28th January 2021

**Keeping in touch 3**

Dear Parents and Carers,

I hope you and your families are keeping well in what continues to be the most challenging of times. I know that there are very few families now who have not been ‘touched’ by this virus and it has been an awful time for so many of us. Not only are we all having to cope with health risks, relatives with the virus and often, sadly, in hospital; we are also facing the enormous impact of continuing to be ‘locked down’. In addition, yet again, schools are right in the ‘eye’ of the media and political storm regarding a return date. With so much in the media that is, at times, very frightening, I can only imagine how each and every one of you is feeling, and the pressures you are under as most of you continue remote learning, working yourselves and trying to stay sane. I truly empathise with families at this time. Please know that we understand all these worries and demands on your time, and the anxiety it causes. We will do all we can to support you. We know you are all doing your very best to enable the children to access the ‘live’ teaching (or recorded) sessions each day so that the children do not miss out on their essential learning, and we really appreciate everything you do.

The government’s response has again split our school community and I fully appreciate how aggrieved some parents who cannot get their children into Key Worker/Vulnerable Provision feel, as our school resources continue to be stretched like never before.

Now, with our bubbles filled to bursting and all our other children at home, we continue with the enormous challenge of keeping in touch with and supporting everyone, as well as providing in school and remote learning. At this time, we have had to make very hard choices about how this can feasibly be done and have had to focus on safety considerations first and foremost.

The Prime Minister has confirmed that remote learning will continue until at least 8th March for many of our children. He has said we will know more about this from 22nd February. We are now optimistic for a return as close as possible to 8th March as we have some of the youngest pupils. Once we have further guidance from the government on how and when a full, safe return can be achieved, you can be sure we will be putting a plan in place and letting you know. In the meantime, thank you for the enormously positive feedback about the ‘live’ teaching and lessons. Your feedback ‘keeps us going’ and we are delighted to hear that you are finding these so beneficial.

**Cameras, safeguarding and live teaching**

As a school we want to ensure that we are doing all we can to safeguard our pupils and staff. This week, we temporarily suspended the use of cameras in live lessons whilst we sought further advice. I am pleased to say that we now have this and that we can continue to use cameras within lessons as the teachers see fit. I know from what you tell us, that this helps with your children’s engagement, so this is great news. Thank you for all your support sticking to our remote learning protocols, which is making the learning as effective as possible.

**Parents’ Evening**

Please be reminded that the booking system for parents’ evening **‘goes live’ at 7am tomorrow (Friday 29th) morning at 7am.** Please sign up for a slot using the instructions provided in the letter sent to you via email on Friday 22nd January, **before the system closes again at 6pm on Wednesday 3rd February**. Thank you.

**Asymptomatic staff Covid testing**

You will be delighted to know that staff testing began (twice weekly) yesterday, and everyone was negative! I do not intend to ‘publish’ any future information regarding staff testing, but I thought you would be delighted to know that this new ‘regime’ has not suddenly led to any bubble closures. Long may that continue for us all.

**The importance of reading and hearing stories**

Below is a link to Islington Library Service. They have recorded lots of story-time videos for children from Nursery to Year 6. It could give you a much needed 15 minutes ‘off’!

<https://www.youtube.com/c/islingtoneducationlibraryservicebookvideos>

**Further support for learning**

There is **absolutely no need to do anything other than the ‘Russell’ remote learning** during this time. However, some of you are still keen to know even more ways to support and vary remote learning. **We do not expect you to use any of these**, but in case some parents find them useful, we attach a word document with some links to resources we would recommend. For those of you who have had quite enough of remote learning – don’t even open it!

**Will there be a February half term holiday club (Premier), or Key Worker/Vulnerable provision at Russell?**

The DfE announced on 26th January that schools will close as usual over February half-term and not remain open to vulnerable children and the children of critical workers during that week. We are very sorry for the inconvenience this will undoubtedly cause, but this is to ensure there is no ‘bubble mixing’ due to limited staff availability and to ensure the transmission is further limited over this period. We regret that companies, such as Premier, will also be unable to run ‘paid for’ ‘holiday camps’ at this time.

**Reporting a safeguarding concern – even if we are not at school**

Thank you for continuing to keep in touch with us. Remember we are open and here should you have any safeguarding concerns.

As always, you can raise any safeguarding concerns, by calling or emailing into school on office@russell-lower.co.uk, or ringing 01525 755664.

Safeguarding Lead – Mrs Bunney

Safeguarding Deputies – Mrs Knight and Mrs Walker

Safeguarding Governor – Mr Keith Redman-Henry

**Keeping anxiety as low as possible**

At this time, it is almost impossible to expect anyone to have no anxiety, so one important step is to know we are all going to feel anxious and accept that. However, children take all their cues from us, if we appear anxious, they will be; if we can stay calm and confident, they will be. I know what a HUGE challenge staying calm and confident is at the moment and hope that the attached resource will help (we did share it back in the summer ‘lockdown’ and many of you said how helpful it was): King’s College – Parenting Under Pressure – research findings and top tips

Don’t forget out Pastoral Support Team are there to support you too. The way you can contact the team, and numerous additional resources can be found on our school website/Pastoral Support Tab:

<https://www.russell-lower.co.uk/website/pastoral_support/367189>

**REMINDER - Stress and Well-being Workshop for parents**

Over 20 parents have already signed up for this. Great news! It is an hour and a half full of practical top tips and strategies to use to cope with these extremely tough times, and particularly stress and anxiety. This will be held virtually on **Thursday 4th March between 6 and 7:30pm**. Approximately 2 weeks before this, the NHS will send you a very short well-being questionnaire to support the event. None of this will be referred to in the workshop**. If you would like to take part, please complete one Google Form for each parent wanting to attend**. You will need to provide us with your name and an email address which can be used to send you the questionnaire 2 weeks before and to send you the virtual event link. **This workshop is totally FREE** and covers content that the NHS currently provide but have a HUGE waiting list for. Please do take advantage of this if you feel it would be of benefit by **completing the Google Form** by no later than **Wednesday 10th February**:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdrLSTkuc7oLhr4J7FkGFucQBvwCPFrsOQjBV7p38puwlhjbQ/viewform?usp=sf_link>

**Thank you**

As you will recall, Mr Jan Telensky of JT Consultancy Ltd kindly and very generously donated 20 Chromebooks to the school to loan out for remote learning. I am delighted to say these are all being put to good use already! In addition, a donor who wishes to remain nameless, has also brought a Chromebook for the children’s use. Yet again, we have been blown away by the wider community’s extreme generosity. You know who you are: a MASSIVE thank you.

**The future**

Currently, it is very hard to predict the next few days, let alone weeks. This is a cause of stress for us all, but we must await further government guidance. We aim to keep you as fully informed as possible, as soon as possible, but at least now we have a date to aim for: Monday 8th March. Fingers crossed!

I will continue with my weekly ‘Keeping in Touch’ letters, rather than monthly newsletters as things continue to change quickly. However, as at all other times, please just get in touch with any worries at any time and we will do our very best to work with you to get the right solution for your child and family. There really is no ‘one size fits all’ and we are **all simply learning how to** **cope** every day. Thank you for your unwavering, on-going support and patience. I cannot tell you how much it has been, and continues to be, appreciated.

Take care and stay safe and well.

Many thanks and kind regards,

Nicki Walker

Headteacher