Dear Parents and Carers, April 6th 2020

My thoughts are with you all as we start a very unusual Easter break period, with a ‘lock down’ being in place across the country. As you will be aware we are only open over this period for the children of key-workers where they cannot look after their children safely at home. I am very grateful for families support with this as we aim to uphold social distancing measures and prevent the spread of infection. I am also very grateful to staff members who have volunteered to support the school being open over the last 2 weeks and also over the Easter period, which has involved in some cases staff having to limit their own contact with close family members and loved ones. I’d like to reassure you that we take staff well-being very seriously and seek to advise staff on the most up to date safety information whenever it becomes available.

I believe a special school community is truly unique and ‘special’ and this is something that has become even more evident to me over this period. Whilst many schools consider how to operate social distancing measures in the classroom, we know that it is virtually impossible in our environment and that it would simply mean we couldn’t fulfil our roles or meet all the student’s needs adequately. Our staff accept this and I for one find their dedication and passion for what they do astounding.

However, the fact is that it is simply safer for the majority of students (and staff) to be at home and we are incredibly mindful of the immense strain that this is putting families under. In fact anyone with young children who is trying to work from home will be finding family dynamics particularly tough right now, even without the added challenge of having family members with additional needs. Yet for me, the incredible part is how hard everyone in our school community is trying to support each other and keep each other safe, even when things are so very challenging.

I want to reassure you that our staff continue to work in the background thinking of new ways to support our students and their families, you really are ever present in our minds and definitely not alone. These are some of the things we are doing to support you:

* Regular contact via telephone and email from your child’s class/form teacher. (Please note as part of our safeguarding policy, staff will call on ‘no caller ID’ when making phone calls.)
* Continued support via our email service: adviceandsupport@birchwoodschool.co.uk which is supervised by myself as designated safeguarding lead and our deputy safeguarding leads (which consists of our senior leadership team)
* Resources, lessons and videos on the parent and student portals
Continued weekly contact from our school councillor for those students who have been receiving this support
* Remote contact from our independent Occupational Therapist for those students on their caseload and OT resources for all on our Parent Portal
* We have uploaded to our student portal sources of information relating mental health and wellbeing. A link has also been created on our website via ‘Key Information’ and then ‘Coronavirus Updates and Information’, which will take you to a range of resources including advice from the NAS.
* We have also uploaded to our website key information about keeping your child safe online, which is now increasingly important since many will be accessing educational material using the internet.

**After Easter**

* New support and listening phone line and WhatsApp messenger service for parents and students- details to be shared shortly.
* We will continue to review safety advice and information with regards to the virus and where ever our risk assessment allows we will aim to provide respite and child care support by having small numbers of students on site.
* Direct contact from our independent OT and SALT for those students on their caseload.

**Free School Meals**

* We are in the process of setting up a revised free school meal voucher service with Edenred, which the government announced late last week. Please download the school comms app wherever possible and ensure we have access to your email address to allow us to update your details with this system.

**Food Bank Information**

We have also been considering our other vulnerable families who may not have access to FSM vouchers or who cannot not get to the shops safely. Key information about local support for this can be found on our website via ‘Key Information’ and then ‘Coronavirus Updates and Information.’

Please do let us know at Birch Wood via your child’s class teacher or the advice and support email above if you are living outside Melton area and are struggling to get access to food and other essential supplies, we will endeavour to support you with this

**Scams**

* Sadly there are some scams trying to exploit the coronavirus pandemic, please be careful and watch out for:
* Emails asking for bank details because you qualify for FSM
* Phone calls purporting to be official bodies (such as HMRC, Sky, BT, etc.) asking for bank details

Citizens Advice has information on how to check for a scam: [https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/…/check-if-something-mig…/](https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/consumer/scams/check-if-something-might-be-a-scam/?fbclid=IwAR0BNY7CtbGH0v1nR1HlbT8dHGT0jTSIhfBhh8-jJ1aK7khWu1JwQ378yDU)

I will stay in touch with further whole school updates, please stay safe.

Yours Sincerely

Rosalind Hopkins

Headteacher