



Dear Parents and Carers

Re: Partial School Closure - 18th March 2020

I am writing, as promised to update you on the current situation at Rackham and our position regarding school closure.

At Rackham, we understand fully the numerous reasons why it is important for us to stay open. We are mindful of the strain on public services like the NHS that would be caused by key workers having to stay home and look after their children as a result of a school closure. We are a public body and are likely to be considered as more of a front-line emergency service in this respect. As such, we will be doing everything possible to ensure Rackham remains open in these difficult times.

With that said, I have a duty of care to protect the staff workforce and ensure our staff are not putting themselves or their families at risk. It is essential that our staff are kept safe (as far as possible) so that they can continue to trust the leadership of our school and will continue to demonstrate their amazing levels of dedication once ordinary school life returns.

Although the government are advising the working population to work from home and against mass gatherings, I feel that the education workforce has been overlooked and placed in a vulnerable and unacceptable position where they too could be exposed to transmission of the virus on a daily basis by coming into contact with children and families. We take the safety of all our staff equally and any member who has fallen into the 'at risk' category has been instructed to stay at home. This has obviously had considerable implications on our ability to provide adequate provision for all pupils at Rackham. Our pupil numbers were reduced today by a third due to pupils staying at home with either symptoms or being in the vulnerable group of medical implications. By comparison, our staffing workforce has been reduced by over two thirds.

We are incredibly thankful to those staff who are willing to work above and beyond in order to ensure our school remains open. Tomorrow, we will be running our school with a significantly reduced number of Rackham teachers. We are fortunate in that we have a regular Rackham supply teacher and two TA's who are able to teach classes and support these teachers. In addition to this we have three TA's who are still able to work in school. We are limited on dinner staff and also on cleaning staff so teaching staff and TA's will be picking up numerous other duties outside of their classroom role. Office staff remain strong but are under considerable pressure.

I have today spoken with our Chair of Governors and to those staff who are still able to come into school and we have decided that tomorrow Rackham will remain open for Years 1-6. Children will be placed into mixed classes and there will be two teachers per year team phase (1-2, 3-4, 5-6). I must stress to all parents and carers that this is a very fluid plan and would urge everyone to anticipate regular changes as the days progress.

With this in mind, I would like to re-iterate to all parents and carers that if you are worried - keep your child at home. Parents should make their own decision. Whatever decision you make will have my full support. Under these exceptional circumstances it will not affect their register mark. We all have a duty of care to protect our children and also our wider community and I will not be making that task difficult for anybody.

I am saddened to have to write that we are now at the stage where it is necessary for me to politely ask parents to consider whether they are perhaps able and willing to support our efforts to remain open by keeping their

child at home. We understand this may not be possible and it is certainly not an expectation, but insufficient staffing levels may necessitate closure should our pupil numbers remain as they are. We are trying to do all we can to avoid complete school closure so that those parents and carers who are key workers can continue to work and support the nation at this critical time.

We are using a phased plan for partial closures as follows:

Phase 1 – School open as normal

- All pupils attend if well
- All staff attend if well

Phase 2 – Staffing is predicted to be low

- School will be open to KS1 and KS2 with EY notified to stay at home
- All non-self-isolating staff and staff not considered vulnerable will attend school

Phase 3 – Staffing is predicted to be critically low

- School will be open to KS2 only
- All non-self-isolating staff and staff not considered vulnerable will attend school

Phase 4 – Insufficient staff for safe opening of the site

- School will be closed to all children except those with parents/ carers who are considered Key Workers. This will be an effort to reduce further stress on our emergency services.
- All non-self-isolating staff and staff not considered vulnerable will attend school

Phase 5 – The school has been instructed to close by LA/Government

- The school will be closed to all children and staff
- All staff will be directed to work at home.

We plan to remain on Phase 2 on Wednesday 18th March but are very close to moving into Phase 3.

I must again thank you all for your kind words of thanks and support during this difficult time. Community support makes a huge difference to the wellbeing of everyone at Rackham. Our teachers are working hard to ensure children's education is disrupted as little as possible and we feel so grateful that our parent community recognise this and are helping wherever possible.

Please keep each other safe. Check in on any elderly or vulnerable neighbours if you are able to. Your children are going to remember how their family felt during this time of crisis. They will be watching and learning from you. Show them how best to respond to stress, fear and uncertainty. Show them how to demonstrate calmness and resilience, kindness and compassion, love, hope and faith. Our children will be future leaders and this is always worth remembering.

I will keep you updated as and when we have further announcements. Please share this message to other parents and carers from Rackham to ensure the message is received by all.

Take care of one another,

Bridget Harrison.

