

Dear Parents/carers,

I hope you have been keeping well, staying safe and making the best of the very difficult circumstances that we have endured over the last few months. I am sure there will be lots of uncertainty for you and your children and therefore I will try to provide you with some clear information about what school will be like when your child returns in September. **It is imperative that you read the very lengthy risk assessment in connection with this brief outline so that you are very clear about how school will be operating.** Winchelsea will not be school as we have known it, with many changes to the organisation and running of the school day from the moment of arrival to the moment of leaving.

You will be aware of the government's guidelines for all children to return to school in September. Whilst following all of the government directives and DfE guidelines it is up to schools to decide what is safe and manageable and I can tell you we will be able to reduce risk but not eliminate it.

Please do not compare our provision with other schools as we all have different staffing levels, different buildings and different issues within school that are unique to our individual settings but be reassured that Winchelsea is putting in place the best provision we feel is possible.

Class 'bubbles'

Children will be organised into what the government is calling 'bubbles'. This may be different in other settings but at Winchelsea this means they will remain with their class of children and a team of adults comprising of their usual class teacher, teaching assistant and a constant dinner supervisor. It is recommended that the class groups cannot mix which is why Winchelsea will not be able to run extra-curricular clubs, breakfast club or hold any whole school events such as assemblies or Christmas plays. This structure is necessary so that any outbreak of the virus can be tracked and traced and those people who have been in the affected 'bubble' can isolate and be tested. We will have a protocol and safe room for any children showing symptoms where they will be cared for until parents are contacted and signposted to testing.

Timings

When pupils are entering and leaving school, times will be staggered and entrances will be separate to reduce contact. Only one parent will be allowed to access the playground to drop off and pick up. **These times are outlined in the risk assessment.** If you have children in more than one year group please use the timings of your oldest child. Younger children will be able to access their class bubbles early in these circumstances. As there will be no breakfast club parents can request to drop off their children early at 8.30am but this will need to be pre-arranged by contacting the school office.

Hygiene protocol

Furniture will be rearranged in classrooms to enable children to sit facing forward wherever possible. Children will have to remain at their desks or be adult-directed and keep to their designated equipment. Each bubble will have designated toilets, classroom and outside spaces away from other bubbles and at different times. Lunches will be eaten in 'bubbles' outside whenever possible to reduce risk or in the classrooms when wet. Children having hot dinners will have an allocated consistent midday supervisor with their class bubble who will serve their meal to them within their allocated area. Staff may choose to wear PPE but will certainly use it to deal with First Aid and if we have a child who presents with symptoms. More detail in regard to the use of equipment and resources is outlined in the full risk assessment.

We are being asked to clean surfaces and resources continuously throughout the day, encourage frequent hand washing, wear PPE for First Aid and set out classrooms for social distancing, avoiding contact with children and between children. From our experience of already caring for children in school since the wider re-opening to specified year groups there will be the aspiration of social distancing in a school and we will try our very best BUT we certainly cannot guarantee it. The government have recognised that there is no requirement to insist on social distancing with primary age pupils but suggest that contact is minimised and no touching is encouraged. We recommend in light of additional handwashing that the use of moisturiser first thing in the morning and at the end of the school day (at home) would be beneficial to your child.

Attendance requirements

When school opened up more widely to additional year groups in June it was a voluntary process and parents could make the decision about whether they felt happy sending their children back to school. However, in September the government currently are making it clear that **parents will be expected to send their children back to school**. We all recognise that the children have missed out on a great deal of their usual formal education and whilst lots of work has been done by many parents at home it is not the same as being in school following the national curriculum. It is important that we all try to support children to get back on track as quickly as possible and there will be a lot of catching up on what has been missed. Therefore it is important that parents understand that the school is being asked to ensure full attendance and currently the element of choice has been removed. Winchelsea has never chosen to impose fines on parents but we ask for your support in ensuring that children attend. Governors may have no choice but to change our policy in future. In usual circumstances children's attendance should not fall below 90% as this then identifies your child as a 'persistent absentee' and may trigger involvement of external agencies. This is the percentage of attendance that is expected to be the minimum requirement from September also.

Managing anxiety

We understand that children will find all of these changes difficult. We will endeavour to make the experience as positive as possible for ALL our children as we recognise that they may be anxious. We are planning to focus on well-being in the first weeks to help children to get back into school routines and understand expectations and, of course, we will always do our best to provide individual support where we can and within the parameters of the risk assessment.

Pupil behaviour

Before your child returns to school please ensure that you have explained to them the expectations around behaviour especially in regard to hygiene and appropriate contact with other pupils and adults. We understand how hard this can be for young children but we must all work together to keep all children and staff safe.

Communication

As our risk assessment does not allow parents on site we know that this makes communication very difficult. If you have any concerns or questions please contact the office by telephone or via email. Please keep an eye on our website for information and follow me on Twitter @Winchelsea1 as these are the best methods of seeing the most up-to-date information. We are trying hard to keep you informed by direct email too but are aware that not all the email addresses we have are correct so please make sure the office have your correct contact details. If school attaches a read receipt or asks for a reply it is vital that you help us by responding so that we know you have received the information. As you can appreciate, trying to keep in touch with over 200 of you is not an easy task!

In this letter I have been as open as I possibly can be. There are many uncertainties with COVID and some lack of clarity from the Government and scientists due to the newness of the virus leaves us with many unknowns. However, we are now instructed that we should return to teaching all pupils and therefore your support with our risk assessment protocols is vital. Whilst I understand that parents may have worries, Winchelsea is following all guidelines and we all know that children have missed a great deal of their formal education over a six month period and there is great emphasis on the government for schools to endeavour to 'catch-up' and this will require a great deal of hard work by both staff and pupils.

Thank you for the time you have given to reading this and the risk assessment – I appreciate there is a great deal of information!

I look forward to seeing you and your children in September.

In the meantime, enjoy the remainder of the summer break, take care and stay safe.

Helen Duckett

Head Teacher