



Childwall Church of England Primary School

A Voluntary Aided School, founded by the Trustees of Salisbury House. Within the Diocese of Liverpool

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Friday 8th January 2021

Dear Parents/Carers

We are now three days into the most recent national lockdown and this new phase of blended learning, with some pupils attending school and others learning from home. Apologies in advance for the length of this letter, but this is a complex situation, which we must discuss fully in the interests of honesty and transparency. As you know, this situation happened very suddenly for all and we were given very brief guidance as to who should and should not attend school. The intention of the government is for **most pupils** to temporarily cease to attend school and, as such, a legal alteration to the attendance requirement of the Education Act 1996 was made and signed by Nick Gibb on 6th January 2021. Please see paragraph below stating the purpose of school closure for most pupils:

“An increase in the rates and means of transmission of coronavirus make it necessary to take further measures to reduce transmission. On 4th January 2021 the Prime Minister announced a national lockdown in England to begin on 5th January 2021. In light of the level and seriousness of risk and having considered advice and information from the Scientific Advisory Group on Emergencies, the Chief Medical Officer, the Joint Biosecurity Committee and Public Health England, the Secretary of State has decided that it is appropriate for most pupils to temporarily cease to attend school. The purpose of this measure is to reduce rates of transmission by reducing the number of contacts among pupils and between pupils and staff at school, and between pupils and others while travelling to and from school and while at home and in the community.” (Secretary of State for Education – 6th January 2021)

Critical Workers

As you are aware, school is still required to provide essential accommodation during the school day for children of critical workers. This is intended for children of parents whose work is **critical to the current emergency situation**. Whilst there is an extensive list of occupations who might fall into that category, depending upon an individual's actual role, the true intent of lockdown, as stated by the Secretary of State, is to reduce transmission by reducing numbers of contacts. The initial brief guidance issued on 4th January stated that only one parent is required to be a critical worker. We are aware that, around the country, some local authorities and some individual schools have specified both parents (or one parent in a lone parent household). Liverpool local authority has not, as yet, taken that stance, awaiting further government guidance. The full guidance from government came to us late yesterday afternoon and the situation is still that only one parent or carer needs to be a critical worker. I would like to draw attention to the wording of this paragraph:



And The Child Grew... Luke 2:40

*“Critical workers parents whose work is critical to the coronavirus (COVID-19) and EU transition response include those who work in health and social care and in other key sectors. Children with at least one parent or carer who is a critical worker can go to school if required. This includes parents who may be working from home. Schools should speak to parents and carers to identify who needs to go to school. If it proves necessary, schools can ask for simple evidence that the parent in question is a critical worker, such as their work ID badge or pay slip. **Parents and carers who are critical workers should keep their children at home if they can.**”*

South Liverpool has a disproportionately high percentage of parents whose roles might be listed on the extensive employment list. Consequently, whilst the government intent is for **most** children to be at home, we recognise that our numbers in school would be higher than average. On Wednesday, the average for primary children attending in school was 20%; our school had 54% in attendance on that day (the highest in the city) and the request for places is rapidly increasing.

Given that the aim of school closures is to reduce contacts among pupils and between pupils and staff at school and between pupils and others while travelling to and from school, I would respectfully request that you consider whether a critical worker school place for your child is **essential**. The new variant is highly transmissible, and therefore limiting contact is the only way to bring down transmission. We currently have 60% of pupils in school which gives us concerns that inevitably, with such high numbers, we may soon be required to isolate bubbles as we encounter positive cases, thus causing further problems for those engaged in roles critical to the Covid 19 response.

Until I am guided otherwise, either by the local authority or central government, I cannot and will not turn children away provided they meet the criteria of one critical worker parent. However, as parents, you are in the best position to fully consider your family circumstances and judge whether the place is essential and whether your working role, at this time, **is critical to the coronavirus (COVID-19) and EU transition response**.

Vulnerable Children

Again, the government interpretation of vulnerable children is very open to interpretation. We know our children and our family circumstances very well and the widening of the vulnerable definition has been to allow schools to offer places to children who might not have fitted previous criteria relating to social worker involvement. We have contacted and offered places to children for whom we consider attendance at school is essential for their additional needs. However, we have families requesting places because their children are missing friends or finding it difficult to adapt to working at home. We are very mindful of the social and mental health impact of the past 10 months on **all** children and it is something we deeply regret. As a parent myself, I personally share your concerns about the psychological impact of the pandemic on our children. That said, we cannot reduce transmission, and all return to school, unless we reduce contacts between pupils and others and between families while travelling to and from school.

And The Child Grew...Luke 2:40

We are in a much better position now than we were several months ago to support your children at home. Seesaw is fully set up and all children should have access – please let me know immediately if you are struggling with access – either because of technical issues or lack of a device. We are arranging Zoom sessions so children at home can still talk to school staff. If a child has a problem with any aspect of work, they can comment on Seesaw and their teacher, or another member of staff will help them, much as they would if they were in school.

Blended Learning

Our teachers and teaching assistants are doing an incredible job for all our children but if they continue to be required to supervise 60% + of our children, this will have an enormous impact on their ability to keep planning and providing that high quality blended education provision. They are currently immensely stretched and the demands on the staff of having to provide the high quality education both remotely and within school may not be sustainable, particularly if staff also experience Covid illness or have to self-isolate. We recognise the fantastic job they are doing (as, of course, are so many of you currently carrying out critical worker roles).

I have been made aware that there are understandable concerns amongst you, as parents, that, if your child is not in school, they risk falling behind their peers in school in their learning. Indeed, I know of situations where close comparisons are being made and children being questioned on just what exactly is taking place in school. Can I please give my full assurance that we are all doing everything possible to ensure that the educational offer to all our pupils is **consistent and fair**. Our teachers are having to juggle both in class and home learning needs. **Consequently, children in school are not being directly taught in the way they would normally be doing**. Classes are frequently covered by learning assistants supervising the children as they access the same work, video explanations etc... as are being uploaded onto Seesaw. The additional intervention groups and small group work that would normally happen in school is not taking place since teachers are also, in the school day, preparing, uploading and responding to the work on Seesaw. We do, obviously, speak to children in school, as you do to the children who are at home, but they are not getting different or better teaching. Again, can I reiterate that, if a child at home is unsure about something or needs a teacher's help, they should make that comment on Seesaw and we will respond as soon as we are able.

Some days your child will be set more activities than others as length of activities vary. For example, yesterday, one year group had 2 lengthy 'lessons' with multiple tasks. As a guide, children in key stage 1 should be engaged in learning for 3 hours daily and those in key stage 2 for 4 hours daily; this includes reading, times tables, spellings and various other 'continuous learning activities'. As always, if you have any questions, let us know on homelearning@childwallce.com

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Full Time/Part Time School Attendance

In line with guidance, we initially stated that a school place should be considered full time. However, we are now aware that we have a number of parents who are in definite critical worker roles but working part time. Whilst having children in and out of school is not ideal for consistency and does not, in itself, reduce any risk of transmission in school, since there are still potentially high numbers mixing in each class throughout the week, in adherence to government guidance that states, “**Parents and carers who are critical workers should keep their children at home if they can**” we are agreeing for children to just attend on essential days and access home learning on days when a place in school is not required.

I am praying for a swift resolution to this current emergency situation the country is in as, indeed, I am sure you all are too. As a school, we are obliged to follow central government and local authority guidance, whilst balancing the education of our children and the requirement to support parents whose role is critical to the Covid-19 response. This is not easy, and we appreciate that some parents may not be satisfied, but we hope that this letter will serve to explain our position.

As always, you are all in my prayers continuously and I live in hope that all of your family, friends and loved ones remain safe and well.

Kind regards

Wendy Mason

Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.
(Philippians 2: 4)

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