



Oakhyrst Grange School

PREPARATORY SCHOOL FOR BOYS & GIRLS

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HEADMASTER: MR. ALEX GEAR B.Ed

29th June 2020

Dear Parents

I write this letter anticipating the arrival of Years 2 and 3 on Tuesday 30th June. This will mean that all of the children in the school can have some limited access to time at school in order to end the term with their friends and Teachers. Clearly not all children have returned or will be returning. I fully respect the decisions made by individual parents on behalf of their children and families. I have always stressed that we cannot make firm guarantees about the health and safety of anyone on the school site in respect of the Coronavirus Pandemic. As a school we have taken every step within our power to regulate the groups of children, their learning environment and the social play spaces. We have made specific arrangements for hand washing, sanitisation and the use of toilets. The cleaning regimes have been extensive and as more children have been attending the school we have stepped up this process.

The drop off arrangements in the morning have worked very well so far. With some modification, I hope to be able to roll out a similar programme from September. I hope also to be able to offer the Early Birds Care and thereby early drop off for Breakfast Club or Early Birds as was the case before lockdown. From September we hope also to be able to provide a programme of clubs and activities and After School Care. You will all have received the details and will have had a chance to select club and activity choices accordingly. As with all things we are in the hands of the Government. It is clear that the Government do want schools to be running as normally as possible as quickly as possible. Let us hope that the great British public play their part in enabling this to happen. We do not know, at this time, whether or not we will be able to provide the usual dining and catering facilities. We hope that we can, again this will depend entirely upon the Government guidelines as indicated by the Health Authorities and the Department for Education.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you the parent body for the overwhelming support that you have shown me and my staff during this very difficult time. There were a number of communication and practical issues that we needed to overcome at the very beginning of the lockdown period. Quite obviously we, along with the rest of the country, were having to make decisions and take actions in double quick time. All the contingency planning in the world could not have prepared us for what we have faced in the last three months. This being said I firmly believe that your children have continued with their education in beneficial ways despite the circumstances. As parents you have had to deal with your own domestic situations in trying to balance working with the children at home while managing your own working lives. Thank you.

A word now for my staff. A small number of the team has had to be furloughed and this of course has been of benefit to the school in practical financial terms, but it has put additional strain on the whole staff for obvious reasons. The use of Seesaw and Zoom lessons has evolved effectively and I am pleased to say that a large number of you have written very supportive emails by way of thanks and praise. We have throughout this period of lockdown and immediately afterwards been constantly running a group in school for the Key Worker children. Mrs Pumphrey has been a vital Key Worker herself in looking after those children every single day until today. Mr Burke has had the unenviable task of providing work for his own class while at the same time co-ordinating all of the in school timetabling and the schedule for Zoom teaching and the co-hosting that it requires. As of today we are on the 19th version of the operational timetable. Angela and Susan in the office have been in every day as has Mrs Neale, our Bursar, providing practical help and support as only they know how. Mr Buchala, our Premises Manager, whose opening words are always "how can I help" has been indispensable. All of the Teaching Staff have adapted to the needs of the moment and of course to the needs of the children. Every class in the school is very important and has a priority of its own to be fulfilled. As you will know the Year 5 class is under particular pressure because of the imminence in the Autumn Term of the start of next school examinations. I am full of admiration and respect for my Deputy, Miss Dance, the Year 5 Teacher who has unstintingly provided a constant supply of Zoom and related teaching activities throughout this entire period.

Mighty oaks from little acorns grow

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Miss Plant, our Year 6 Teacher is now on maternity leave and I would like to congratulate her and her partner Luke on the birth of their little boy Arlo. Before her departure Miss Plant was instrumental in the final preparation for next school assessments with the current Year 6. At last Friday's virtual Prize Giving, we were able to announce the wonderful news that all of the children received strong next school place offers. Between them they shared a total of 38 offers of scholarships, awards and grammar school places. This is a sensational result. My thanks also to Mrs Harbott, who is currently holding the reins as the Year 6 Class Teacher. Mrs Dowling has now returned from her maternity leave and again congratulations to her and her husband on the birth of their daughter Imogen. In her absence the Lower Kindergarten class has been taught by the highly energetic and enthusiastic Miss Amy Wright. When teaching in person or in the virtual classroom Miss Wright has won universal praise for the quality of her teaching and for the relationships that she has formed with the children and their parents. Our congratulations to Miss Wright on passing her Newly Qualified Teaching year with flying colours and on her appointment at a neighbouring school as a fully qualified Class Teacher. We will all miss her greatly. Miss Hillyard, our Art Teacher, is leaving us at the end of the term and once again I would wish to pass our very best wishes to her and her family for a happy and successful future. We have appointed Mrs O'Sullivan as a replacement for Miss Hillyard and she will take up her duties in September. At this time, I am making a temporary appointment in the Games Department by way of helping to fill the gap left by Miss Harrington on her departure. In the short term, Mrs Pumphrey will continue to lead the Games Department and I have appointed a young gentleman, Mr Steel. He comes from a neighbouring preparatory school and has several years' experience working within the Games Department and as a House Master. I will, myself, be assisting on a Tuesday and Wednesday afternoon with Years 3 and 4 and then Years 5 and 6 Games lessons. In a former life, I used to teach half a timetable of Games at a senior school level. My family is pleased that I have good reason to get myself into better shape. No further comment required I feel.

I would like to conclude this letter by saying a heartfelt thank you to our Chair of Governor's Mrs Davis and to the Board as a whole for the tireless behind the scenes help and support that they have been providing and will continue to provide.

I trust that you will all enjoy a happy and safe family summer holiday.

With sincere best wishes

Mr Alex Gear
Headmaster