

Dear Parents / Carers,

I'm updating my blog very soon after my last post because I need to make a plea to you all.

Schools are closed to the majority of pupils because of the risk from the increasing rates of transmission of COVID-19 in the community. The simple fact is that the fewer pupils there are in school, the less movement there will be in the community and we will not add to the increasing rates of transmission. The country is in a national lockdown for the same reason. We need to stop the transmission of this disease and the way to do that is to prevent people from moving around.

School is partially open to provide restricted - **last resort** - provision for children of CRITICAL key workers. It is widely accepted that the best place for children is at home and that children should be sent to school when there is **absolutely no other option**.

The list of those who could be considered eligible for this provision is incredibly long. Parents and/or their employers need to prove their 'work is critical to the coronavirus (COVID-19) and EU transition response'. But the list is **not a guarantee** of a place.

I appreciate that many of you are in critical roles and working from home. I appreciate how difficult this is and how challenging it can be to run your own home, support your own children and work from home all at the same time. I know the challenges of doing this, because we are doing it too. Staff who are working from home; delivering lessons and supporting you and your children, are those same key workers who could also be requesting a place in school for their child. As an employer, I am trying to respond to the crisis by facilitating their work at home to reduce their movement and- hopefully - help to reduce transmission rates.

I understand that the list says that only one parent needs to be a critical worker. I understand that, as parents, you need to work to provide for your families. I understand that your employer might be saying that you HAVE to work. However, parents have, under the new lock down conditions, been given the right to request furlough when childcare is an issue for your family.

<https://workingfamilies.org.uk/articles/coronavirus-schools/>

We have been overwhelmed with requests for places and we absolutely cannot meet the needs of you all, whilst working in COVID-secure ways. Based on current numbers, we have approximately 20% of pupils attending, spread across 6 classes (in order to reduce the bubble size significantly from that of a normal class of 30). We have spread these bubbles across the school, in order to ensure that children do not have any contact with any more than 14 other pupils. The more children we have in school, the greater the risk of transmission. The more children we have in school, the greater the bubble size needs to be and the closer together the bubbles are. The more children we have in school, the more staff we need to bring in, which means the risk of transmission increases further. The more children we have in school, the more parents we have on-site and around the school, all of which could increase transmission.

Today, the government has updated the list of children who may be eligible to include 'those who may have difficulty engaging with remote education at home'. This has the potential to cause us an even greater problem than we already have. We understand that remote learning provides many challenges, but I also know that the staff are doing a great job of supporting the children. If you need individual support, please make contact with a member of staff in your child's year group team. We are running training sessions and providing written guides. We are trying to access the promised technology from the government and we are looking at purchasing more devices from our own school budget, to be loaned out to pupils. We will continue to do all we can to support your children with this.

So, I am urging you to very carefully consider all you can do to keep your child at home. I am asking for your understanding if I have to refuse your request. I am also waiting for advice from the local authority

about the possibility of children taking up unused places in other, local schools. This isn't what we want to do, but we simply cannot accept any more children into school. If we have to refuse your child a place, we will keep a waiting list and will offer you alternative provision if it becomes available.

I know that some of you are in the position where there simply are no other options. This is what the provision is there for. I want to assure you that we are doing, and will continue to do, everything we can to keep your child happy, safe and on track academically.

As I have been saying all day, we're in this together and I thank you for your ongoing support.