Friday 3rd July 2020

Dear Parents and Carers,

I hope you are all well and have had a good week. I am sure that you will have heard the Government announcement yesterday regarding the return to school of all pupils in September. I was expecting the guidance document to be published today; it was actually released yesterday and is available online at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/guidance-for-full-opening-schools>

Highfields will be open to all pupils full time from September, subject to any change in circumstance such as a local lockdown. I am currently working through the risk assessment and aim to publish this to you by the end of next week. We are very excited to be able to welcome you all back. There will be some fairly significant changes from how school used to operate but it will be wonderful to get back to some kind of normality. The risk assessment will explain plans in detail but here are some of the things that you can expect in September.

* Children will be back to normal group sizes – classes of 30 (31 in some classes). Wherever possible children will ‘bubble’ with their class and will not mix with other class bubbles.
* There will still be staggered start and finish times to the school day and the one way gate system will still be in operation.
* There will be no large group gatherings such as assemblies until further notice. Unfortunately this means that it is unlikely to be a Christmas play either.
* At lunchtimes children will continue to eat in their own classrooms.
* Attendance at school will return to being mandatory for all pupils.
* It is unlikely that school trips will take place in the Autumn term. Current guidance is that no overnight trips will take place.
* Wraparound care will be available and charges for this will be re-introduced.

As I’ve said, the risk assessment will be far more detailed than this. I’m sure many of you will have questions about the finer details but please be patient as I’m sure they will be answered when I publish the document next week. Having said that, you know where I am if you have any major concerns.

**Transition of pupils into Reception class:**

We always make a huge effort to ensure that before September all preschool pupils have had the opportunity to settle into school before they start the new year. Unfortunately many of the things we normally do have not been possible this year. One thing that we always do is invite new parents into school for an open evening in June. We can’t do that this year but we are going to have a ‘virtual open evening’ on Thursday 9th July at 5.00pm using Zoom conferencing.

We are also going to use the INSET day on Tuesday 1st September to welcome our new children into school so they can get used to it before all other pupils return on the Wednesday. We will explain how that will work on the 9th. For the rest of that first week children are going to be on a shorter day and will finish school at 1pm. From Monday 7th September they will commence full school days.

It is possible to buy school uniform online directly from our supplier and their website can be accessed through this link <https://www.myschoolstyle.com/school/highfields_academy/>. Their website also contains our uniform policy; this is also available on the school website.

**Online Learning**

As you will be well aware, for the last few months learning for a large number of our pupils has been virtually. Although all pupils will be returning in September we are very keen to keep driving forward with this and to continue to build on the new skills that staff and pupils have developed. From September all pupils in preschool, Reception, year 1 and year 2 will have access to a system called Tapestry. This is something that we have used in Early Years for a long time and we are very familiar with it. We are also going to set up all Key Stage 2 pupils with access to the Microsoft Office 365 package which includes Microsoft Teams. Over the last few months pupils in some classes have become very familiar with the ‘Google Classroom’. The Microsoft package is very similar to this in many ways but provides some additional functions. There will be support materials provided for pupils and parents to help us embed this. As well as enhancing our normal provision this will also enable us to adapt very quickly should a local lockdown be enforced in this area.

We have two weeks to go before the end of term and the end of a school year. I can honestly say that it has been the most unusual year that I can recall and I hope that we never experience one like it again. Having said that the support and engagement of pupils and parents has been phenomenal and I would sincerely like to thank you all for this over the past few months.

Take care, have a lovely weekend.

Simon Dyson

Principal