

May 31<sup>st</sup> 2020

Dear Parents and Carers,

The Board of Governors thought it would be appropriate for me to write to you at this time, to give you our perspective on the current situation.

Firstly, I would like to thank you all for looking after those most valuable members of our school community, the children. I know it can be very hard to be in each other's pockets all the time, working at home at the same time as caring for each other and trying to provide meaningful experiences for them, and I salute you. I hope that you are able to focus on the positives! I know the staff at Willow Brook have been missing your children and are very much looking forward to seeing them in school again.

The restrictions placed on educational settings have put unprecedented pressures on the staff: as professionals who take great pride and satisfaction in helping your children flourish, it is difficult for them to remain so distant, while providing some structure to help you. As we move towards welcoming more children back into school, the pressures on their time will increase, as they will be in class during the day as well as preparing materials for those children who need to remain at home. Let's not forget that they also have all the personal pressures associated with the current situation. I know you will give them your full support, and I thank you for that.

I am delighted that we are welcoming back years R, 1 and 6 from next week. The decision to do so is an operational one and therefore lies with the Head, but the Governors have a duty of care to the whole school community, and have reviewed the plans accordingly. If you have any connection to the education sector, you will know that the guidance has been evolving rapidly over the last few weeks, and I would like to thank publicly Mrs Ballard and Mr Jones for their hard work in turning it into a workable system, enabling education to continue at Willow Brook while minimising risk of virus transmission. The measures being put in place will inevitably feel odd at first (to all involved!), but a great deal of effort has gone into making them child-friendly, so that the rules can be observed in an environment that remains welcoming, encouraging and nurturing for your children.

Guidance revolves around the two central pillars of social distancing and hygiene, to minimise both airborne and surface-contact transmission risks, and parents/carers of the year groups involved will already know that this translates into measures such as:

- Strict controls around drop-off and pickup times to maximise social distancing in the playground
- Children being grouped into 'bubbles' (about half a class, plus allocated staff) which are
  - given their own zone in the school, including toilets and entrances
  - allocated enough space to spread out in class
  - encouraged to work outside when possible
  - required to stay as a group throughout the school day
  - kept apart from other bubbles
- A programme of educating the children about the measures they must take to keep themselves and each other safe at school
- Strict controls on the movement of members of staff and visitors
- An enhanced, frequent cleaning regime of all touched surfaces throughout the school.

These measures, plus the training and internal management processes in school, as well as additional resources, are designed to minimise the risk of virus transmission within the school, and **as a Board we believe that the school has taken the measures it needs to, in order to comply with the guidance on reopening safely.**

You need to help us to continue providing a safe environment for everyone at the school by playing your part in the measures above. The school also needs to know as soon as possible about relevant changes in your circumstances, so that we have time to react accordingly. If the medical situation changes in your family, the school needs to know. If you have kept your child at home, but later decide that your child should be in school after all, the school will need to agree a start date for a safe entry into a 'bubble'. If there is anything that you are concerned about, but aren't sure is relevant to school, please discuss it with Mrs Ballard so that she can advise you. As a community, we all need to look after each other, and this is one of Willow Brook's strengths!

I will perhaps take a moment to look forwards. The implementation of current guidance means that we are using all of the school building to accommodate three year groups. It is impossible to say how and when this guidance might change, so it is equally impossible for me to speculate on how and when we might welcome all year groups back into school. As I have said before, we are in an environment of rapidly-changing guidance, which is often racing to catch up with political announcements. Please rest assured that we will not make change until we are sure that it is safe to do so.

I think everyone is finding the deluge of guidance a challenge when working out their personal circumstances, and I know that some of you are shielding yourselves or other family members and are unable to let your children come back to school, while others do not yet feel that the balance of risks has swung in favour of your child returning. We are in a situation where you must make decisions based on what you believe is best for yourselves and your family, and I would expect you to continue to do so. Please be assured that the Board and the Staff are working hard to support you.

Yours sincerely

Neil Rabbitts  
Chair of Governors  
on behalf of the Board