

Learning together to be the best we can be

Headteacher - Nichola Irving



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Dear Parents

Firstly I would like to apologise for the delay in this communication but as you can imagine since returning to school in January lots has happened. I have no doubt that for you as parents it has been a tricky time too. Throughout the pandemic we have tried to communicate regularly and be transparent with regards to decisions made and how school will operate. I want to continue with this approach as I believe it is in the best interests of all.

Where to begin - only a day before the start of term for many schools (Sunday) we were informed schools were safe and were to stay open. Our training day (Monday) was spent preparing for full opening but advice from unions around safety of full opening forced many schools, including Horton Grange to regrettably close. This was a difficult decision for all and not something that any staff member took lightly. Later that evening (Monday) the Government announced school closures and that they should remain open for children of key workers and vulnerable children only. On Tuesday, schools began to plan how they would operate with no guidance from the Department for Education. On Wednesday some children eligible to attend did so, with still no guidance to direct schools. On Thursday evening we received new guidance with no cap on the number of vulnerable and key worker children in school. This could have made social distancing a challenge and contradict risk assessment measures in place in light of the new COVID 19 strain, which is more transmissible. Friday brought another u-turn with school nurseries to be open fully and the number of required hours per day for remote learning increased. By Friday evening, the guidance changed again stating parents should keep children at home if they could. My point here is simply that over a very short period of time we have operated with lack of guidance and then lots of changes so please bear with us at this difficult time. I am mindful that this was also a confusing time for parents too!

Whilst the message from various sources is that schools are shut, I would like to stress that we are still open to children of **critical workers and vulnerable children**. Today we have 143 children in school. The attendance across county varies and is proportionate to the size of school and staffing levels. At all stages I must assess the risks regarding attendance and therefore places for all who need them cannot always be guaranteed. The most recent guidance states:

Vulnerable children and young people include those who:

- are assessed as being in need under section 17 of the Children Act 1989, including children and young people who have a child in need plan, a child protection plan or who are a looked-after child
- have an education, health and care (EHC) plan
- have been identified as otherwise vulnerable by educational providers or local authorities (including children's social care services), and who could therefore benefit from continued full-time attendance, this might include:
 - children and young people on the edge of receiving support from children's social care services or in the process of being referred to children's services



- adopted children or children on a special guardianship order
- those who may have difficulty engaging with remote education at home (for example due to a lack of devices or quiet space to study)
- others at the provider and local authority's discretion including pupils and students who need to attend to receive support or manage risks to their mental health

Critical workers

Parents whose work is critical to the coronavirus (COVID-19) include those who work in health and social care and in other key sectors. Children with at least one parent or carer who is a critical worker can go to school if required. This includes parents who may be working from home, **but parents and carers should keep their children at home if they can.**

The guidance around children of critical workers is ambiguous with the most recent addition in bold. However, I urge everyone to appreciate that everyone's situation is different and to be non-judgemental of parents' choices regarding sending their child to school if they are eligible. Please be kind – especially at this difficult time. Many staff, including myself, have primary school aged children who may be attending as key worker children in their own schools to allow us to carry out our own key worker roles daily, so we understand the difficult decisions being made and worries this may cause.

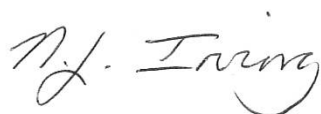
We are operating systems which are very different to the previous lockdown. This is education and not childcare. Children are, where possible, with their own class teacher so we can keep bubbles consistent and limit mixing. This should make transition to re-opening much smoother when it safe to do so and when we are directed by the Government. We are trying to ensure that children learning remotely are not disadvantaged. Staff are working very hard to teach children in school every day as well as setting remote learning, feeding back and making phone calls to support parents and children at home. Please be mindful that the staff are working hard to balance school and home learning; this is our chosen profession and staff at Horton Grange are committed to ensuring the best possible education for all in these challenging circumstances.

This brings me to the parents supporting children at home with remote learning. Again everyone's circumstances are different and I know you will be trying your best – so be kind to yourselves too. We are required to set a specific number of hours learning but we do understand the difficulties this can bring. Many of you will be working from home and trying to balance this. When you receive a phone call from us, we are trying to be supportive – we are not checking up on you I promise! If there is anything else we can do to help please contact us.

The support from parents throughout this pandemic has been appreciated by all and I hope we can continue to work together. Further details regarding home learning will follow.

Finally I would like to say a big well done to the children of Horton Grange – despite all these changes they always impress whether they are in school or learning at home.

Take care and stay safe.



Nichola Irving
Headteacher