



24th April 2020

Dear Parents and Carers,

Thank you to all our parents and carers who have understood the extraordinary pressure that frontline workers, including the teaching profession, are under during these unprecedented times. Like the virus, pressures are invisible and multiple in number; just because we do not see them it does not mean they are not happening.

As Governors we are clear that our ultimate objective is to support our staff to keep our children and our community hopeful, purposeful and most importantly safe. This pandemic has reminded us all of the importance of our 'Ewell Grove Spirit' – togetherness, compassion, equality and kindness is what will get us all through this crisis.

When I last wrote to you none of us could have conceived that we would be under lockdown with our families permanently at home. Whilst we could see it coming and make some preparations, nothing could prepare any of us for the reality of lockdown and the stresses it ultimately creates.

As I type this I am listening to my University son, his first year cut short, practising the trombone online with other trombone players and reflecting how lucky my children are to have personal space and access to technology to carry out their limited leisure activities and school tasks without sharing computer equipment or internet bandwidth. This poem, in various forms, is being shared on the internet and is a reminder that this is not a levelling pandemic.

I keep hearing that everyone is in the same boat. But it's really not like that. We are in the same storm yes, but we are not in the same boat.

Your ship can be shipwrecked and mine cannot. Or vice versa.

For some, quarantine is optimal and full of moments of reflection, of reconnection and peace. Life is easy in flip flops, with a glass of Coke or a cup of tea in hand.

For others, this is a desperate crisis. For others it is facing real loneliness. For some it means peace, rest time and a bit of a holiday.

For others, this is torture as they wonder how they are going to pay their bills.

Others were concerned about the bread for the weekend and if the pasta will last for a few more days.

Some were in their "home office" doing all they can to protect the company they work for and still do an honest day's work from home.

Others are looking through rubbish bins to survive.

Some want to go back to work because they are running out of money.

Others want to berate those who break the quarantine.

Some need to break the quarantine to stand in a queue at the supermarket. Others just really want to escape.

Others criticise the government for the queue at the shop and for all the uncertainty.

Some have faith in God and are patiently praying and waiting for miracles in 2020.

Others say the worst is yet to come and that's probably our reality.

So, friends, we are not in the same boat.

We are going through a time when our perceptions and needs are completely different.

And each one will emerge, in his/her own way, from that storm.

Some with a tan from their pool. Others with scars on the soul.

It is very important to see beyond what is seen at first glance. Not just looking, more than looking, actually seeing.

See beyond the political party, beyond religion, beyond the nose on your face.

Do not underestimate the pain of others if you do not feel it.

Do not judge the good life of others, do not condemn the bad life of others. Just don't be a judge. Let us not judge the one who lacks, as well as the one who exceeds him.

We are on different ships and all looking to survive. Let everyone navigate their route with respect, empathy, and responsibility. Stop the judgement and be kind.

So, having watched the latest scientific updates from Prof Whitty and as we all adjust to the blurring of the days of the week, and possibly weeks into months, I wanted to share an update about Ewell Grove's COVID-19 response.

The DfE have made it very clear that the core purpose of schools currently is to provide child care for the children of Critical Workers to enable them to go to work, and to provide care for those children who are deemed "vulnerable". The DfE's policy, made in these challenging times, means that all the usual methods of scrutiny are on hold, along with all demands for educational outcome data.

The key focus for our school leaders is finding ways to ensure those children whose family circumstances or learning needs are already compromised, are not compromised further as a result of not being in school. This is a challenge and one which draws heavily on the existing strong relationships between staff and families they work with. Over the Easter holidays the school was not open due to the very low level of need. However the staff were working every day, delivering food parcels to our vulnerable families, working with the LA ensuring schools and pupils in other parts of our county were supported and cared for, ensuring that staff facing challenging personal circumstances never felt alone and equally trying to give time and consideration to their own families.

Like health professionals and social workers, teachers see and are privy to many things they wish they were not and know what can happen when things go wrong. We are privileged that Ewell Grove's school leaders are nationally recognised and expected to work within the wider education environment – especially in times of need. In return our school benefits from the insight gained from a clear view of the regional and national picture. We must listen to our professional staff and trust that all decisions they take are for a reason.

As Governors we discuss and challenge many key decisions and have done for many years. We are confident that our trust is not misplaced. As Governors we work or have worked in a wide range of institutions, many of us at very senior levels. We are wise to what effective decision making looks like. We do this invisibly, but we do it regularly. We hope that you will continue to support us so we can support our staff – for as long as this may take.

Ewell Grove has explored numerous plans to try to keep learning opportunities available to all pupils. We have been asked if the school can do video recordings to go out to the children from their class teachers. This is not something that we have ever done, and we will continue to follow the same safeguarding procedures (in their widest sense) to protect all involved with the school, not just the pupils. The safety and mental wellbeing of our staff is of utmost importance at this time.

The professionalism of our staff and teachers can make us forget that they have the same worries, concerns, and anxieties as the rest of us and are working to keep their boat afloat at the same time as your child's. We asked the relevant authorities, just this week, if we could organise for a class at a time to come in to school and do a book exchange, with very clear guidelines and safety protocols. However, under the current lock down rules this was not permitted – this may change over the coming weeks and we will continue to look for ways for pupils to maintain their connection with the school and their teachers.

Inevitably there have been occasions where parents have felt their personal expectations are not being met. To those parents who are tempted to offer criticism or demand more or less, I ask that you reflect before you hit the “send” on that email. It is vitally important that we all keep perspective on this. Very few people today have ever lived through a pandemic so you must consider the impact dealing with such emails has on our already overwhelmed and stretched staff. Every child in the country is in the same position. Every school leader, every teacher and every parent or carer ultimately should know that there will inevitably be the need for a period of readjustment when our children return to school; whenever this eventually maybe. There may be gaps...these will be filled; there may be trauma... this will be supported. Whatever happens I have every confidence in the skill and talent of our staff to do whatever is necessary for our community, and the individuals within it, efficiently and effectively when our school reopens.

It has been lovely to see the messages, photos and idea swaps on the FOEG Facebook pages and we know that you are all working so hard to look after your families. In the [newsletter](#) at the end of term the school highlighted the new class newsletters the first of which will go out this week. These will provide the voice of our staff to your children, as well as include images sent in by the pupils. Please read these with your children and encourage them to feature in the coming editions.

Thank you all for your continued support – togetherness is our best light through this pandemic.

Mrs Rachel Tillen
Chair of Governors