

7th January 2021

Dear Families,

Re: National Lockdown – school/college provision**1. Rationale**

I am writing to update you on the message I gave in my video on Tuesday 5th January that The Rise would taking an educational approach in this period of national lockdown that reflected the approach taken in the lockdown in March.

I have prepared a video message with the same key points as this letter which can be watched here: <https://youtu.be/7q85QjhNcHQ>

The key message for this lockdown is:

- Stay at Home
- Protect the NHS
- Save Lives

We are aware that many of our parents and staff have very real concerns about the rates of infection in London, influenced by the vastly increased rates of transmission caused by a particular variant of the virus. There is genuine concern about the reducing ability of the NHS to meet the demands of the population.

As a specialist setting for vulnerable children the Government has asked that we remain open to all of our children and young people. However, while we await further guidance specifically for specialist settings, we have had make our own decisions.

After a thorough review and risk assessment of The Rise, we have concluded that this is not a tenable way of working for us. We are already operating with limited staffing and if we continue to operate as we were prior to Christmas it is entirely possible that we will find ourselves in the situation where we have to close the entire school.

Therefore, Ambitious about Autism have made the decision across all our schools and college that we will revert to the approach we used in the first lockdown period in March 2020. Many of our parents have already informed us of their preference to keep their child or young person at home for the moment. This is perfectly acceptable and we will mark the register as 'agreed leave of absence' which is in line with current guidance.

In all other cases we will now need to prioritise the children and young people of key workers and those we consider most vulnerable. **All other children and young people will access the same learning experience (a full timetable delivered via our VLE platform using Google) from home.**

I know this is not ideal, but, like many other specialist schools we are facing very difficult choices. I believe our decision means we can offer a sustainable model moving forward and some certainty in uncertain times and of course we'll review our approach regularly.

2. Our Educational Approach

Please see below for a summary of what our offer will look like during this time: we are committed to ensuring that those pupils who are learning from home are not disadvantaged in comparison to the small number of pupils who are learning from school.

- Whether pupils are learning from home or school they will access the same learning experience via the VLE.
- All interventions such as Mental Health First Aid, OT and SALT will be delivered remotely.
- We will facilitate social contact for the pupils via remote form times.
- In terms of contact, we will speak with you and your child at least twice a week.
- We will be contacting all families who are eligible for free school meals to supply vouchers as we've done since March.

3. Additional Information for those Learning from School

Please see below for a few key notices for the small number of families who are accessing a learning from school space:

- All pupils will enter via Gate 2.
- We are only offering packed lunches (eaten in the classroom) at this time.
- The school week has a small change. We will be closing at 2pm on Mondays in order to support the weekly testing of staff.

As I've written before, we intend to roll out testing to those pupils and families who want to be involved over the next few weeks. We will share more details before we do so.

As ever, the strength of The Rise stems from our ambition for children with SEND and a deep commitment that they deserve 'the best of both worlds' and in the support we receive from the community. We will do our very best to continue to deliver this ambition in these uncertain times, and thank you for your support.

Should you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Kind regards,

Helen Ralston
Head of The Rise School