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ROYAL ALEXANDRA & ALBERT SCHOOL



11th August 2020

Dear Parent,

Letter to Parents of Boarders regarding September Re-Opening

We have been discussing plans for the September re-opening of School over the past month, thinking about how we can best apply the government guidance to our unique situation, to allow all pupils to stay safe and have the best possible experience in the new environment, in which we will find ourselves next term. We are mindful of the need to offer a full educational experience whilst ensuring that we minimise, as far as possible, the risk to our pupils, staff and community.

We have reached a stage in our planning where I feel I am able to give you some definitive statements about how school will run, including for the extended day and boarding.

Firstly, below is a link to the government guidelines for schools should you wish to look at the detail. I am pleased that the government has recognised the fact that each school will have its own context and a need to consider arrangements for that context. For us, having boarders and flexi-boarders as well as a desire for us to run an extended day for all, certainly provides a different context from many other schools. As you know, we strive to be much more than a standard school, and I recognise that this is the reason why you have chosen RAAS. We have therefore developed a framework which is designed to enable us to offer an extended day, a varied co-curriculum programme and a thriving boarding atmosphere through evenings and weekends to preserve the RAAS experience as much as we are able to, but which also keeps everyone as safe as possible in the new environment.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/guidance-for-full-opening-schools>

The Bubble System

During the school day we are planning that pupils will only mix within their year group, which in most cases will be what we refer to as their “bubble”. However, for most of the day pupils at any one time will be in class-sized groups as we will not be having year group meetings. Two exceptions to this are the Junior School and the Sixth Form, which will each be classed as one bubble. The sizes of these groups are such that we feel this is sufficiently safe, and we believe their education is best served during the extended day if they can be treated as bubbles in this way.

Once the school day is over and boarders return to their boarding houses, they will change from being in their school day bubbles, based around the horizontal year system, to being in a bubble within their boarding house. Each boarding house will be treated as a separate bubble for the boarding time – for boarding co-curricular activities, breakfast and supper, weekend activities, etc.

To minimise the risks produced by the change from the year-based bubble system to the house-based bubble system, we are installing additional washbasins and sanitising stations for the boarders as they return to the houses after the school day. We will be ensuring that boarders wash hands very thoroughly whenever re-entering the boarding house, and they will not be able to visit other boarding houses.

The School Day

During the school day, pupils will follow their normal school timetable. We will be facilitating the pupils being taught by their specialist teachers and in specialist rooms - so that pupils receive a high quality education that enables them to thrive and progress. To ensure that we do this as safely as possible, we have put in place a number of proportionate protective measures for pupils and staff which are described in more detail below.

We will be operating systems for moving around School which look to minimise interactions between bubbles. We will have in place strict one-way systems of moving around the School and will be reducing the times that pupil movement occurs indoors. Senior School pupils will be encouraged to wear face masks when moving indoors between classrooms as at these points meeting other bubbles in closer proximity is more likely, albeit briefly. We will be implementing cleaning routines for rooms between classes and increasing access and use of hand sanitisation. We do not advise wearing face masks in the classroom, as they can be a barrier to communication (and therefore learning), but pupils may if they wish to.

We will not be having year group assemblies or other mass gatherings in School. Of course, communications with the year group or School as a whole are important, but we will be delivering these via technology with form groups staying in their form rooms for these occasions, as led by the form tutor.

The Extended Day

We have decided that the boarding houses should only be accessible outside of the school day, and only for boarders at that time. Flexi-boarders will not be able to access their boarding house. By doing this, we are able to ensure that the boarding house is able to be cleaned thoroughly during the school day and all pupils are as safe as possible during the extended day. This will also reduce the risks presented by flexi-boarders and boarders mixing other than in the controlled environment of the school day.

As boarders will not be able to access their boarding house, they will need to have a rucksack and will need to pack for their day in advance. As you may have seen from Mr Czerpak's letter, boarders may attend school in PE kit if they have PE or Games during the school day, but may wish to bring a change of footwear with them if required for a specific sport.

Boarders and flexi-boarders will be provided with a **Hub Space** on site for their year-based bubble. This will be used for break-times and the extended day, and will include a defined area of outside space on campus for that bubble. Lunch-times will be staggered for different bubbles to eat at different times. For breakfasts and tea, boarders will eat separately to flexi-boarders, and each boarding house will have different times to eat within their own boarding house bubble.

We will have in place a co-curricular programme after school, with activities which the boarders need to book in the usual way. For this term, however, the afternoon activity programme will be strictly arranged to be for separate year-based bubbles.

Boarding

The boarders may of course return to their houses, after the school day finishes, and they may do so to get changed to then join their co-curricular activity with their year group bubble. As said previously, to help ensure safety we will be expecting the boarders to wash hands very thoroughly whenever re-entering the boarding house, and they will not be able to visit other boarding houses.

We have carefully considered how to make each boarding house the safest environment possible, whilst balancing this with the need to ensure that all of our boarders feel at ease, supported and cared for. To ensure this we will be taking specific steps, such as: restricting the use of communal kitchens, increasing the frequency and depth of cleaning, preventing boarders from entering other bedrooms, allocating communal areas to specific groups of boarders within the house and training staff in how to uphold safe behaviours. We will be sending you the details of our risk assessment and safeguarding measures along with answers to frequently asked questions (FAQ) to give you more details on this. Due to the measures we are taking, and the fact that we are treating the boarders in each boarding house as one bubble, we do not feel there is a need for boarders to wear face-masks when in the boarding house, although they may if they would prefer to.

In the late afternoons, evenings and weekends, we will be looking to organise some co-curricular activities for the boarders only, but these will generally be for each house bubble, separate to the others. We are treating the houses as individual bubbles, and this includes when they go to the dining room for breakfast, tea and weekend meals.

We plan to allow sixth form and year 10 and 11 boarders who are on the highest house status in terms of trust and personal responsibility to be able to go off site to visit Redhill at weekends. This will need to be arranged according to strict provisos, such as staying within their house groupings for the visit. This will be reviewed at half-term, or earlier if needs be.

Boarders will be able to go home for the weekend, but this will need to be agreed well in advance with the boarding house and the boarders will only be able to return to the boarding house upon confirmation that they have observed the government guidelines and that the home household is symptom free. We will be asking for a form to be completed by parents to support this for each and every return from home. We recognise that this is an inconvenience but we must do all we can to ensure that the boarding houses remain safe for all of our boarders and community on site.

We will be observing quarantine arrangements for boarders travelling from affected countries. They are either coming to the School to be quarantined for the necessary time before the School re-opens, or they will be quarantined away from school with guardians or family until able to join our boarding community.

There will be isolation procedures in place to safeguard boarders if there are symptoms or cases within the School or within boarding. We will be communicating these if and when your children are affected by these procedures. We have worked on these with Public Health England and the Boarding School Association (BSA) in line with their Covid Safe Charter, which we have signed up to.

Expected kit for all boarders to have:

- **Rucksack for the school day**
- **(senior school boarders only) Sufficient set of re-useable and washable face masks** (at least 3 to allow for laundry) **or a sufficient set of disposable face-masks.** *Please note that face-masks must be plain and not in bright colours or patterned – they are functional equipment and not to be fashion accessories in school.*

Recommended kit for all boarders to have:

- **Personal hand sanitiser.** Although the houses will have additional handwashing stations at the entrance to the house, and there will be hand sanitisers in classrooms, we recommend all pupils have their own with them in their rucksack as part of their kit. We recognise that this might be difficult for international boarders to bring, but the boarding house can support them once they are here, if needed.

- **(senior school boarders only) Personal Laptop.** We recommend that boarders have their own laptop, or equivalent. Perfectly sufficient models can be bought at around £300. The reason we recommend this, even though the boarding houses have PC rooms, is that if a group of pupils need to isolate, boarders having their own machine will very much assist them continuing to take part in remote learning, for example following a streamed lesson in their boarding house, etc. As with mobile phones we will continue to control these devices after hours.

We are happy to be sent any questions that you may have on the above, and in fact welcome them as they will help us during this planning phase. Please could questions be sent to the Concerns email as below:

concerns@gatton-park.org.uk

We will be continuing to monitor the government guidelines and changes that are made to them. We will continue to communicate any significant changes that we are making to how we are going to run boarding and the school day, as needed.

I hope that so far you have been able to enjoy the sunshine, and my best wishes for the rest of the summer holidays.

Yours sincerely,



Mark Dixon
Headmaster