

**Headteacher**

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Dear Parent/Carer,

We hope this finds you and your family well.

-We really want to say thank you once again for your incredible support and understanding as we continue to navigate the ongoing COVID-19 challenges together. As you may know, news and school guidance updates are changing on a near daily basis, which means a lot of effort is going towards operating within all the requirements, ensuring the highest health, safety and wellbeing measures are in place to keep our staff and pupils as safe as possible within school and delivering remote learning for all our pupils who are at home.

We are writing today to update you on the current picture.

Key worker provision: The latest update at the weekend, “Your child’s school or college will speak to you to identify whether your child needs to attend. You should keep your child at home if you can.”

Despite phrasing often used in the news, schools have never closed, and the amount of work going on behind the scenes is truly monumental. We really want to acknowledge the tremendous efforts of our staff and thank them for their dedication to the children. No one wants the current situation. It would be so much easier if we were able to operate as normal and we could have every child learning in the classroom. As much as we want normality, it simply is not possible at this time and more than anything we must keep our staff, children and their families as safe as we possibly can. The new variant of COVID-19 spreads infection at an easier and faster rate, leading to intense pressure on the NHS. Our borough of Barking and Dagenham has particularly high rates of infection with our local hospitals full and struggling to cope with demand. The government has put us all into another lockdown because they now need to use every lever possible to reduce all social contacts wherever possible.

Guidance for schools says the overarching principle to apply at the moment is “reducing the number of contacts between children and staff” and says that “where possible schools should keep group sizes small.” Whilst children are less likely to display symptoms of COVID-19, they are still able to spread it to each other, to teachers and back home to their families. We must ensure we are limiting contacts as much as possible to keep people as safe as possible. The whole point of lockdown is to stop the spread. This may mean that in line with our risk assessments, if it becomes a challenge, we may, at times, need to make adjustments and prioritise key worker provision places, such as for those working in health and emergency services.

Our school has a significant number of children classed as vulnerable, whether because of complex needs, safeguarding issues or other important reasons. We want to also have space for as many key worker children as possible, however this may not always be possible due to health and safety reasons. We very much appreciate the complexities of working from home and managing remote learning (we are both parents of school age boys), but if you are working from home or have a safe childcare bubble, we are asking you if at all possible, to please keep your children at home to limit risks to health and safety for staff, pupils and other families. This is in line with government guidance which states, “parents and carers who are critical workers should keep their children at home if they can.” Health and safety must be our number one priority.

Remote learning: We know remote learning places pressure on you at a challenging time but your support in helping your child engage with it as much as possible is so important and we are incredibly grateful for it. We understand the challenges: for some children it is difficult to complete the work that the government requires for primary pupils (three hours per day for years 1 and 2, four hours per day for years 3, 4, 5 and 6); some families are concerned that maybe it isn't enough learning each day; and others are hoping to have live lessons available so their child can see their teacher. We know this may feel incredibly stressful, but we want to reassure you that you should not feel like you are doing it wrong or that your child is not keeping up well enough. These are extraordinary times and we do not expect it to be perfect.

There are different activities, subjects, and programme options for your child to make use of. The key thing is that you encourage them to engage with the different options and try to keep it as routine and low-pressure as possible. We aim to provide continued meaningful learning opportunities for all pupils, whether they are in school or at home. We are working towards including some short, live online sessions led by teachers, enabling pupils to see their teacher and learn some of the key concepts they will be using for that day's remote learning. The timing and frequency of live lessons may vary, but your child's year group will keep you informed if and when this is possible.

We can assure you teachers are working hard to plan and deliver sessions effectively, manage the provision for vulnerable pupils in school and provide everything families will need to engage with learning flexibly each day. The expectations for teachers have never been greater and we are working hard to support each other in managing these competing pressures. We are keeping all remote learning under constant review to ensure we are delivering the highest quality education possible during these extraordinary times.

If you would like additional learning opportunities, we can recommend the easy-to-navigate online Oak National Academy or the new BBC Teach Live Lessons which will be available on their website and on television from this week. The BBC will run a three-hour block of primary school programming on CBBC from 9am – including BBC Live Lessons and BBC Bitesize Daily, as well as other educational programming such as Our School and Celebrity Supply Teacher. (If you also have a secondary-aged child, BBC Two will provide at least two hours of content each weekday for secondary students to support the GCSE curriculum). Bitesize Daily primary and secondary will also air every day on BBC Red Button and episodes will be available on demand on BBC iPlayer.

We have been more successful than many schools in obtaining devices for pupils who are unable to access online learning at home. We have received 87 laptops from the government which we have been distributing to our families who have indicated that they do not have a device. (We continue to check on a daily basis whether there is further availability of laptops from the government.) We are also ensuring that our children who are working remotely are not going hungry by supporting families with food vouchers and hampers.

Thank you again for all your support and understanding. We look forward to welcoming all our pupils back into school again when it is safe to do so, but in the meantime, we will support you as much as we can so we can all work together for our children.

Stay safe and healthy.

Kind regards,



Selina Frazer and Michael Kaitell,  
Headteacher and Deputy Headteacher.