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2nd September 2020

Dear Parents and Carers,

Welcome back! I know some of you have had children in our schools throughout the pandemic but I appreciate for many of you this week will be the first time you have sent your children into school for almost six months. As you will have heard from your head teachers and school staff we have been working hard over the holidays to do as much as we can to make school as normal as possible but most importantly as safe as possible for your children and our school staff.

Experience tells us that over the next few weeks the guidance we receive for our schools will be subject to change and we will endeavour to keep you informed of any developments that may affect you or your child. As you may know, our Trust operates across four local authorities and each has slightly different approaches to how we manage the issues that arise so our Head Teachers will be the first to communicate with you any changes in our plans.

Leading up to the new term there has been a huge amount of press and media coverage about schools and the levels of anxiety about COVID from staff and parents. From our perspective we are thrilled and excited to be opening our schools to all of our children. We see our schools as working together with, and as part of, their local community so please can I appeal to all of you to support us in keeping our schools as safe as possible by respecting social distancing and keeping to the bubbles and households that the government suggests.

As we move into winter we know there will unfortunately very likely be the usual increase in cases of coughs and colds. Unfortunately, whereas in the past we have managed to accommodate children with minor cold symptoms we will now have to follow the strict guidance which requires our schools to send children home if they present with a cough, a raised temperature or any symptoms that could potentially suggest they have the coronavirus. We have been assured by Public Health that tests are readily available for children and that the turnaround times are swift for a test, however if a child presents with symptoms they and their household must self-isolate pending a negative test result.

Finally can I thank you for the kind words and support that so many of you have shown towards our schools. I cannot deny this has been one of the most challenging times in my career in education but I am lucky to work with such a dedicated, skilled and caring team who simply want the best for our children.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "P. Rickeard".

Paul Rickeard
Chief Executive Officer
Durham Diocesan MAT