



Email Message dated: 10.01.2021

Dear Parents and Carers,

Thank you for not only your support but also your flexibility in coping with what has been an intense and concerning week, both in education and more globally. I know that change can be difficult for everyone, especially for some of our young people – as well as for parents and education staff. Nevertheless, we have collectively managed a move to a different form of education as positively as possible, and despite some teething problems in some areas, we are now fairly well established in both remote and on-site provision.

As you will know, we have an unusually high number of clinically vulnerable staff at Rackham, over 65%. During the previous lockdown, we were able to protect these staff members by enabling them to work from home, teaching and caring for our pupils remotely. Pupil numbers in school were considerably lower than they are this time where there has been a marked and significant increase of critical worker requests. In addition to this, due to the new variant and its increased transmissibility, our risk assessment for pupils and adults in school has even stricter social distance rules where children must sit 2 metres apart. As such, pupils in school have not been grouped together as they were in March and are instead remaining in their usual classrooms. This means that we need a teacher or adult in every classroom so you will notice that all Rackham staff are working in school. It is too difficult to draw lines between which staff members are more or less at risk and staff at Rackham have requested solidarity in this respect. They have adapted with very little notice to this new way of teaching. I know this collective mentality is matched by our parent community who are doing all they can to support us and I am hugely grateful.

It is crucial that we work hard to limit the chances of any bubble in school needing to close. Bubble closure will occur if a member of staff or pupil in the bubble test positive for Covid-19 or if we do not have enough staff to cater for the bubble. Sadly, I know lots of schools are having to close bubbles due to lack of staffing and I am so grateful to our Rackham team for doing everything they can to avoid this. We recognise that we have an important responsibility to support efforts to fight this virus by making the school available to children whose parents offer critical work towards our nation's Covid-19 response. We do not want to cause a divide between parents and the school, but we have to do everything we can to limit bubble closure as this will undoubtedly have a huge impact on parents' ability to continue their critical work. As such, I politely request once again that parents follow the guidance from our Government and keep their children at home if they are able. If in school requests become too high, health and safety will take precedence above all else and we will

have to start prioritising critical worker places in school. We will do all we can to avoid this eventuality.

Anxieties are running high for everyone across the nation and we at Rackham understand it is not only schools who are working at great risk to their own physical and emotional health. Coupled with this, Government announcements can and have done very little to allay staff fears about the virus in school and indeed have, for many staff, only served to increase frustrations and anxiety. These factors together can potentially make it all too easy for a divide to become apparent between schools and their communities. We want to do everything possible to ensure this does not happen at Rackham and so we will continue to be open and transparent about our current situation in the hope that we can trust our community to do the right thing.

Many of our bubbles are presently close to the limit of what we would consider safe in terms of social distancing in school. I understand very well how difficult it is to look after children whilst working from home. During the last lockdown, I was shielding and working from home with my two children, so I do not underestimate the enormity of such a challenge. We will do everything we can to support those parents who are finding themselves in this situation and with all staff working from school, we are better placed to offer this.

I think it is key for parents who are worried about their children's learning to remember that children are often learning more than we realise about kindness, tolerance, empathy and patience. You are, and always have been, your child's primary educator. If you decide that your child is going to spend the entire session playing in the garden, or baking, or watching TV, then that is your choice. That is your right. There is nothing to feel guilty about whatsoever. Please bear in mind that the expectations set by the DfE for remote learning must be adhered to by the school, but this does not mean you have to complete it all. We will not penalise any family for being unable to complete work set, we will just offer help and support. Teachers worry that parents will complain they have not set enough work and so they are sending home what is expected of them, but please do not interpret this as an expectation on your part.

Remote Learning Provision.

Please read the attached letter from Miss Wakefield and Miss Turner which details how our remote learning provision differs across different key stages. We hope it will help to clarify our provision and help those few parents who have concerns about the complexity of the various platforms we are utilising. I would like to thank our senior leaders for working hard

to streamline our remote learning experience and working hard to support all staff in school to best support our children and their families.

Technology

We are aware that some families have limited access to IT resources and broadband for a whole variety of reasons, making it potentially difficult to access our remote learning. Thank you for completing our recent survey about this. We are working with local charities and the Local Authority to find a way to provide devices where necessary and I will write to you again about this soon. For information, the Government has recently announced a scheme by which the most disadvantaged families in receipt of Pupil Premium can request help to increase the mobile data allowances for children and young people who do not have fixed broadband at home and cannot afford additional data for their devices. We have some Vodafone Sim cards in school and we will be sharing more information about this soon.

I pay huge tribute to the hard work of the staff and the students, and to you the parents, for your support in helping us move rapidly to full “remote education” over the course of the week. I absolutely acknowledge the additional burden the closure of school buildings to most students will place on many. We will do all we can to support and keep students engaged in their learning, whether this be in school or at home.

As always, we will continue to keep in touch and update you on any important information over the coming weeks.

Mrs B Harrison
Headteacher