Dear Parents and Carers,

Some important guidance was issued to schools from the government on April 19th relating to risk assessing the needs of your child whilst at home or in school during COVID-19.

**Risk assessing your child**

As you will be aware schools remain partially closed as the lockdown continues; smaller numbers of children in school means they are safer and allows us to continue to provide care for a limited number of children and young people (those who are vulnerable and those whose parents or carers are critical to the coronavirus response). At Birch Wood we have already done provisional risk assessments to determine whether children and young people will be able to have their needs met at home, and be safer there than attending an educational setting during COVID-19. However, following government guidance we will now be revisiting these initial risk assessments to check whether the decisions made initially will remain suitable over time. We will therefore be sharing a risk assessment with you and where appropriate your child over the next few weeks.

Where the risk assessment determines a child or young person with an EHCP will be safer at home, the Department for Education (DfE) recommends they stay at home. Where the risk assessment determines a child or young person with an EHCP will be as safe or safer at an education setting, DfE recommends they attend the education setting where possible and if the parent or carer agrees.

A risk assessment for a child or young person will need to balance a number of different risks, but the key question for us will always be the potential health risks to the individual from Coronavirus (COVID-19), particularly if they have any underlying health conditions.

At Birch Wood we have not had any families or students who have had a confirmed case of the Coronavirus. I truly hope this remains the case and am acutely aware that other special schools have not been so lucky and have had confirmed cases of Coronavirus within both their student and parent population.

One of the challenges for the special school community during this period remains that we cannot ensure that students socially distance whilst in school. A secondary issue is managing a student in crisis without appropriate PPE in school. As you can imagine both situations create questions for us when attempting to safeguard everyone.

Many children and young people with an EHCP can safely be supported at home, but often these decisions are difficult and need to be finely balanced; I believe that by continuing to work collaboratively we can seek to find the safest conclusion.

Your child’s class teacher or form tutor will be in contact over the coming weeks to discuss your child’s risk assessment, but if you have any questions in the meantime please do not hesitate to contact the senior leadership team via the advice and support email service. I’d also like to remind you of our ‘family listening service’ number which is **07915871046** 10am-4.00pm Monday to Friday.

Whether you child is accessing school or staying at home we seek to provide you with as much support as possible during this challenging time.

Stay safe and best wishes.

Yours faithfully,

Rosalind Hopkins

Headteacher