



## **Return to School – January 2021**

Monday 4<sup>th</sup> January 2021

Dear Parents and Carers,

Firstly, may I take this opportunity to wish you all a very Happy New Year. I hope you have all managed to spend time as a family, enjoying the festivities.

Increased rates of Covid-19 across the country, especially in the South East, has led to a number of government announcements - the most recent being from Gavin Williamson, Secretary of State for Education's when he detailed his plan for children and students returning to school after the Christmas holidays. As it stands, the government have directed that all Primary Schools in our County are to re-open the week commencing 4<sup>th</sup> January. Teacher and support staff unions have released an outcry response to this decision and have called on all staff to inform their headteachers that they do not feel safe enough at work with full classrooms. Unions have argued that schools should be moved to remote learning to prevent further increases in the infection rates and all have quoted up to date SAGE recommendations regarding schools as a basis for their argument. This has understandably left all staff in our profession with a feeling of uncertainty and as such, many schools are now unable to open for face-to-face teaching due to limited staff capacity.

Having spent a great deal of Sunday consulting with staff at Rackham, we are pleased to announce that Rackham is currently still able to welcome children back as planned on Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> January 2021.

As a setting we have worked incredibly hard, and continue to do so, to put measures in place to ensure your child is kept safe and well. However, in light of the considerable increase in the growth rate of Covid-19 and being subject to the highest level of local restrictions (Tier 4), it is clear that further action is necessary. We have therefore reviewed our Covid-19 Whole School Risk Assessment.

In addition to measures previously in place, we will now:

- Expect all staff to wear face coverings in communal areas of the building. In addition, should teachers wish – they are permitted to wear face coverings when interacting with pupils on a one – one basis.
- All staff are being encouraged to challenge non-compliance with the risk assessment e.g. to challenge parents/carers loitering on site at drop off and pick up or attempting to enter the school site past the pupil drop off and collection points.
- All staff meetings/training/governors meetings will take place remotely.
- Visitors will be kept to an absolute minimum - use of online platforms to be utilised.
- We are suggesting, that for the time being, any staff working in close contact with a child where physical contact is required, are permitted to wear PPE should they wish. Our SEND Team will consult with parents where this might be applicable.
- Where staff operate in an extended bubble/in different extended bubbles (for example; Leadership/Office Team, PPA Team, Safeguarding Team, Music Teachers) social distancing and increased/considered use of facial coverings/hand gel/cleaning may be used in addition to measures previously in place.

We have worked hard to reduce our bubble sizes in the lower half of the school and have re-arranged staffing allocations to ensure fewer staff need to cross over more than one bubble. Larch class will now move to a joint EYFS and Larch bubble. This means both KS1 and EYFS bubbles have the equivalent of two classes - EYFS/Larch bubble will be approximately 55 pupils, and Beech/Chestnut bubble will be approximately 60 pupils. This change will have minimal effect on any children other than slightly altered breaktimes but it affords our staff necessary reassurance that we are minimising the risk of transmission as much as we possibly can.

In addition to this, we have agreed to allow pupils to attend school in their PE kits on non PE days if they find that more comfortable. We will continue to ventilate all our classrooms throughout the day despite the colder temperatures and so it is vital all parents are aware of this and ensure children are dressed with layers for warmth. I have also told teachers they are permitted to wear PE kits to school too as it is important for them to feel comfortable too so please do not be alarmed if you spot our staff looking like we are taking part in a charity race.

I am so proud of the staff at Rackham for their understanding and cooperation during this crisis. They are all incredibly brave. Our profession has been unfairly criticised in the main stream media in recent weeks and their voices have been misrepresented a great deal. I am grateful everyday to work with such amazing colleagues. However, the success of their efforts is only possible with the full support and co-operation of all stakeholders, and so we are hopeful our community will continue to play its part and support our efforts.

Please ensure you:

- Wear a face covering when coming on to the school site.
- Keep a 2m distance from anyone outside of your household when entering and leaving our premises.
- Do not spend unnecessary time on the school site - if you want a conversation with your child's teacher for example, please make a phone call appointment.
- Do not send your child to school with personal belongings - we will not be able to distribute sweets for birthdays or other such items. Packed lunches need to remain in disposable bags.
- Our staggered timings for drop off and collection must be strictly adhered to. However, please bear in mind they are 15 minute slots to allow for greater social distancing and the full extent of the time slot can be used.
- Ensure you keep children off school who display symptoms (following our flow chart as a guide) and communicate test results promptly.
- Ensure you inform us immediately if any household member develops symptoms or has a test.
- Keep up to date with information we share by logging onto MCAS and making sure your contact details are correct.
- Ensuring you respond promptly to any surveys or information requests sent out by the school in upcoming weeks.

Crucially, we politely request that all families with household members who have contracted Covid over the Christmas Holiday period to contact the school to inform us so we can ensure an accurate picture of transmission within our community is maintained by the school.

In EYFS, KS1 and Year 3/4, reading books will no longer be sent home. Year 5/6 children must not bring books from home for reading, school reading books only will be used. If you wish to read a book with your child that is related to their current reading level, please log on to Oxford Reading E-Library: <https://home.oxfordowl.co.uk/reading/free-ebooks/>

I believe personally that in the near future primary schools in our area will be closed for all but our vulnerable children and those with key worker parents - but I cannot make decisions based on personal predictions and so we will continue to follow the directions we are given. At the point of partial closure, we will write to you reminding you of our remote learning plan. In the near future, we will be requesting information from parents regarding keyworker status so that we are prepared for every eventuality. Please complete the keyworker information form promptly. Further efforts to prepare for potential closure mean that children will be bringing home a new exercise book on Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> January. Please make sure children do not use this until a time that we enter remote learning.

The situation seems to be changing nationally and locally on an almost daily basis. There may be times when we have to adapt or change our plans swiftly. I thank you in anticipation for your patience with this, and I thank the staff for their readiness, dedication and commitment to striving for a sense of purpose and normality for the children of Rackham.

I would like to re-iterate to all parents and carers that if you are feeling anxious about sending your child into school, please contact us so we can support you. We do not intend to instil any level of friction between parents and the school and we will work with you to explain what options are available for you. In a perfect world, we would be able to afford all parents a choice about whether their children return to school but unfortunately, we are not able to promote that idea. Please know that we will do all we can to support parents with whatever they feel is best and that whilst absences will have to be recorded as unauthorised, it is unlikely that we will be penalising or imposing any fines to families during this period of uncertainty. However, we are not promoting long periods of absence and this situation may change in the future.

These arrangements will be regularly monitored against local infection rates and we will provide you with any further updates as necessary.

I appreciate the start of this term will be difficult for many and that children and parents alike may feel anxious or frustrated by the present situation. However, it is vital that we come together to support each other so that we can look ahead to more positive times. Rackham won't judge people for personal choices, we want to unite, to serve our communities and do our best to minimise the risks to ourselves and our community. We are hopeful that our community will understand our stance and join us in our efforts.

Included with this letter is a statement from our Local Authority regarding the opening of schools this week.

We will write to you again as soon as further updates become available.

May I take this opportunity to once again thank you for your continued support.

Yours sincerely,



Bridget Harrison  
Headteacher

