

8th January 2021

Dear Families,

Thank you very much for your patience and support as we continue to work to put our offer in place in the light of Monday evening's announcement. As we face yet another period of uncertainty, I would like to take this opportunity to remind you that we will do everything we can to support all our families.

Clearly, there is an increased risk posed by the current virus and I urge you to keep yourselves and your families safe and support the national lockdown in order to combat the spread of this. I am sure we are all concerned by the increased rates of transmission and the serious consequences faced by so many.

At this time, our position is that all pupils and their families are safer at home and wherever possible this should be the situation; I would encourage you all to reflect on this.

The guidance has been very unclear to date as to what specialist settings should consider if they don't have the resources to offer full time provision for all and I know this has been confusing for families. The guidance that was finally released yesterday afternoon states the following, which very much applies to our setting:

"On occasion special schools may encounter circumstances where they cannot provide their usual interventions and provision at adequate staffing ratios, or with staff with vital specialist training. In these circumstances they should seek to resume as close as possible to the child of young person's specified provision as soon as possible. Pupil level risk assessments, which were used last spring, should not be used to filter children and young people in or out of attendance, but could be helpful to prioritise the provision a child or young person can get if full time provision for all is not possible."

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/950510/School_national_restrictions_guidance.pdf

During a meeting yesterday with 600 special heads from across the country, it was clear this is not an "on occasion" situation - all special schools are in the same position, where they can only currently accommodate 30-40% of pupils due to capacity and risk assessing. The vast majority of our students do not socially distance and the risks of transmission within our setting are such that opening to more students would deem us a potentially unsafe environment for students and staff.

We do not want to be forced to close entirely due to health and safety risks and are therefore putting in additional measures around pupil and staff numbers on site to ensure that we are able to stay partially open for as long as possible. I am sure you can appreciate the situation we are facing and I do understand that the guidance is confusing and really not appropriate or specific enough for specialist settings, and we are working with the local authority to ensure the DFE revisit this.



Majority of students in our school this week are children of critical workers, in order to keep the nation running in key areas. We have additionally made space for a few highly vulnerable students, however not as many as we would like and we are liaising with social care around the support they can provide at this time.

The definition for highly vulnerable in a specialist setting has been agreed by our local authority as follows and this is what all Cambridgeshire and Peterborough special schools are adhering to:

Highly vulnerable pupils in specialist settings are identified in the following way:

- ***Child Protection Plan***
- ***Child In Need Plan with Child Protection concerns***
- ***Looked after Children / Children in Care where the placement is unstable***

We understand that the current situation affects EHCP provision and therefore we will be drafting Section M documents for every child to reflect any amendments to provision during this time and this will be shared with you in due course by the class teacher.

I am deeply aware of the impact this situation has on all our families and realise that life becomes more difficult for everyone. We are busily preparing for our online learning to commence on Monday to ensure a substantial home education offer to students that cannot be accommodated on site.

My hope is that the restrictions we face can be eased as soon as possible with containment of the virus and we can see more pupils safely return to school.

As always, please do get in touch if you need to speak to us.

Yours sincerely,

Ruchi Datta
Headteacher

