

Rokesly Avenue
London
N8 8NH



Bola Soneye-Thomas
Head Teacher
Tel: 020 8348 0290
Fax: 020 8342 8410

www.rokeslyschools.org.uk

26 January 2021

Dear Parents and Carers,

As we begin the fourth week of lockdown, the Governing Body wanted to take the opportunity to write to you all. While updates to the school community are usually provided through the school newsletter or letters from the Head Teacher, we hope that it may help everyone if we provided an overview of the current situation from our perspective.

As you may know, the Governing Body includes parents, representatives of the teaching staff and Senior Leadership Team (“SLT”) and members of the local community. The guidance under which governing bodies operate explains that our role is a strategic one and governors should not routinely become involved in the day-to-day running of the school. Part of our role however is to hold the Head Teacher to account for the educational performance of the school. We do that by requesting and receiving information from SLT and by asking (sometimes tough) questions of them. The Governing Body has continued to meet regularly since the first lockdown was announced in March last year, including additional ad hoc meetings. Many of these meetings have focussed on the school’s response to the pandemic.

Risk assessments

For the school to open, as it did throughout 2020, we have to have a risk assessment in place. This is prepared in line with guidance from the DfE and with the input of public health experts in Haringey Council. The Governing Body reviewed and agreed the risk assessment introduced shortly before the first lockdown. Since then, we have been briefed as and when major changes to the risk assessment need to be made. This allows us to ask questions about how the school intends to ensure a safe environment for staff and pupils, and where necessary, we have asked for, and /or agreed to, changes to the risk assessment.

The current risk assessment allows for children in school to be supervised in a bubble of 10. Each bubble is supported by two teaching assistants at any one time but requires four staff in total to be on site. As the present situation with Covid-19 is an evolving one with an increased rate of transmission everywhere, the Governing Body feel that retaining this bubble size is sensible. We currently have one bubble of 10 per each year group. We also feel that having more than one bubble per year group would pose unacceptable risks as there would be too many children and staff in school, in particular



HEALTHY SCHOOLS
LONDON



having to share non-classroom space, to maintain safe distancing. Increasing either the number or size of these bubbles compounds the risk of transmission. This in turn will increase the risk, as we have already seen, of instances when bubbles have needed to isolate and the school is then unable to provide this support to critical workers.

Provision of places to vulnerable children and the children of critical workers

The DfE's guidance provides that only the children of critical workers and vulnerable children can now attend school. The categories of critical worker are quite wide. We are pleased that the school, working with the parents and carers concerned, has been able to accommodate all requests for a place while maintaining bubble size, so minimising contacts and risk. Indeed, Rokesly is managing better than other schools in this regard, and we are grateful that parents are only using a place where absolutely necessary. That accords with the DfE guidance which highlights that "Parents and carers who are critical workers should keep their children at home if they can."

It may reassure parents to know that the Governing Body is satisfied that the senior leadership team has considered the criteria it should apply in allocating places and is well aware of the need to adopt as flexible an approach as possible. Should there be more demand than is currently available, then the school and the Governing Body would have to decide how to deal with this. We hope however that we will not be put in this position. You will all appreciate moreover that such decisions will have to be taken in light of changing circumstances.

Provision of remote learning

Home schooling has been a challenge for parents and carers, adding to the many other demands that the pandemic has brought. We are pleased that the package of remote learning provided by the school has evolved since the first lockdown, especially given the very short period of time the school had to switch from preparing to welcome all the children back on 5 January to readying itself to deliver both in-person and remote learning.

The Governing Body was briefed on, and contributed with suggestions to, SLT's plans for remote education. Those plans have been, and continue to be, informed by the sharing of information and experience with other schools via the NLC¹ of which Rokesly is a member.

Rokesly's remote education package now includes:

- (a) Daily learning packs with materials and links to pre-recorded online lessons from Oak National Academy and BBC Bitesize (parents without access to a printer can collect hard copies of materials from the school as they were able to do in the first lockdown). The same learning packs are also used in the class bubbles in school;
- (b) A daily pre-recorded video from each class teacher to introduce the day's work;
- (c) A weekly live half-hour tutorial session in English and another one in Maths with their class teacher for small groups of up to six children;
- (d) An informal online registration meeting for each class every morning;

¹ Network Learning Community – a group of all the local schools.

- (e) Daily zoom drop-in sessions so children or parents can ask questions about the learning pack and discuss individual concerns with their child's teacher;
- (f) One piece of work a day to be uploaded to J2E which is then individually marked and on which the teacher provides feedback as well as challenge/extension questions. Children can also ask questions via the comment box for each piece of work.

That the school can offer more varied remote education has been made easier this time round by the fact that it has finally received a number of Chromebooks to be used by children at home. These are being distributed to those children identified by the SLT as having the most need.

As Governors we are acutely aware of the amount of work that goes into ensuring that the above package is provided. Like many of us, class teachers are working full-time from home, each with their own personal circumstances. It falls to them to, for example, plan lessons for use in the learning packs, prepare the material for those packs, record videos, mark uploaded work, prepare for the live Zoom lessons and deal with the follow-up from those lessons, as well as providing the additional pastoral elements needed for some pupils. This way of teaching is completely different from a teacher's previous experience. It is proving much more time consuming, especially as whole lesson plans are being adapted and re-written to be effective remotely. This work sits alongside the need to liaise with colleagues individually and in team meetings.

In determining what can be offered by way of remote education, the SLT has to balance a range of factors including the availability of staff and resources and the fact that the school serves a very diverse community. As a Governing Body, we feel that the remote provision strikes a good balance between giving children structure while allowing parents and carers to approach home schooling in a flexible way that suits their individual family unit. You may be aware of the recent advice issued by Ofsted² which includes keeping things simple, focussing on the basics and that live lessons are not always the best. Overall, we consider that the current provision meets the DfE's expectations as to the number of hours of remote education that should be provided at Key stage 2.

Communication

Since the first lockdown was imposed, parents and carers have communicated their views and concerns to the staff team. It is only through such communication that the school can gain information as to the difficulties or issues that can arise, for example, with home schooling. We encourage you to continue to give your views, whether positive or negative, to the school. There are good reasons why every suggestion cannot be acted upon, but they are heard. What works in one school setting may not work in another because the needs of children differ, and equally what works for one family may not work for another, for example where there are multiple children in different year groups or where parents are juggling work commitments alongside supporting their children.

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/whats-working-well-in-remote-education/whats-working-well-in-remote-education>

We all know that it is impossible (either in a bubble or remotely) for the school to recreate the normal school experience of a child sitting in a classroom learning alongside his or her friends. Nonetheless, it is important that the school continues to give thought to how it might adapt the delivery of education. The Governing Body will be discussing the various ways in which the school can communicate with parents and carers and also whether we can do more as a Governing Body.

We end by thanking all the staff for their efforts over the last year. It is only through their commitment that the school has been able to continue operating. They have, like many, persevered while coping with the impact of the pandemic on their own personal lives. We also extend our thanks to you, the parents and carers, for your patience and the support that you have given to the staff.

Hopefully, it is not too premature to begin to imagine a time when we can plan for the return of the children to school even in a limited form and perhaps even to a normal school life.

In the meantime, we send our best wishes to all of you.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'N. Leskin', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Nigel Leskin

Chair of Governors

On behalf of the Governing Body of Rokesly Junior School