send their own children to school. I must do what I can to keep the school community as safe as possible.

For some children, this amount of change will be devastating and we need to consider very carefully whether your child could cope with it. They will expect school to be just as it usually is – and it will be anything but. We can arrange transport if needed, but again, it is not likely to be the usual driver and escort and may change without warning. These are things we have to manage, because we are dealing with very unusual and difficult circumstances.

If we are able to offer your child some time in school, we will contact you to talk about it on Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> April which should have been in INSET day. Instead I will be working with my senior leaders to plan the next few weeks of our “new normal”. We will be taking things a week at a time and even if we can’t offer your child some time in school next week, we may be able to in the weeks to come. I must highlight that this could change day by day as the numbers of available staff change including catering, cleaning, first aiders etc

As always the staff have been working tirelessly to support you all. Teachers are delighted with the photographs of the learning activities you are doing at home – you are doing some fantastic, inspiring things with your children. So many of you have let us know that you are using and enjoying the resources the teachers and staff have made for you. It really is heart-warming, thank you for taking the time to let us know.

Next week, teachers will be contacting you to discuss virtual teaching sessions so that children can see staff and if we can work the technology some group session so they can see friends. You will receive more information on this from your class teacher. I know they are keen to get it going because we all miss the children and it will be lovely to see them.

Thank you for all you are doing to access the learning resources. I do want to highlight again that you and your family’s well-being is paramount to me and if home learning isn’t working for you, have a break and just enjoy the warmth of the sun. Children learn through play and they take joy in your presence so where possible enjoy these days just being together.

S A Pickering