



Tuesday 12th January 2021

Dear Parents / Carers,

## Subject: URGENT Update on Critical Worker Status

With the first week of the current national lockdown complete, we are glad to have been able to settle smoothly into our remote learning protocol, offering in-school provision for our vulnerable children and those from our critical worker families whilst providing online remote learning to all of our pupils at home. We are aware that we are sending lots of communications and we appreciate the time you are taking to read through this information. We are sure this will settle down in the next couple of weeks.

I would however, like to draw your attention to the latest Coronavirus data in our local area and across the country. In Richmondshire, we are currently seeing high infection rates with 489 per 100,000 cases. This is up 63 in the last week, with 263 new positive cases in the last 7 days. Nationally, last week 417,570 people tested positive, there were 6,363 deaths and 24,292 patients with COVID admitted to hospital. This is why I am writing to you today with a plea for your support in the challenges we are facing in school and in our communities.



What is clear from last week, is that the number of pupils eligible to attend school under the critical worker provision is significantly higher than during the first lockdown. In comparison, at the start of the first lockdown, we had on average two socially-distanced groups of children accessing the site whereas today, we have at least double that. Given the direct messages around reducing contacts, this is a major concern. We therefore need to ensure that we can accommodate those most in need whilst recognising that we must continue to **do everything that we can to keep staff and pupils as safe as possible in school** in light of recent Coronavirus developments.



Department for Education

The guidance from the Department for Education has been updated in the last 48 hours reiterating that whilst children with at least one parent or carer who is a critical worker can attend face to face teaching in school if required, parents and carers who are critical workers should keep their children at home if they possibly can.

The simple message is; **if you are not at work then your child should be at home with you. Please reflect on this and look at booking a place for your child only for the times that you are out of the family home.**

The schools across the Garrison have been working closely with the Garrison Commander and the relevant MoD departments. There is a clear directive being sent, requesting they flexibly juggle the demands of home schooling and work. The Garrison Commander has also asked Units and the attached elements of the MoD (Aramark etc) not to issue a blanket organisational letter. Instead, there must be an individual letter stating why the named person is critical at this moment in time. Without this information, we cannot allocate a 'critical worker' place so please help us by giving us the information we need.



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For our part, we must stress that places in school for critical worker children are limited and we please ask that you only take up a place **if absolutely necessary**. As a community we must ensure that there is space for our healthcare workers' children, those MoD personnel undertaking COVID-related deployments and other vital roles that are actively helping to fight the pandemic. Many of our critical workers, particularly hospital and frontline medical staff, will be working additional hours and covering multiple shifts and we want to ensure that we prioritise those with the most urgent need.

Accordingly, **we are now asking you to review your needs and consider only sending your child to school if it is absolutely necessary** in order to carry out your critical worker role. We appreciate that a number of you have shared your personal information regarding critical worker status. However we may need to ask parents/carers to provide individual evidence of their critical worker status using the published guidance if we become overwhelmed by requests. Given the national severity of COVID-19 and the messages that further restrictions are highly likely, parents should discuss any continuing difficulties with their own employer's HR department and further investigate reasonable adjustments to working patterns in order to support. We are aware that a number of your roles are key and you will not be able to change. However, we know of some employers that place undue demands and stresses on people in their work settings even when those roles are not **'critical roles in relation to combating COVID-19'**.

It is our desire to accommodate parents' needs as far as we possibly can and within the published guidance whilst keeping children and staff in school safe but, just like other schools and yourselves, we are balancing very difficult priorities. While we have carried out all the required risk assessments and put the relevant procedures in place to keep our school and its community as safe as possible, if we can find ways to reduce the number of children in school on any day, this would reduce even further the risk of spreading infection.

**We will continue to review every child who has a place currently and apply the new guidance to any new requests. Please think carefully about asking for a place to help keep us all safe and quicken the reduction in cases across our community.**



Many thanks in advance for your support in this matter.



**Colin D Scott - Headteacher**

