

Hello Parents and Carers,

I hope you are all well.

Given the unprecedented nature of events that have taken place this year I wanted to write to you on behalf of all the Governors at Highfield.

Ever since the lockdown was imposed and schools were shut we have all been getting used to a 'new normal'. Whilst schools were shut for most pupils there was still a requirement for schools to remain open to look after our most vulnerable children and the children of critical workers so their parents could perform key front line services.

During this time there were somewhere between 15 and 30 children in school every day. The children were having to get used to a new way of being in school – with other children often from different year groups and not necessarily with their usual groups of friends. The children all coped brilliantly in dealing with these new circumstances and staff of course were as professional as ever.

Whilst the full Highfield curriculum could not be taught there was still some great learning being done whilst the children were being looked after. And for those at home teachers were able to set and comment on children's work using the Seesaw platform. There was excellent take up of the learning offer provided via Seesaw and where children could not access this, work was sent to their homes to ensure these children did not miss out.

Thanks must go to you as parents as no doubt many of you will have become involved in the Seesaw work – I know I certainly had my moments in trying to upload pieces of work that Mala had done!

And then of course came the Government announcement that schools would open from 1 June to Reception, Year 1 and Year 6 children provided it was safe to do so. There were of course arguments from both sides of the fence as to why it was/was not a good idea to re-open schools to a wider cohort of pupils. During this time Mrs Colley and her staff were always planning for the inevitable re-opening. Whilst Government guidance was issued as to the actions that all schools needed to take, Highfield had already done a lot of planning. So all the measures that had been put into place when caring for vulnerable and critical worker children - such as regular hand washing, separation in corridors, keeping children in small year groups as far as possible – simply needed to be built upon.

That is not to say that the creation of class bubbles was an easy task. As a Governing Body we were required to sign off the risk assessment to confirm that we were content with the measures taken to enable school to re-open from 1 June. I visited school the week before and did a 'walk round' with Mrs Colley. Each classroom comprised a bubble of 15 children and a staff member so all desks and chairs were now spaced out. Tape was placed on the floor to keep children a safe distance from staff. Hand sanitiser stations were located in all classrooms. In the playground cones were used as markers for children to stand besides on their first day back. The field was separated out into zones so each bubble had their own safe area to play in. This is just a tiny snapshot of the work that was carried out by Highfield staff to ensure school was as safe as it could possibly be when the additional children returned in June.

Again I must thank all parents for the patience and understanding that you have all shown at this most difficult of times. The vast majority of parents did of course have their children at home prior to 1 June and I know from personal experience how difficult it can be trying to work from home whilst looking after your children at the same time.

Mrs Colley has of course kept you all regularly updated throughout this period with her newsletters – as a parent I certainly found them to be an invaluable source of information. They have contained a lot of detail at times and in some cases requiring a response from you in a short space of time. So again, thank you for reading these newsletters and acting upon them when required.

And now of course we move to the next phase following the Government's announcement that school will re-open for all children in September. Again this has and will continue to involve a lot of planning by all the Highfield staff. The risk assessment that Governors previously approved will need updating to account for the fact that school will be full. So there will still be lots of safety measures to adhere to when school re-opens.

One such measure is in relation to educational visits and the DfE guidance states that overnight residentials should not be go ahead. Year 6 parents were notified that the Marrick residential was cancelled last month. In line with Government guidance, Governors have taken the decision to cancel the Year 4 residential to Robin Hood's Bay which was due to take place in September 2020. We recognise how much the children (and the staff) look forward to these residentials and we have taken the decision to cancel the trip considering the safety of everyone involved as our number one priority.

On a slightly separate note I can confirm that school will not be open during the summer to care for vulnerable children and the children of critical workers. Of course this care was in place over the Easter holidays but that was at a time when severe restrictions were in place and critical workers would have had little alternative provision for their children. As lockdown restrictions are being lifted and the pressure on health services is being eased the need for school to remain open during the summer is reduced. The DfE has written to teaching unions to confirm that there is no expectation that schools will remain open during the summer. And I am sure you will agree with me when I say that the staff have all worked incredibly hard during these unprecedented times and deserve a well-earned break.

I think I speak on behalf of all governors when I say that I am looking forward to things returning to normal in September - or at least the 'new normal'. Whilst we have been able to undertake our governor duties and attend meetings virtually the one thing we haven't been able to do is go into class to see teaching and learning in action. I know all governors are keen to get back to their governor visits and hopefully it won't be too long into the new school year before we can do this again.

It just remains for me to wish you all a safe and enjoyable summer break and we look forward to welcoming all the children back in September!

Ashutosh Paul  
Chair of Governors

July 2020