Dear Parents and Carers,

The school will officially close today for the vast majority of pupils.

However, the government has requested schools continue to provide a skeleton service to care for the children whose parents work is critical to the COVID-19 response or are ‘vulnerable’.

Fulfilling the government’s request is particularly challenging. Staffing numbers in school will be a constant and changing consideration due to the self-isolation of those who must self-isolate due to illness, family illness or because they fall into the ‘vulnerable group’ (those at higher risk from the virus).

**Government guidance issued yesterday clearly states:**

* As a country, we all need to do what we can to reduce the spread of the COVID-19 virus. **(Social distancing is at the heart of this response.)**
* The government has asked parents to **keep their children at home, wherever possible,** and

Schools to remain open **only for those children who absolutely need to attend.**

* The **fewer children making the journey to school, and the fewer children in educational settings, the lower the risk that the virus can spread** and infect vulnerable individuals in wider society.
* The government has given clear guidance on [self-isolation](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/self-isolation-advice/), [household isolation](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance) and [social distancing](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for-vulnerable-people).
* The most recent scientific advice on how to further limit the spread of COVID-19 is clear. **If children can stay safely at home, they should, to limit the chance of the virus spreading.**
* Schools are, therefore, being asked to continue to provide care for a limited number of children – children who are vulnerable and children whose parents are critical to the COVID-19 response **and cannot be safely cared for at home. Every child who can be safely cared for at home should be.**

St John’s will be setting up a reduced childcare provision. Parents may be eligible if they work in one of the critical sectors **and** your child cannot be kept safe at home. (E.g. one parent works in the frontline NHS but the other does not work in a ‘critical sector’ then your child should **stay at home**.)

If you contacted school yesterday to say that you believed you were a key worker, or now the government has published a list of who it believes is critical to the response to COVID-19, you believe you qualify as a key worker, please consider **very carefully** the bullet points above.

For your family’s safety and that of the wider community, you should **only** request your child attend school if there is no other safe option. This is likely to be the case if both parents are in the critical group (e.g. 2 police officers.)

Government guidance says *‘If workers think they fall within the critical categories they should confirm with their employer that, based on their business continuity arrangements, their specific role is necessary for the continuation of this essential public service.’*

The link below contains information for parents:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/closure-of-educational-settings-information-for-parents-and-carers/closure-of-educational-settings-information-for-parents-and-carers>

Further guidance including information about critical workers:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-educational-provision/guidance-for-schools-colleges-and-local-authorities-on-maintaining-educational-provision>

The government’s list of critical sectors is extensive. In managing how many children we can safely care for, we may have to prioritise which children we can safely support. I will be looking at how many children that is currently and will be in contact with those parents who have told me that they are in the critical group later today.

All children of critical key workers in school will be looked after in one area and guided to access the online learning teachers are providing daily. Your child’s teacher will not necessarily be in school, as we will be operating with skeleton staff. We will be encouraging social distancing between the children at all times where possible.

If you no longer believe that you need to be on the school’s list please contact the school office or email admin@stjohnsboll.cheshire.sch.uk to let us know.

Sending love and best wishes to all of our school family in these difficult times,

Melanie Walker.