



16th June 2020

Dear Parents and Carers,

As we enter a new phase of the current pandemic and restrictions are cautiously being lifted, I am aware that only the parents of children who have been attending school recently may know about the actions taken by Rackham to date. I want to provide you all with clarity about what we have been doing and what the situation will look like from this point moving forward.

When we were asked to close our school, we were well prepared and had ensured we were able to do this in a way that minimised any stress on our children. Our team of committed staff moved their learning from the classroom to children's homes with relative ease. Within a week, we had organised meals and staffing rotas to ensure that from day 1, our school remained open for our most vulnerable children and the children of key workers.

When the announcement was made 8 weeks later that schools would reopen to more pupils from 1st June, we worked hard to prepare our school for reopening and were able to open our doors to every child in Reception, Year 1 and Year 6 who wanted a place, as well remaining open to our vulnerable pupils and those of key workers in other year groups. Our excellent online provision continued for those pupils who are not in school.

For these efforts, I would like again to thank all staff at Rackham. They have shown commitment, resilience, generosity and good humour throughout and I could not be more honoured to lead them. They have worked creatively and without hesitation to ensure that the needs of our school community are met. Whatever the guidance that has been received, whatever the demands placed on them, they have risen to the challenge, adapted their practice and kept going. I would also like to thank all parents and carers who have supported us in all our efforts. We are reminded every day what a fantastic parent community we have at Rackham.

As I am sure most of you are aware, the government has recently changed its policy about the return of children in Years 2-5, and there is still considerable uncertainty about what will happen in September. We are advised that the risk of infection among primary-age children is relatively low, but the virus is nevertheless very much present and can be picked up from many surfaces and from contact with other people. Moreover, non-affected children can carry the infection to more vulnerable people, including staff.

Limiting Contact and Mixing

It is essential that we place the health and wellbeing of children and staff at the heart of our operations. It is not possible to prevent all close human contact in a primary school setting, however, it is possible to limit and contain it. This is the thinking behind the 'bubble' process. Children are divided into small groups (bubbles) with at least two adults attached to each group; for the process to work it is essential that children restrict their close contact only to those pupils with whom they share a bubble. Children must remain in their bubble whilst on school premises: on arrival – hence the staggering of arrival and departure times - in lessons, during breaks (including lunch and going to the toilet) and when going home. The supervision required for each bubble means that more adults than usual need to attend each class and to remain with the children to whom they have been allocated throughout the school day. So, even though the number of children attending school is drastically reduced, our staffing is stretched to its limit.

Protective Measures

The school is required to maintain social distancing as a safeguard against the spreading of the virus through droplets that might be transmitted through normal school activities like speaking or singing, as well as through sneezing or coughing. Until a vaccine is available, social distancing remains an effective measure to restrict the spread of the disease while allowing essential functions to continue. In a school setting, the ability to perform effective social distancing is heavily determined by the nature of the space available. The corridors at Rackham are relatively wide and

our school is set out in such a way that we have been able to put in place a one-way system for moving around the school. We are grateful to Witchford Village College for opening a section of their school for our Year 6 pupils who are utilising this facility well. It is because of the extra provision that we have been able to cater for all those who wished to return to school this term.

Online Provision

All staff are keenly aware that most children are having to rely on online provision for their lessons. No-one would pretend that this is an ideal or even desirable situation, but it has been forced upon us by the emergency. Mrs. Ward has worked hard with the teachers at home to ensure that the need to provide staffing for pupils in school throughout the school day has not had a negative effect on the experience for those children not in school. As always, our priority is to sustain and continue our children's education in what are surely the most difficult and stressful circumstances of recent times.

Key Worker Children

The arrangements for Key Worker children are slightly different, though the general principles remain the same. Key Worker children are also arranged in bubbles, but their bubbles are made up of children from different year groups. The number of Key Worker children has changed since the process of loosening lockdown began and we have had to more than double the number of Key Worker places. We now have severely restricted capacity in terms of both space and staffing even for the children of Key Workers.

Working under the present Government guidance, we have provided spaces for all the children wanting to return in June or July and all the key worker families who needed places. We have used all our available staff to teach in the bubbles and so are unable to offer any more spaces at this time. The Government's announcement at the end of last week made it clear that they will not be removing the social distancing requirements in schools and thus they are not expecting schools to be able to take back other year groups during this term. Under these circumstances, it saddens me to announce that we are unable to accommodate children from Years 2 to 5 back in school this academic year. We will of course keep everyone informed of changes as we get more guidance.

We all appreciate just how challenging this has been and continues to be for everyone in our community. The virus has affected our children's education and continues to do so. Many children would rather be in school and parents would like to see them return as soon as possible. Our staff all wish for the same.

I am sure our community will understand that we strive to be accessible to all at Rackham and that the prospect of being unavailable for pupils within our community is completely alien to us and one which I am not comfortable having to write to you about. Furthermore, in our efforts to keep everyone safe, we are having to distance ourselves from parents and put in place measures that make our usual friendly and open approach very hard to maintain. Please know that when we are able to open our doors more fully, we will be nurturing your child and putting their safety, health and well-being at the forefront of all we do. Our Rackham family will be full of love and kindness. On behalf of all staff and governors at Rackham, I would like to thank you all for your continued support.

Yours sincerely,

