

8th January 2021

Dear Parents/Carers,

Lockdown

I sincerely hope it is understood how deeply disappointed I am that we find ourselves in a position where again the school has been asked to close, but with cases rising across the country it is the right decision. All teachers work in education because we firmly believe that every single child is entitled to an excellent education.

As a staff team we are appreciative of the parent community and the governing body for the encouragement and support through what has been logistically a very difficult period..

Throughout this time the schools' priorities remain the same:

- Provide equal access to a high quality education remotely and on-site
- Keep our community safe.

Upon notification that the school would close, a plan was formulated in order to meet the priorities above.

The priorities are simple but the plan to achieve them is more complicated. Having said this, I am pleased with the outcome of our planning and how our remote learning offer has commenced.

The Prime Minister has unequivocally stated that schools are safe but he advised on Monday 4th January 2021, "The problem is that schools may nonetheless act as vectors for transmission, causing the virus to spread between households." Therefore, we are now, by law, asked to play our part in minimising the spread between households and this is reflected in our current Covid-19 Risk Assessment..

Critical Workers and Vulnerable Families

Throughout this week we have been contacting families to try and establish school places for these children who have parents who are critical workers or are considered vulnerable.

These children have been allowed to come to school but it has meant prioritising children on the criteria given by the Department for Education (DFE).

If your child has been allocated a place it is important that they arrive and are collected on time so groups of children can be kept together and people do not mix.

I know that there are more families wanting places, but I need to ensure that the safety of children and staff working with them comes first. We will be contacting families if spaces become available, but as of today we are at our maximum safe capacity.

To allow more children to access remote learning the government has promised to give schools an allocation of devices, as yet we have not received them. However, I have decided to allocate our own Chromebooks to the most vulnerable where access to devices and the internet has been identified to be an issue among families.

Parents who are offered one of our limited supply of devices must fill out and sign an equipment loan form when allocated. The expectation is that these are looked after and are returned to the school at the end of the lockdown period when requested.

Families who receive a device will not be offered an on-site school place.

Data Increase Allowances

For any families who are struggling with a lack of mobile data, the DfE has launched a data boost scheme. This scheme temporarily increases data allowances for mobile phone users on certain networks. This is so that children and young people can access remote education if their face-to-face education is disrupted.

Who can get help

Schools, trusts and local authorities can request mobile data increases for children and young people who:

- do not have fixed broadband at home
- cannot afford additional data for their devices
- are experiencing disruption to their face-to-face education

For more information and to fill out a very simple application, please visit our website.

Remote Learning

Over the coming days and weeks, teachers are available to you and your child as we have made a huge effort to ensure that our remote learning offer is as strong as possible.

Children who are not completing their assigned work will be contacted, as there is an expectation that all children should be engaged in the learning offered by the school. We do not expect parents to become teachers, but inevitably children will need to be guided and encouraged to engage with the lessons on offer.

Teachers will continually update their class pages on the school's website to ensure that parents are aware of what is happening. We consider these pages to be our public face so please do refer to them.

If you have any questions or concerns please do not hesitate to contact your child's teacher so we can resolve any problems quickly.

Coming onto the School Site

If for any reason you need to come onto the school premises you must wear a mask. Unfortunately, if you do not you may not enter.

Sonia Ellington

It is with a heavy heart that I also want to send my condolences to Sonia Ellington's family who passed away with COVID-19 over the Christmas period. Ms Ellington was a former teacher at Earlsmead who worked in the school from 2016 to 2018. We remember her fondly, her laugh, smile and personality. She was a committed teacher who always strove to do her best for the children she was responsible for, she will be deeply missed.

For many of the staff this news came as a shock and it is a further reminder of the seriousness of this pandemic.

Over the coming weeks we will keep you updated on the various activities that are going on in school. Please listen to the government advice of staying at home and maintaining your social distance as I want us all to remain safe.

Kind Regards,

S McKenna

Scott McKenna
Deputy Headteacher