

2nd February 2021



Dear Parents,

We hope you are all keeping well and continuing to manage in these uncertain times.

Further to the Prime Minister's recent announcement, you will be aware that schools will continue to remain closed for most children and the government has indicated that it hopes that it will be safe to commence the re-opening of schools from Monday 8 March. We understand that this latest news will continue to have an impact on you and your family – our thoughts and best wishes are with you all. We recognise that these are extremely difficult and worrying times and that families will be continuing to adapt to different ways of living and working alongside supporting their child/ren at home. **We are most grateful for all you are doing to support your child's learning at home and the support you have shown the school.**

National School Closures and Provision for Critical Worker and Vulnerable Children

The government guidance continues to indicate that we all need to do what we can to reduce the spread of Coronavirus [Covid-19]. With the high infection rates locally, including the more highly transmittable and potentially serious variants of Coronavirus, the first and overriding principle is for everyone to stay at home. Parents have been asked to keep their children at home and for schools to remain open only for those children who absolutely need to attend.

The school will continue to provide care for those children who are most vulnerable and for children whose parents are **critical** to the Covid-19 response. **Government guidance states that parents who are critical workers should keep their children at home if they can. It is important that children attend school only for you to complete your work as a critical worker and there is no other alternative.** We appreciate the challenges this brings, but to keep everyone as safe as we can, we need to reduce the overall number of social contacts/interactions in our community. We are grateful that many parents who are working have been able to ensure their child/ren are kept at home. **We continue to ask all families to consider whether their child/ren need to attend school.** Please consider whether your child/ren can remain at home or at the very least reduce the time they attend school. **The guidance outlines that every child who can be safely cared for at home should be, so that everyone including children, parents and staff are at less risk of exposure to the virus.** Your support is much appreciated.

The school will be closed over the half term for all children and we hope everyone has the opportunity to have some rest and relaxation.

Contact Tracing by the School over the Half Term Break

We very much hope that everyone remains safe and well. We have been advised by the Department for Education that schools will need to be available for contact tracing during the half term break, **for those children and staff currently attending school.** During the school holidays, the school will monitor office emails. It is important that **if your child tests positive, having developed symptoms within 48 hours of being in school, that the school is informed,** so that we can take appropriate actions in conjunction with the Department for Education, Public Health England and the Local Authority, including advising the relevant close contacts of the need to self-isolate. If your child develops their symptoms more than 48 hours after being in school [from Monday 15th February onwards], the school will not be required to carry out contact tracing.

If your child or a member of your household tests positive for Coronavirus, it is still important that you inform the school of the positive case, so that we can agree with you when your child will be able to return to school. You should contact the school by email in this circumstance. We appreciate your support in helping us to sustain the health, safety and wellbeing of our whole school community.

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Remote Learning

Remote learning is continuing to be provided for all those children not attending school and we would like to thank parents for the wonderful support they are providing for children during periods of home learning. We recognise that families will be facing many pressures during these times, and we would like to reassure all families that whatever you can do to support your child's learning will be of great value, even if not all sessions provided can be completed. We do not anticipate that you can fully replicate the typical school day or all the activities/ events that the children would usually engage in during an ordinary school week. Please do not worry if you are not able to do everything.

In addition to your child's daily sessions, your child's teacher or a member of the staff team will also endeavour to make regular telephone contact with each family whose child/ren are based full time at home, so that links between school and home are maintained. This week, staff will be continuing to contact families by telephone. As you are aware, children are also able to participate in regular live video sessions with their teachers and a small group of their peers - the third of these opportunities will be provided next week. You may also wish to use the class email contact if you have a question about how to support your child's home learning. Teachers will endeavour to get back to you as soon as possible, but please be patient when awaiting a response, as the teachers will be continuing to teach in school, alongside preparing resources for home learning.

As you are aware, the school is continuing to care for a significant number of children in school and as you will appreciate, this poses challenges for the school in terms of providing for those children attending school, as well as for those children learning remotely. Despite these challenging circumstances, we can assure you that we are making every effort to ensure high quality provision for all Rushcombe children. Please also be aware that arrangements may be subject to change due to issues, such as, staff absence and other unforeseen circumstances.

Emotional Health and Wellbeing

During these difficult and concerning times, it is important that we all take care of our mental health. This means helping and supporting our children, as well as thinking about our own mental health as adults. As time goes on, you may be noticing signs of increasing anxiety, frustration or lack of engagement in your child as they spend more time indoors and outside of their normal routines. Children may pick up bits of information from the news, the internet and from listening to others talking around them – but they can misunderstand what they are hearing or reading so it is important to talk to them about what is happening and share age appropriate information. You may wish to encourage children to express their emotions. The theme of this year's Children's Mental Health Week is 'Express Yourself'. Expressing yourself is about finding ways to share feelings, thoughts, or ideas, through creativity. This could be through art, music, writing and poetry, dance, drama and physical activity, photography and film, and doing activities that make you feel good. You may wish to refer to some of the links below:

Information about Children's Mental Health Week.

<https://www.childrensmentalhealthweek.org.uk/>

Guidance from the charity Mind about mental wellbeing during the coronavirus pandemic.

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing/#collapse8dd00>

Guidance from Unicef about how to talk to your child about coronavirus.

<https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/how-talk-your-child-about-coronavirus-covid-19>

If you are worried about your child's anxiety, **YoungMinds**, is a charity dedicated to children's mental health. They have opened a [parents' helpline](#) for confidential, expert advice. You can reach them at 0808 802 5544.

If your child would like to speak with someone confidentially, there are helplines and websites specifically for them, such as, ChildLine, a confidential telephone counselling service for any child with a problem. Call 0800 1111 any time for free, so they can have an [online chat with a counsellor](#) (9am to midnight daily).

In addition, the East Dorset Children's Centres Team, have provided the following link to their 'Action for Children 'TALK' services for Parents'

<https://parents.actionforchildren.org.uk/>

Listening Service for Anyone Affected by Covid-19

Maybe you could benefit from a **one-off chat** with someone who has professional training. Contact Psychotherapy Dorset and someone will call back offering to listen and speak for 50 minutes. The service is designed to help people share some of the impact that the current situation is having on them and to regain some sense of control. This is not an advice service nor counselling or therapy. **Call 07714 330120 or go to the website: www.psychotherapydorset.co.uk**

Vulnerable and Key Worker Children - Drop Off and Collection

Vulnerable and key worker children will continue to be able to attend school each day from 8.30 am – 3.05 pm. A reminder that drop off and collection times have been adjusted following national school closures, and that children should be dropped off between **8.30 am – 8.45 am** and picked up between **2.50 pm – 3.05 pm**.

When dropping off or collecting your child from school, please adhere to the following safety measures:

- **Continued use of the one-way system on the playground.**
- **Maintaining strict and appropriate social distancing at all times.**
- **Utilising a face mask/cover during drop off and collection times [unless you have a pre-existing health condition].**
- **Ensuring only one person accompanies your child to school [avoiding extra people accompanying your child to school where this is not necessary].**
- **Continued use of the red lines outside each year group to queue for drop off/collection, ensuring that parents do not come any further forward than the red line nearest to your child's year group entrance - this is to ensure appropriate social distancing for both parents and staff.**
- **Ensuring your time on the school grounds is as short as possible, including avoiding congregating with other parents/families. This includes ensuring that the area around the school gates are kept clear and that pathways around the school [including the pathways outside the main gates and around the car park] are used for socially distanced entry and exit purposes only.**
- **If you have any messages for your child's teacher, please contact them via the school office email, rather than relaying messages on the door in the morning.**

The school will endeavour to remain open for vulnerable and critical worker children, however, if there are confirmed case/s or insufficient safe staffing levels, the school may have to close or partially close for a period of time. The school will keep parents updated with any decisions by parentmail as soon as they can.

Coronavirus - Minimising Risk to the School Community

With the significant increase in local and national infection rates, including the more highly transmittable variant of Coronavirus, **it is essential that we are all even more vigilant to avoid the spread of the virus and ensure the health and safety of our whole school community.** Everyone's support in minimising the possibility of anyone becoming unwell and the need to self-isolate, is important.

As a school community working together, we can also reduce the risks by:

- **making sure that children and staff do not attend school if they or a member of their household has symptoms of coronavirus – it will be necessary to send a child/adult home if they become unwell**
- **self-isolating if you or anyone in your household has symptoms of Covid-19 immediately and booking a test for anyone with symptoms - if you are waiting for a test result you and your whole household must self-isolate until you get the result**
- **if you or someone in your household receives a positive test result or have been identified as a close contact, you must self-isolate for the required time period and advise the school**
- **expecting everyone to continue to follow the guidance in and out of school regarding contact and social/physical distancing, including wearing facemasks where required and particularly when the appropriate social distancing is difficult to maintain**
- **promoting regular hand washing for at least 20 seconds with water and soap or use of sanitiser and ensuring good respiratory hygiene by promoting the catch it, bin it, kill it approach**

We appreciate your support in helping us to sustain the health, safety and wellbeing of our whole school community.

School Office and Messages for Staff

A reminder that **the school office is only partially open to parents and visitors and we ask that you refrain from visiting the school office wherever this can be avoided. In the first instance, we request that all communications are made via email or phone to the school office**, including any messages for your child's teacher. A telephone appointment to speak with a member of staff will be made for you if necessary. If you need to visit the school office for essential reasons [or if agreed with a member of the school office], the entrance area has been marked with physical/social distancing demarcations and there is a taped line by the office window to ensure the appropriate social/physical distance is in place. In the office foyer, there are two boxes/containers, one for paperwork, such as, letters/permission slips, and one for objects/parcels. Entrance to other areas of the school will not be permitted, unless by prior agreement/appointment. We would be grateful if you could wear a face mask/covering when visiting the school office, unless you have a medical exemption.

Coronavirus [Covid-19] Guidance [Please see separate information letter for more details.]

Please remember that if your child or any member of the household have symptoms of coronavirus infection [COVID-19], **however mild**, you will all need to stay at home for 14 days from when the symptoms started. The most common symptoms of coronavirus [COVID-19] are:

- **High temperature [feels hot to touch on the back or chest – a temperature of 37.6 degrees and above]**
- **New continuous cough [this means coughing a lot for more than an hour, or 3 or more coughing episodes in 24 hours (if you usually have a cough, it may be worse than usual)]**
- **Loss or change to your normal sense of smell or taste [anosmia]**

More details of the symptoms can be found: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/symptoms/>

It is important that anyone with symptoms is tested. If your child presents with Covid-19 symptoms, they will not be able to come to school and you should book a test. A test can be booked or ordered online via NHS UK, using the following link: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/testing-for-coronavirus/> **It is essential that the school is advised of the test outcome.** Where the child or staff member tests negative, they can return to school, if they are well enough, and the fellow household members can end their self-isolation. If there is a confirmed case in school, it may be necessary for other children/groups of children and staff to isolate at home. We will work closely with Public Health England who will advise us of the course of action.

If your child appears to present with any of these symptoms when they are in school, we will contact you and you will be advised to follow the [COVID-19: guidance for households with possible coronavirus infection guidance](#).

You can seek further medical advice from NHS 111 and you can also use the Department for Education coronavirus helpline, which is available to answer questions about COVID-19 on T: 0800 046 8687. The helpline is open between 8am to 6pm (Monday to Friday) and 10am to 4pm (Saturday to Sunday).

The school will endeavour to remain open, however, if there are confirmed case/s or insufficient safe staffing levels, the school may have to close or partially close for a period of time. The school will keep parents updated with any decisions by parentmail as soon as they can. If in the event that children have to self-isolate at home or that our school has to be partially/closed, teaching staff will provide home learning for each child/year group via Microsoft Teams.

Support and Information

Please see the following link for additional information and guidelines about Coronavirus and a confidential helpline number for those who may need advice if you are worried about work and/or money. If you need help with access to food, warm clothes or need someone to talk to then support is available.

<https://mailchi.mp/dorsetcouncil/latest-coronavirus-covid-19-news-and-information-17-march-3121566>

[Find out about support available](#)

In addition, as part of the COVID Winter Grant, Dorset Council have funded Citizen's Advice to help families with the cost of utility bills. They can make rapid £200 payments to support families, as well as connecting to additional areas of help. You can apply online [Get help with your utility bills - Dorset Council](#) or by ringing 01929 408950.

Finally

A reminder that the school will be closed over the February half term for all children and we hope everyone has the opportunity to have some time to rest and relax. We wish you a good half term break. The school will reopen on Monday 22nd February for those vulnerable and critical worker children who need to attend school and remote learning will commence again.

Once again, I would like to thank you for your continued support, understanding and patience as we deal with this ever changing, difficult and complex situation. By working together, we hope that we can ensure the health and safety of our whole school community. We will continue to keep you updated as the situation develops and more information is available

I would like to thank the staff for their ongoing hard work, commitment and dedication this term.

Our thoughts and best wishes are with you all.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "C Mahon". The letters are cursive and slightly slanted to the right.

Mrs C Mahon
Headteacher