

4th May 2020

**Keeping in touch 5**

**Dear Parents and Carers,**

I hope this letter finds you all well and staying safe. We are really missing everyone being together at school, but know what a brilliant job everyone is doing of keeping learning going at home until we all return.

Our best guess, and hope, is that schools will begin to re-open for at least some children in a phased approach after what would have been half term, on 1st June. Obviously, at the moment we don’t know which children that will be. We await further direction from the government and I will, of course, be in touch as soon as we know more to answer the many questions I am sure you will have. One thing I can assure you is that we will only re-open when we have been satisfied that it is safe to do so and with robust plans in place. We are already busy making plans for a return and talking to other local schools about this so we have a coordinated approach.

We hope you are finding the new class@ email addresses helpful in communicating with your child’s class teacher and supporting you with home learning. We are so grateful to you for all your support. What a fabulous team and community we have at Russell – so clearly demonstrated now in this time of national crisis. Thank you!

**Getting ready to come back to school:**

As we prepare ourselves and the children for a return to school soon (fingers crossed!), we have some advice below to help the transition back go as smoothly as possible. To be most effective, we really need to begin this a couple of weeks before coming back.

1. **Set up a back-to-school routine**

Having consistent bed and wake-up times will help. The National Sleep Foundation suggest starting two weeks before the first day of school to set sleep routine habits. But even a week beforehand will help your child adjust.

The first week back will be difficult, transitioning from being in ‘home mode’ so don’t worry and indeed expect this. Try to maintain [healthy habits around sleep](https://childmind.org/article/encouraging-good-sleep-habits/) ([around 9-11 hours for children aged 5-13](https://www.health.qld.gov.au/news-events/news/physical-activity-exercise-sleep-screen-time-kids-teens)), [exercise](https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/health-pubhlth-strateg-phys-act-guidelines#npa517) (around [one hour per day](https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/health-pubhlth-strateg-phys-act-guidelines#npa517) of moderate to vigorous physical activity [three times a week](https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/nutrition-fitness/physical-activity/physical-activity-how-much)) and a healthy [diet](https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/food-and-your-life-stages). These all help us cope.

Create structure with a ‘[school’ routine](https://healthyfamilies.beyondblue.org.au/age-6-12/mental-health-conditions-in-children/anxiety/tackling-back-to-school-anxiety) during most weekdays if you can. Be guided by your knowledge of what best supports your child during times of change and transition. For some children, a visual calendar will help ‘count down’ and know which days are weekends.

You could s[et up a practical chart for getting ready](https://raisingchildren.net.au/school-age/school-learning/school-homework-tips/morning-routine-for-school). You could include:

* What needs to be done each day for school, such as: getting up, eating breakfast, brushing teeth and dressing
* What help does your child needs from you to get ready?
* What they can do on their own? (Establish these together).

Parents feel like they go back to school with their children! Consider adjusting your own schedule to make the transition smoother for you too. If you can’t adjust much in the mornings, arrange time in the evenings so you can give as much time as your child needs, especially during the first week.

**2. Talk about going back to school**

Most children have some level of stress or anxiety about school. You can offer support by normalising experiences of worry and nerves. [Reassure your child](https://www.heysigmund.com/how-to-deal-with-school-anxiety-no-more-distressing-goodbyes/) the feelings they have are totally normal and very common, and they will likely overcome them once they have settled in. Worries and courage can exist together.

Depending on your child’s age, you could also try writing [a social story](https://www.andnextcomesl.com/2018/08/free-social-stories-about-going-to-school.html)  about going school and the routine ahead, or set up a [peer-buddy system](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/childhood/professionals/learning/trkpp6.pdf) where a peer and their family meets you at the school gates or, see if friends can go into school together

**3. Help create a sense of school belonging**

A sense of belonging at school [can really affect](https://theconversation.com/many-australian-school-students-feel-they-dont-belong-in-school-new-research-97866) academic success and well-being. Parents can facilitate positive attitudes about school by setting an encouraging tone when talking about it. Staff at Russell are busy preparing a short fun video for you all. This would be a great way to start talking to your child about the whole Russell community. Watch this space!

**4. Look out for signs of stress**

Parents can spot stress if their child (depending on age): is more clingy than usual; appears restless and flighty, or cries; shows an increased desire to avoid activities through negotiations and deal-making; tries to get out of going to school; retreats to thumb sucking, ‘baby’ language, habits they had previously grown out of, or increased attachment to favourite soft toys.

We have all been through a huge ordeal and change to our routines; stress responses are to be expected. However, if these behaviours persist for more than a few weeks, talk to your class teacher or pastoral support about what is happening. Together, we can work on a strategy of support.

**5. Encourage questions**

Encourage questions children may have about coming back. What will be the same? What will be different? Be open about what we do know and what we don’t know yet. Tell your child who they can talk to at school if they have questions. We will all be completing ‘Network Hands’ when we get back so that everyone has a ‘go to’ person who can help.

Also, let your child know, nothing is off limits to talk about. Have in your head some time set aside to chat informally and with low pressure (usually whilst doing something else, like driving somewhere, cooking together etc.)  Most importantly, don’t over-do it: too much chat can worry children too. Gosh, it is hard being a parent!

**Home learning:**

Thank you so much for continuing to support the children’s learning from home:

Although you have access to many resources via the website, we continue to recommend that you focus on:

1. The **home learning packs under the ‘kids area’** tab of the website, and then **‘year groups’ tab**.
2. **The Oak Academy** <https://www.thenational.academy/> <https://www.thenational.academy/online-classroom>
3. **Daily reading** (at least 4 x week). Don’t forget there are free eBooks on:

 <https://www.oxfordowl.co.uk/for-home/find-a-book/library-page/>

1. Daily **TTRS (Y4**) or **Hit the Button** (Times Tables and Number Bonds are particularly helpful, 10 minutes a day, 4 times a week): <https://www.topmarks.co.uk/maths-games/hit-the-button>

**Daily phonics** for children in FS, Year 1 and Year 2 is also crucial for reading and writing. Don’t forget Mrs Hale’s daily video lessons can be found at:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCfS6dDC9DA4udt4JPyaFrRw>

Please do give your child the opportunity to watch and join in with these lessons if you can. They last a maximum of 15 minutes. They can really help parents too.

Thank you SO much!

**Could your child now be eligible for Pupil Premium?**

(Confusingly called Free School Meals (FSM) even when all children in FS/KS1 are entitled to Universal Infant Free School Meals)

Some parents may find the need to apply for Pupil Premium/FSM, particularly in KS1 who previously received the universal offer and who are now receiving a qualifying benefit.  This [link](https://lnks.gd/l/eyJhbGciOiJIUzI1NiJ9.eyJidWxsZXRpbl9saW5rX2lkIjoxMTMsInVyaSI6ImJwMjpjbGljayIsImJ1bGxldGluX2lkIjoiMjAyMDA0MDEuMTk1OTQ5NTEiLCJ1cmwiOiJodHRwczovL3d3dy5jZW50cmFsYmVkZm9yZHNoaXJlLmdvdi51ay9pbmZvLzUzL2JlbmVmaXRzLzQvZnJlZV9zY2hvb2xfbWVhbHMvNSJ9.je23q3va-e6uGVA4C8htvce_P1QDry482VPD2Xextb4/br/76882480553-l) takes you to the information and the telephone number is 0300 300 8306.  Information for parents can be found at this [link](https://lnks.gd/l/eyJhbGciOiJIUzI1NiJ9.eyJidWxsZXRpbl9saW5rX2lkIjoxMTQsInVyaSI6ImJwMjpjbGljayIsImJ1bGxldGluX2lkIjoiMjAyMDA0MDEuMTk1OTQ5NTEiLCJ1cmwiOiJodHRwczovL3d3dy5jZW50cmFsYmVkZm9yZHNoaXJlLmdvdi51ay9pbmZvLzUzL2JlbmVmaXRzLzQvZnJlZV9zY2hvb2xfbWVhbHMvMyJ9.6mutbVnf5ljAY7eZe-yanZkN4SO6JGlO_SA_Gkp6Kro/br/76882480553-l).

**If you think you may qualify, do pick up the phone and ask.**

**And finally:**

Please find below, at the end of this letter, a quick reference to some of the services and up-coming events outside of school that parents may need or want to access over the coming weeks and months. If you cannot find a service to help you with a problem – however big or small – do get in touch with us. We will do everything we can to find you the support you need at this challenging time. Equally, if you have any safeguarding concerns about a child who attends Russell, please do get in touch: office@russell-lower.co.uk

Once again, thank you for all your hard work with the home learning packs. What you are doing will really make a difference to your child, both now and when we do return to school. We really do greatly appreciate it, and honestly know what a huge ‘ask’ it is!

I will be in touch again following the government’s next set of announcements due between the 7th and 10th of May.

In the meantime, stay safe, keep well and take good care. Also…coming soon…keep your eyes out for a musical message from us to all of you!

Many thanks and kind regards,

**Nicki Walker**

**Headteacher**

**CBC and government support services for parents:**

**ChildLine**

Helpful tools and information to help your children manage worries about the virus and everything that is happening in the world. [www.childline.org.uk/toolbox/calm-zone/](http://www.childline.org.uk/toolbox/calm-zone/)

**Mind**

To help you cope if you are feeling anxious or worried. [www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing](http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing)

**SENDIASS**

Free confidential support service for parents/carers of special educational needs children. SENDIASS@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk, 0300 300 8088, [www.cbcsendiass.org](http://www.cbcsendiass.org)

**Parent line**

Confidential text messaging service for advice and support for parents of 0-19 year olds 07507 331456 (text only)

**Ampthill Good Neighbours**

Providing support for those self-isolating with no support

07833314903, ampthill@gmail.com-volunteering and [www.ampthillgoodneighbours.info](http://www.ampthillgoodneighbours.info)

Ampthill Baptist Church – 01525 841682 community@ampthillbaptist.org.uk

St Andrew’s Church – 01525 753170 nigel@vernewood.co.uk

**Grand Union Housing**

[www.guhg.co.uk/coronavirus/rent-worries](http://www.guhg.co.uk/coronavirus/rent-worries)

**Citizens Advice**

[www.citizensadvice.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk)

**Pre-payment meters**

Families can phone them if they have pre-paid and are self-isolating. They will send out 2 weeks’ worth of gas/electricity for you.

British Gas 0333 202 9802, EDF 0333 200 5100, EON 0345 052 000, N Power 0800 073 3000, Scottish Power 0800 027 0072, SSE 0345 026 2658

**Advice Central**

CBC’s ‘open door’ to help you find services around benefits, debt, disabilities, education, health, housing, immigration, employment and legal – free and confidential

[www.advicecentral.org.uk](http://www.advicecentral.org.uk) 0300 303 6666

**Domestic Abuse**

[www.womensaid.org.uk/the-survivors-handbook/](http://www.womensaid.org.uk/the-survivors-handbook/)

Women’s Refuge – 0808 2000 247 and Men’s Refuge – 0808 801 0327

Boots is also offering safe spaces for those experiencing domestic abuse to make calls to specific domestic abuse services. This is in conjunction with UK SAYS NO MORE. The Safe Space will have information on national helplines and how to download the Bright Sky app.

<https://www.hestia.org/brightsky>

Bedfordshire Domestic Abuse Partnership website <https://bedsdv.org.uk/> Twitter: @bedsdv Facebook: BedfordshireDomesticAbusePartnership

**Behaviour and Positive Parenting - Virtual Triple P group, parents of 3-12-year olds – 11 th May 9:30-11:30**

A broad-based parenting intervention delivered over seven weeks for parents of children up to 12-years. The programme involves five (2-hour) group sessions of up to 36 parents. Parents actively participate in a range of exercises to learn about the causes of child behaviour problems, setting specific goals, and using strategies to promote child development, manage misbehaviour, and plan for high-risk situations. Then there are two (15 to 30 minute) individual (telephone) consultations to assist parents with independent problem solving while they are practicing the skills at home. **https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/virtual-triple-p-group-positive-parenting-programme-tickets-102663088060**

**CBC Virtual Drop-ins:**

7th May – Supporting children with angry feelings. 11-11:30 (Kids session) and 11:30-12 (Parents advice) **https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/promoting-positive-wellbeing-supporting-children-with-angry-feelings-tickets-104116182304**

14th May - Sleep and nightmares. 11-11:30 (Kids session) and 11:30-12 (Parents advice) [**https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/promoting-positive-wellbeing-sleep-and-nightmares-in-children-tickets-104117185304**](https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/promoting-positive-wellbeing-sleep-and-nightmares-in-children-tickets-104117185304)

**Teen Brain presentation:**

4YP have developed a Teen Brain presentation for parents of young people across West-Mid Beds (**note** the information is pertinent to parents of young people aged **8**-24). Find attached presentation for further information. This really helps us understand why young people do/react/say and feel the things they do.

**The government have produced guidance for parents and carers on supporting children and young people’s mental health and wellbeing during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, updated 21.4.20**:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-supporting-children-and-young-peoples-mental-health-and-wellbeing/guidance-for-parents-and-carers-on-supporting-children-and-young-peoples-mental-health-and-wellbeing-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak>

**and a summary of information for parents:**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/closure-of-educational-settings-information-for-parents-and-carers/closure-of-educational-settings-information-for-parents-and-carers>