



Dear Parents/ Carers,

12th May 2020

As most of you are aware, I have only been headteacher at Rackham for 3 years. However, I have been fortunate enough to work with children for over 16 years in one capacity or another, and I have worked within school leadership for ten years. In this time, I have learnt two things; the first is to always be truthful no matter how hard it may seem, and the second is that when it comes to children, always think of the worst case scenario. With this in mind, today's letter is probably one of the most difficult letters I have had to write to parents.

You will all be aware of the Government's recent advice regarding continued social distancing in the workplace and in public but also a potential phased return to school for particular year groups. I think it is important to note that schools had no plans sent from the Government before the announcement on Sunday and no guidance from the DfE until after yesterday's evening briefing. Late last night we received a flourish of advice documents from the DfE which we are working through carefully. I include advice written specifically for parents and carers [here](#) and would urge you all to read it.

Currently, the advice is very confusing and in many places contradictory. We are working with the Local Authority and other schools in Cambridgeshire to risk assess and plan for our potential reopening. In addition to this, the Witchford Area Schools Partnership (WASP) Headteachers are working closely together to ensure consistency across our locality.

I must be transparent here and inform you that social distancing in a school is nigh on impossible; it does not exist currently, never has existed and probably never will exist. The reason childhood illnesses spread in a school is because we are all in contact with each other. We can put two children in opposite classrooms and they will still get Chicken Pox because that's how it is in a school. I'm sure many of you are aware of how difficult it is for us to contain an outbreak of head lice at school so will appreciate how unlikely it is that we will be able to safely contain the spread of an invisible virus.

The Government have asked the UK to maintain social distancing and I can only presume that they consider a reduced number of year groups in school will make this possible due to additional classrooms. However, this is not the case because we would need less than 10 pupils in each classroom to ensure any level of social distancing and that would only work if the pupils didn't move at all. Lunchtimes, toileting and transition times are an altogether different kettle of fish. Witchford Village College have very kindly offered us a dedicated space in their building for our Year 6 cohort which I am hugely grateful for. I would like to thank Mr. Baxby, the Principal of WVC, for the continued support he has made available to Rackham during these difficult times. However, even with our Year 6 cohort off-site, we do not have adequate space at Rackham to ensure social distancing should all pupils in Reception and Y1 return to school. In addition to our space restraints, we also have inadequate staff available to ensure safety. I consider staff safety just as important as pupil safety and am not prepared to put my vulnerable staff at risk by asking them to work in a place where social distancing is impossible. As such, our staffing availability is limited to just 6 teachers, one of which is a supply teacher and three of which are only part time.

I am sure you can all understand that this makes planning a safe return to school for pupils in Reception, Y1 and Y6 on 1st June a very difficult jigsaw.

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To complete this jigsaw effectively, I need to know how many parents are likely to want their children to return to school. Until we know pupil numbers, we cannot devise an effective timetable for reopening. If all pupils in Reception, Year 1 and Year 6 were to return, together with those pupils from Key Worker families who already attend school, we will not be able to open school safely on a full time basis and it may be necessary to offer half-days or alternate days to accommodate everyone safely with the staff and room spaces available. Please be assured Rackham is not unique in this respect and many schools across the country find themselves in a very similar situation to us.

I wish I could be sharing better news with you all but I am not comfortable writing to you to say we can achieve social distancing in a school when I do not believe it to be true. We can always make things safer, we can certainly do everything we can to reduce the risk slightly, but I am not able to give you a guarantee that your child will be safe from the virus in school. Having spent most of the past 24 hours reading national guidance sent to schools from the DfE, I have read nothing that has put my mind at rest enough to be able to offer you guarantees of safety.

My chief priority is our community and the families I serve. As was the case before our Government announced a national closure of schools, Rackham will always act in the best interests of our pupils, our staff and our community. Safety has to be the most important part of our role as educators.

We have devised a parent survey which I would urge all parents to please complete, even those who do not have pupils in Reception, Year 1 and Year 6. It is paramount that I am able to know how many pupils we are likely to need to provide for within school so that I can effectively plan out how this provision may look for both June 1st and also beyond. I know that these questions may be difficult to answer, and your feelings may change over time in response to the local and national situation but that is absolutely fine. Please note that fines for attendance will not be issued during this difficult time and I will not penalise any parents who choose to keep their children at home. Could I please ask for all families to complete the attached [survey](#) before the end of this week so that we can start to plan things properly over the weekend.

Once again, I thank you all for your continued support and thank all staff at Rackham for their continued hard work and dedication.

Kind regards,

Bridget Harrison

