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Headteacher: Mr C King

28th January 2021

Dear Parents and Carers,

Schools have featured heavily in the news over the past few days and yesterday's announcement from the prime minister will have been received by our families in many different ways. On one hand I am disappointed that we won't all be back together at school sooner; however, it is reassuring to know that the government is working to keep our communities safe and setting out a clear route to schools reopening. Often you will be hearing school-related news before me but I do promise to keep you updated as soon as I receive any concrete information.

This week we have begun a programme of Lateral Flow Covid Testing among our staff team. The programme is designed to help identify team members who may have covid19 but are asymptomatic. The tests themselves are very similar to the covid tests done at test centres; however, these can be done at home and give a result within half an hour.

The tests will provide school with an added layer of security to our covid safety plans. By identifying a member of the staff team who is asymptomatic, we can help prevent the spread of infection throughout our school community. While there is a real benefit to testing of staff, it may well have an impact on families in our school; if we are alerted to an asymptomatic case as a result of a test, we may well need to close a bubble down at short notice.

Next week is Children's Mental Health Week. It is inevitable that working from home, being away from their friends and living in a national lockdown will have an impact on our children. As part of the week, each class will be doing some activities based around mental health and well-being. There are some resources that parents can access at:

<https://www.childrensmentalhealthweek.org.uk/parents-and-carers/>

While the activities are geared towards children, I would recommend them to adults as well. It is essential that we look after our own mental health during this crisis. I am very aware that I am doing a balancing act: on one hand I am a headteacher and I am expected to enforce and deliver a set of curriculum expectations to families; on the other hand, I am a parent of young children and understand the limitations of what can be realistically achieved at home. As a teacher with twenty years of experience, I want to share with you some secrets and experiences I have learnt over the years:

There have been many occasions when I have planned out what I think is going to be the best lesson ever. I've got my resources prepped, books set out and everything looks like it is going to be amazing. Then, when I've made a start, it all begins to go wrong. The children don't understand or they're tired or the work is too hard or what I thought was interesting isn't and they're bored or they just aren't in the mood. In these instances, I have learned that I just need to step back and take a breath. No amount of me driving a point home is going to have an impact on them. So I stop. We can always try again later or on a different day or in a different way. This was all happening in a lesson - I couldn't imagine trying to juggle it against a day of full time work and calls. *It is okay for you and your child to step back from the work if it is getting too much for you all at home as well.* Children are resilient and will catch up.

As a school leader, I always try to remember "be kind". Over the years as a teacher, I could really see the impact a few words or a phrase could have on a child or a member of staff. There is nothing worse than hearing from another teacher (I haven't heard this at Plaistow and Kirdford) "that class never behaved like that for me" or "they were doing so well when I taught them" - it quickly cut to my core and would sit with me for days. All of us at school and at home are working under a huge pressure at





the moment - many of us are caring for relatives or children or worried about the ones we love. Some of us won't have seen family for a year or won't be able to see our elderly relatives because of the lockdown. We are all in this together and it is vital that we support each other as we work our way towards schools coming back together. With most of our communication online and written, it is easy to click 'send' without considering the impact of our words or the tone in which they will be received. At the moment it is taking me twice as long to send messages because I want to be sure I get the tone right and not cause upset to others because I am frustrated or sad.

I was always jealous of other class teachers. When I first started teaching, there was always fierce competition around which class had the best displays or which class was getting the highest scores. I would often look at other teachers' displays and think "why hasn't my display turned out like theirs?" It took my very experienced mentor to point out to me that every class was different and I shouldn't be comparing my classes end points with other classes - I should be comparing my classes end points with their starting points. At home, it is really easy to compare ourselves to others in terms of school work and how our children are getting on. None of us really know each other's stories or starting points. As someone who has children at home as well, we have had to understand what is achievable for us in the day and we do our best - sometimes we get it all done, sometimes we don't, but when I look at how the day started, I am confident we've achieved something and at the moment that is positive and enough.

What I'm really trying to get at is that this is an imperfect situation and for every family it is going to be imperfect in different ways. It feels like we are all navigating our way down our own river and, just when we think we've got it sorted, we hit another set of rapids and everything in the boat is knocked about and put out of place. While we're in the rapids we need to remember that things will calm down again. We will have an opportunity to take stock and put things back together and have another go. It is important to remember that, while we are all in our own boats and on our own rivers, we are not alone. If ever you feel like things are difficult, you would like advice or you would like to have a chat, rant, cry or laugh then please do call us and we will always do our best to help.

As always, thank you for your support and kindness - we are lucky to have such an amazing community.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Charlie King". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Charlie King