21st January 2021

Dear Parents/Carers,

**Keeping in Touch – 2 January 2021**

I hope this letter finds you all safe, well and continuing to cope in these extraordinary times.

Since I last wrote to you, the teachers, support staff and governors have been working tirelessly to maintain and further improve remote live learning, keep in contact with our families, run our closure provision for vulnerable children and key workers, digest and implement further DfE guidance, seek to find answers to our numerous questions, assess and mitigate risks and plan all the actions required to ensure that school is as safe as it can be.

During this time of national lockdown and exceptionally high infection rates, we are making some significant alterations to the way we are doing things in order to minimise any possible transmission. We greatly appreciate your support during this very difficult period of time.

**Key worker provision**

As you may be aware, over the last few days we have had to close two of our Key Worker/Vulnerable year group bubbles, due to children testing positive

**Please can I just stress the importance of the following key points:**

**1) At this time of such high infection rates, your child should not be in school if you have any way of caring for them at home.  This ensures everyone is as safe as possible and keeps these important bubbles open for longer**.

2) Your child should not come to school if they have any of the 'classic' Covid symptoms: a high temperature, a continuous, new cough or a loss of/change in sense of smell or taste.

3) Your child should not come to school if anyone in your household has any of the 'classic' Covid symptoms.

4) Your child should not come to school if someone in your household is awaiting the results of a Covid test.

5) All government national lockdown guidance must be followed

**Extra precautions:**

I wanted to make you aware of the fact that the children who have tested positive are often not displaying 'classic' Covid symptoms.  Often, their symptoms have included headache/tummy ache and/or sickness - all often without a temperature. This is making detection increasingly difficult.

**In the light of this, we would ask you to exercise an extra cautious approach at this time.  If you are concerned that your child is at all unwell during this closure period, please keep them at home and request a Covid test by calling 119 or using the following link:**

[**https://www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test**](https://www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test)

As soon as you have a result, please let us know in school, and of course if the test result is negative and your child is well enough, they can return to school straight away.  **This will be especially important when your child is returning to school following their bubble being closed due to a positive case so that we do not unwittingly bring the virus back into school.**

At school, we continue with strengthened Covid measures, including stringent handwashing and respiratory hygiene, ensuring bubbles do not mix at any time, staff wearing face coverings, daily temperature checks, social distancing (where possible) etc.  I really appreciate your extra vigilance at this time too, as it is the only way we will be able to keep our Key Worker/Vulnerable provision open at this time.

It is important to remember that no one can 'help' getting Coronavirus if they are following all the guidance, especially as scientists believe that 1/3 of all cases are asymptomatic.  This does mean that we all have an incredibly difficult job on our hands though!  It is only by our whole community being extra vigilant at this time, that we can reduce the transmission rates and minimise school bubble closures.

As always, thank you for all your hard work in your many key worker roles and for all your unwavering support at this incredibly challenging time.  We really do appreciate it.

Please do not hesitate to contact us at school if you have any queries at all.

**Next steps – Routine Staff Covid Testing in Primary Schools**

From next week (25/1/21 onwards), the government wants all schools with primary age children in to begin testing all staff members twice a week. We are planning this huge logistical exercise now and aim to get started very quickly as an additional weapon in our armoury against Covid. We have been told to expect some disruption in the beginning and I apologise in advance for this. As you can imagine, with up to 1/3 of people being asymptomatic, and having so many ‘contacts’ with their bubble each day, staff may unknowingly have Covid and this may cause a ‘wave’ of bubble closures initially. I am sorry and apologise in advance if this is the case, but again, like so many other things at the moment, this is completely beyond our control.

If you suddenly get emails and letters home where it says that a bubble has had to close because ‘a member of staff has tested positive’ you will at least know why.

**Remote learning**

Thank you for continuing to support your children’s learning from home. This will make an enormous difference to their confidence levels when they do return. Please continue to do everything you can to keep learning going at home using Google Classroom and the live lessons and Tapestry (if your child is in Foundation Stage). Attendance at live lessons has been fantastic: we really want to keep this going. Do let us know if you have any problems that you think we could help you overcome.

**A reminder from Mrs Brown, Mrs Moore and Mrs Peace** – please remember to upload ‘work’ and ‘photos’ to Tapestry and not Google Classroom if your child is in Foundation Stage, this way they are added to your child’s Tapestry Learning Journey. Thank you.

**2 new ‘resources’:**

1. **A weekly assembly** – Both myself and Mrs Bunney will be recording a weekly assembly and posting it (in the Classwork area of Google Classroom and it will also appear in the ‘Stream’) for the children to watch at any convenient point in their week. The assemblies are between 15 and 20 minutes long and focus on our values (currently courage) and other important characteristics. Unfortunately, we cannot use Google Meet (the camera part) for this due to the number of students each ‘classroom’ can cope with, so we have reverted to Loom which you access via the internet as a hyperlink in the Classwork area of Google Classroom. It is really easy, and does not require anything to be downloaded or installed. Please encourage the children to watch these assemblies weekly at their leisure (a new assembly will be posted at 9am each Thursday – but you can watch at any time!)
2. **Oak Academy Virtual Library -** This Virtual School Library, is brought you by Oak National Academy in partnership with the [National Literacy Trust](http://literacytrust.org.uk/) Every week a popular children's author or illustrator will provide you with free books, exclusive videos and their top three recommended reads. You can access it here: <https://library.thenational.academy/>

**Save the date – Parents’ Evenings**

The level of communication has greatly increased between home and school this lockdown, compared to last. This is brilliant news: thank you! This is due to the interactivity and feedback built into Google Classroom and Tapestry, the class@ email system, and telephone calls all of which are working well. However, we think it is still really important that our planned Parents’ Evenings go ahead as they did in the autumn term: either by phone call or Zoom. There will be a **separate letter** about this and with information about booking these appointments later this week. **Please do not email the office or the teachers about this yet.**

**Parents’ Evening Dates:**

Monday 8th February 4pm – 7:20pm

Tuesday 9th February 3:50 – 7:20pm

More information will follow later this week.

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

In November, Russell staff worked with NHS staff (virtually) to undertake a Stress and Well-being Workshop. This was 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. We all found it really useful and asked if they would run the workshop again, but for parents this time. I am delighted to say that they have agreed and 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:**

To everyone, thank you for your on-going patience and understanding. It continues to be the most challenging of times for all of us, but the safety and well-being of our children, parents and staff are paramount. This must always be our first concern.

Sadly, I **cannot yet answer any detailed questions about the** **timing of the re-opening of school to all pupils, but the Secretary of State for Schools, Gavin Williamson, has said that schools and parents will get at least 2 weeks’ notice.** If you have any other queries, please do not hesitate to get in touch using the [office@russell-lower.co.uk](mailto:office@russell-lower.co.uk) address.

Thank you for taking the time to read this newsletter.

Stay safe and well everyone.

Many thanks and kind regards,

Nicki Walker

Headteacher