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Dear Parents,

I apologise that my usual half term letter arrives later than normal but I know you can all appreciate how very busy it has been to get the school ready for the re-opening last week. Your help and support has been greatly appreciated as once again we enter a phase of the School's operation that none of us has experienced before. Since last week we are running four different models of the school experience. We have those who are attending school in the identified year groups of Nursery, Reception, Year 1 and Year 6. We have Showbie running for the children in those year groups who are unable to attend for any reason. We have the Key Worker children who are split into two bubbles across Years 2 to 5 and of course we have the rest of the School who are working from Showbie. With the government's latest announcement that schools will not re-open for all before the end of this term I know some of you will be tempted to e-mail to make a case for your child returning. We are looking at what the remainder of this term, and indeed next September, will look like from every angle and will make decisions that first and foremost look at the safety of all those in the Richard Pate family.

Return to School Last Week: We were delighted to see as many as 125 of the children back last week which accounts for 72% of those eligible to return. We know that some families are shielding and others are waiting to be certain that it is safe to return. We saw Nursery, Reception, Year 1 and Year 6 come back to be educated in smaller groups known as bubbles. These bubbles are separate entities that do not mix with one another and are taught by separate staff. To cater for the 28% who are not coming in we are running Showbie both in School and remotely. This has created a fair amount of work for the teaching staff but does mean that those at home are not disadvantaged educationally by their absence. Staggered arrival and departure times also means that we are limiting the contact between parents at drop off and pick up times. The in-school team has been tremendously impressed with the children's behaviour throughout this process and wanted me to share how grateful they were for parents' cooperation. We have so many children and parents cycling that we wonder if we will need a car park when we return!

Mrs James and her catering team are offering a variety of packed lunches and snacks to the children coming into School and made lots of children very happy with the hot dogs on Friday. She is looking to increase the offer of hot lunches as the system becomes more refined. We do ask parents not to send snacks in with children as this increases the risk of contamination. If you feel your child is not getting enough to eat please let your child's class teacher know and we will address it.

Return of the Rest of the School: Nothing would make me happier than seeing everyone back in School where they belong but we must not get complacent in our efforts to come out of this pandemic. We are looking at all options and a huge number of scenarios both for the remainder of this academic year and for our return in September. Our challenges are space and human resources. Each of our year groups must be split into three for any return and this requires an additional room and an additional form teacher. As no member of staff is permitted in more than one bubble this affects our ability to run our specialist provision in each of the year groups. We will keep you posted on developments and as always appreciate your patience through this process.

Exciting Appointments: Back in the Spring Term we went through a recruitment drive to appoint a number of new staff, both to cover retirements we had announced as well as to add to our provision. For obvious reasons the lockdown has made our usual recruitment checks more challenging but we are now in a position to announce those appointments. We have also decided to use this as an opportunity to make some internal adjustments which we are also very excited about. We have always tried to run a lean, efficient admin team at School trying to ensure the investment is spent in the classroom. More recently we have become aware that we are in need of a greater presence on-line and we could refine our communications to you. As a result we launched a search for a Head of Communications and Marketing and we were inundated with applications. We were delighted to find the successful candidate amongst our own parental constituency and we are excited about what Mrs Victoria Compton will bring to the team. Mrs Compton brings a huge amount of experience and is very excited to get started when we return for the new academic year which marks the School's 75th anniversary.

With Mrs Jones, Mr Gilvear and Mrs Cooper announcing their retirements we had a hugely important job to find the right people to fill those vacancies. Mrs Conner was our successful applicant to take on the Special Educational Needs and Disability Coordinator position from September. We appointed Mrs Rachel Norris to take up the Reception post from September and Mrs Norris brings a huge amount of Early Years' experience to the team. Mrs Norris has been acting EYFS Lead at Hatherley Infant School and is very excited to join the EYFS team at Richard Pate. We then decided to move Mrs Lewis up to Year 2 to partner with Miss West. This meant the appointment of Miss Laura Thomas to join Mr Jones in Year 1. Miss Thomas has taught across EYFS and Key Stage 1 at Robinswood Primary Academy and comes highly recommended for her leadership of creative pursuits across the Multi-Academy Trust. In the Junior Department we are moving Miss Ingrey to Year 3 to work alongside Mrs Argyrou putting our curriculum leads for English and Maths together. This creates a vacancy in Year 5 where Mr Luke Kitchen will work alongside Miss Massey. Mr Kitchen joins us from the Oasis Academy in Worcester and has led Maths previously. Miss Massey was formerly Head of English at Cheltenham College Prep School so this gives us another strong pairing in the core subjects. Mr Kitchen also looks forward to supporting Mr Edwards in the boys' sport programme with extensive experience teaching and participating in sport, including captaining the U18 England National Football Team.

We have two more changes to announce in this newsletter with regards to retirements. Mrs Gail Mills has announced that this will be her last term with us. Mrs Mills has been leading Year 3 and Year 6 drama and has done a brilliant job of driving forward the English Speaking Board curriculum over the last number of years. Mrs Mills and I worked together 21 years ago when I first arrived in Cheltenham so this ends a very long professional relationship. We are grateful to Mrs Mills for all she has done and know that she will continue to visit us at RPS. Mr Pound has also decided that he will begin a phased retirement in order to spend more time with his parents who are requiring more support. Mr Pound will be working part-time from September and will continue to teach Science to Year 3 and 4 children. I am delighted to announce that his Year 5 and 6 Science teaching will be taken on by Mr David Wade. Mr Wade has worked as Head of Science in a number of schools and most recently has filled that role at Pittville School. Mr Wade is really excited to take on this new challenge and is very eager to take the children through their Science curriculum in our wonderful laboratory and outdoor area. Mr Wade is well known to the School as he is married to Mrs Wade, one of our Deputy Heads and Year 6 teacher.

PTA Video: As I said in my last assembly I was absolutely delighted to open my post last week to find a memory stick with the PTA-organised thank you tribute from the children. I, along with all my colleagues, was moved beyond words to see them all with their home made signs, posters and even a creative use of the garden hose! This lockdown has been difficult for everyone in different ways but seeing the video set to inspirational music was just the tonic we all needed. Due to GDPR I was unable to show the video through Showbie but I will play it for the children when we are all re-united.

Induction Evenings: Traditionally we would be getting ready to host our induction evenings for both Prep and Junior Departments but those are not possible in the traditional format. We will be arranging a virtual alternative for those parents whose children are about to transition into Reception and to those Year 2 parents whose children will be making the move into Year 3. These are significant and exciting steps in our School journey and we want you to feel reassured and as well prepared as possible. We will be sending you details of those meetings in the coming days.

Residential Trips: We would normally be reporting on the fabulous experience enjoyed by our Year 4 and Year 6 children as they returned from their hugely successful residential trips but neither of those were able to take place this year. Our current Year 4s will be having their residential in Year 5 next summer so that they do not miss out on this exciting opportunity. The Year 6s sadly won't have that chance which is one of the great disappointments caused by Coronavirus. Fortunately, many of them have been able to reunite recently and we have arranged refunds for those parents. Those Year 6s in school have the opportunity to do cycling proficiency in the coming weeks.

Many Thanks to Parents: I am in contact with a great many other Heads across the sector and I know that they are all facing huge challenges. This has been one of the most difficult periods I have faced in 31 years of education. I do have to say that the support we have had from you, the parents, has made a tremendous difference. You have all recognised that the current situation is not of our choosing and I genuinely believe we have been working as a team to make the most of the situation. We could not have made Showbie work without the tremendous support we have had from you at home. I appreciate it is not always easy but the children have maintained a working routine that will stand them in good stead when they do eventually return to "normality". I have also been incredibly grateful to those who have paid the full fees and to the sets of parents who have made donations to the School in the way of a gazebo, digital infrared thermometers and IT equipment to help us through this latest period. We have been wonderfully touched by the gestures but they are also helping us to weather this very challenging financial storm. I know many of those Heads are finding their greatest challenges coming from their own parents while I can genuinely say you have been one of our greatest supports.

Final Assembly: Last year I managed to return from surgery and a prolonged stay in hospital to say farewell to the Year 6 leavers. This year we face a brand new challenge. We are considering lots of possibilities but I ask the Year 6 parents to keep the final week flexible as we will find some appropriate way to mark the end of a fabulous Richard Pate career for an extra special year group.

Normally we would be so excited about the Summer Fayre, the Lido Party, the various productions, the Sports Days and the list goes on. It is very sad to think we won't be able to enjoy those events this year. We have all been part of a time in history that will be talked about for a hundred years. We must stop and remember that while this has been challenging for all of us in different ways we are all so blessed to be where we are and when we come out of this, try our very best not to take things for granted. We look forward to things returning to normal, even if that normal does not feel completely familiar. We must see it as an opportunity to make the most of the life we are given. I look forward to continuing that journey with all of you.

Yours sincerely,

Robert MacDonald
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