



Dear Parents,

I am writing to you at the end of this first week to just try to give you an update of the current situation.

I would just like to start by giving my most sincere thanks to the whole of our school community. Once again, we find we are in a deeply confusing and topsy-turvy situation. And unbelievably, once again, this has come at the very last minute from the Government. However, despite the incredibly short notice, thanks to staff and parents working together, we have managed to get systems underway.

I would like to give my thanks to my staff for their care and dedication - helping to prepare the building, the plans, the arrangements, the home learning, and at the same time juggling their own families - so a massive thank you.

I would then like to give my thanks to you, the parents. I do not for one minute underestimate how hard it is for you - juggling your own jobs while trying to keep your children at home, coupled with the worries around the transmission of this new strain. As we said last summer, the school just isn't the same without each and every child, but right now, the science is saying it simply isn't safe. This inevitably poses difficulties for you, with trying to juggle work with keeping children going at home - and in many cases, more than one child at different phases of education. However, despite these challenges, the kind words and messages, as well as your understanding and patience have been both overwhelming and invaluable and from me and all the staff, a huge thank you to you.

So, I would now like to outline a few key points.

Restricting Attendance during the National Lockdown

I am sure you have been following the news and been alarmed at the rising numbers of cases again and sadly, the number of deaths. Our NHS is once again struggling, and we must all do what we can to get through the weeks ahead together.

I must remind parents that this is a period of national lockdown and the government have made it clear that people **should stay at home**. The places offered in school are for the children of parents who are **critical workers** and who are unable to work from home and/or unable to make other arrangements for their children so have no alternative but to attend school. Unlike the first lockdown, families are now able to establish a support bubble to help look after children from home.

The "Stay at Home" advice is to try and reduce numbers and through this, reduce the spread of this highly infectious new variant. As the current worker list is so extensive, we currently have a demand for places that is beyond what we can safely accommodate given the current situation. If the provision is too large it negates any benefits of the social distancing measures the government has imposed and through associated contacts, children and staff will be exposed to unacceptable risk.

This is not 'business as usual'. All medical advisers are clear that the safest place for children and families to be at present is at home with as little social contact as possible.

Despite how safe we have tried to make our school, everyone is safer staying at home during this time.

If you are working at home or have any adult at home or in your childcare bubble who can care for your child, they should not be coming in to school. These emergency places are intended for families who have no other adult at home and who are immediately required in the response to this virus. It will not be easy but that is not a reason for your child to be in school.

We are aware of the guidance, but stress the rationale behind the lockdown - 'Stay at home, Protect the NHS, Save Lives'. It is now our moral and civic duty to remain home wherever we can. In order to limit the spread between your children, your family and staff, we have to reduce numbers in school. That is why we had no option but to prioritise based on the Key Worker list, as, if we didn't, based on the replies to the survey, we would be open to nearly all children, which would create a very unsafe environment.

We understand that may cause difficulties, and you may feel your child should have a place, but we are appealing to you, please, only use attending the school building as an absolute last resort. Home is the safest place for everyone at the moment. Parents and carers who are critical workers should keep their children at home if they can.

We are here to support vulnerable children identified by school and the children of critical workers who have no other option, and we will continue to be. If having read all of the above, you truly feel you have absolutely no other option other than to send your child in to school, please contact us to discuss the situation.

We thank all our critical workers once again for their immense efforts and personal sacrifice.

Remote Learning

The children in school and at home will be covering as much of the same work as possible and we will be working hard to support all our children at home as much as we possibly can. We do not expect you to be able to work miracles any more than we can. Do what you can with home learning, do your best, encourage the children to do their best and do not cause yourself or your children stress about it.

As we have had in place since September, we are using Google Classroom to deliver our remote learning. As with any new system, as time progresses, we will all become more familiar and confident with it - and that includes us, you and the children.

Thank you to those who have responded to our survey - it has given us some really useful information to help us make the system even better. I have summarised some of the main points below based on your feedback:

- We are working our way through contacting those who have indicated they need support/advice on using Google Classroom. There is further information on this below
- We will be making contact with those who have indicated that they have an issue with device or wifi availability to see what we can do to help
- We understand that some responses have said that there has been an overwhelming amount of work being set - please don't worry about this. We wanted to ensure that there was plenty to begin with, but as time progresses, we will focus this down to some core learning each day
- Many thanks for your suggestions on how to improve and refine the remote learning to make it more engaging for your child - we are going through the suggestions and hope to begin some of your ideas

Next week we hope to put out some further information on our remote learning including what you can expect, learning details and further advice.

Issues with Google Classroom

As you know, any new technology always has teething problems, and IT in particular has a habit of causing frustrations! If you find you do have any problems with the platform, including log in details, downloading or uploading, or any other issues, if possible, please can you send an email to schooloffice@stjosephs-birkenhead.wirral.sch.uk and say which class your child is in, and a brief description of the issue. This will then be forwarded to your child's year group team, and someone will contact you to resolve the issue.

Regular Contact

As we are in a National Lockdown, with the key message being 'Stay at Home', the Secretary of State has decided that it is appropriate for most pupils to temporarily cease to attend school. The guidance document says "Where a parent wishes for their child to be absent, we expect schools to authorise the absence during this national lockdown period. Absence will not be penalised."

However, so that we can continue to fulfil our safeguarding responsibility, we would still request that we have daily contact with the children. For those on site, a register is taken. For those at home and learning remotely, we will use Google Classroom to monitor activity. If we can see that a child at home hasn't logged on, we will phone home in order to make contact. Because staff may be using their own personal phones, it may come up as a withheld number so please can we ask that you do pick up as it might be us trying to get hold of you!

Free School Meals

During this period, we will continue to provide a school meal to children eligible for a Free School Meal (not UIFSM i.e. children in Key Stage 1, just those who are FSM registered). Until a voucher scheme is implemented we are providing a daily packed lunch for collection. Please let us know if you require this service.

And finally...

When we restarted in September, we were so happy to have all the children back, and even though things were a bit different, we felt whole again. This new lockdown is the last thing any of us wanted. However, we have got through it before, and we will get through this one.

Looking through social media, watching the news, reading the papers, the thing that helped everyone was the new found kindness, love and appreciation for the small things. While we are #together-apart, I hope we all once again re discover these things. In fact, I don't believe they left any of us, and together we will all be there for each other. With love

Mr Turner