



Newsletter – 23rd June 2023

Dear parents and carers,

To say that the last couple of weeks have been eventful is akin to saying that the Pacific Ocean is a bit wet. At some point later this term I will write an account of the last couple of weeks, as long as I haven't deeply suppressed the memories by then.

There have been some reports in the local press about our situation, some of them more accurate than others. My statement to the press, being positive about everyone, has not been included at all so, for what it is worth, here it is:

I am completely overwhelmed by the positive reaction from our parents, staff and pupils who have been incredibly supportive since learning of the sudden need for the partial closure of the school. Alternative arrangements have been quickly put into place to ensure that disruption to the affected year groups is kept to a minimum - hopefully with all classes returning to face-to-face learning by Wednesday this week. I would like to thank everybody concerned for their response to this, including the two wonderful schools who have agreed to host us for the remainder of this term; I had offers of help from many other local schools, churches and Tunbridge Wells Borough Council. I did not think it was possible to be prouder of my school community than I already was, but they have all exceeded themselves yet again. I am thankful that KCC are now organising for the necessary works to be completed in such a short timeframe.

As I have already said, lots of people have been involved in putting together the current arrangements, and I have had support from many different people, including many at KCC, the diocese and Greg Clark, our MP. I am deeply grateful to all of them.

Most of all I would like to thank the staff at St James', Temple Grove and Rusthall – I am sure you will appreciate that I am a very small cog in a very wonderful machine with many people working extremely hard.

Roof

I thought I would try and explain the issue with the school's roof as clearly as a lay person can.

The school roof is made of a grid of steel beams with RAAC panels laying across the top. New guidance from the Institute of Structural Engineers stipulates that they recommend that the panels sit on the beams, with an overlap of at least 75mm unless they have been reinforced. The DfE adopted this on Wednesday. The panels at St James' sit on the beams with an overlap of 50mm. Therefore, we are short by 25mm (or one inch). Overnight our school became non-compliant and we were asked to close all parts of the school built in this way.

The ceilings in every affected room will be removed completely and the roof panels will be reinforced from underneath. The classrooms will be completed first and the school hall/communal areas last.

I explained this to Year 3 and 6 using lego as a metaphor. Some children have missed the metaphor (my fault entirely) and have told their parents that the school has closed because the roof is made of lego. Please let me reassure you that no lego has been used in the construction of the building.



I am going to clarify this by building a model of the school in lego this weekend and bringing it to school to help explain to the children in assembly why this work needs to be done. This will either help their understanding or further reinforce the fiction that we have been sitting inside a giant lego school every day.

Start of the school year September 2023

While it is anticipated that the school will be ready for us at the start of term, this is not a certainty and, even if it is, we will inherit an empty shell; the contractors have said they will allow us back into school on 1st September. We have asked for permission by KCC to add an additional INSET day to the start of the school year to get the school back together, which means that the children would return on Tuesday 5th September. I will let know you if this is granted. If it is not we will reallocate an INSET from later in the school year. Therefore, regardless we will have an extra INSET on 4th September and all children will return to school on 5th September.

While 1st September has been given to us with a fair degree of certainty by the people doing the work and KCC, we need to keep in mind that this completion date may drift and we might need to consider contingencies.

The deer

As you know a wild deer found its way into the school earlier this week. I would like to reassure everyone that, following the advice of the RSPCA person who arrived, we lowered a fence and left the gates open overnight and the deer found its way back to its friends. Chloe from Chaffinch class, an eyewitness of the event, has drawn a picture to capture the excitement, which she wanted me to share with you:



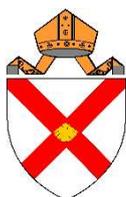
Ofsted

We have still had no word from Ofsted and were beginning to worry that they will repeat their 2017 practical joke of turning up in the last week of the school year. They were getting so overdue that I had tried several methods to induce an Ofsted, including (but not limited to) spicy curries and hot baths. I heard this week that Ofsted have suspended inspections for schools nationwide who are dealing with this disruption, so we will not hear from them for another few months.

Engine idling

This means sitting in a car while leaving the engine running and more and more people seem to be doing it at the moment. In order to push Armageddon back as far as possible, please do not do this – apart from unnecessary emissions, it is deeply unpleasant for pedestrians. If you are getting a bit too warm sitting in your car, my advice would be to open the door and get out.

The school council recently voted on measures to make the school greener and engine idling was something they raised.



Warm weather

What beautiful weather we have had. Please remember to give your child a full bottle of fresh water each morning, apply sun cream and give them a hat.

Photographs

I would like to say a very public “thank you” to Georgina Edwards, a parent and professional photographer, who came into school the week before last to take some photos of the school in action. The photos are absolutely beautiful. The very least we could do is to include Georgina’s website address in this newsletter:
www.georginaedwardsphotography.co.uk

Reception news

Reception have enjoyed the start of their topic 'Land Ahoy!' They discovered a parrot loose in the school grounds and have enjoyed watching videos of it. They discovered that the parrot belongs to Pirate Ellen as they were reunited during their pirate drama workshop. During the workshop the children thought about what type of pirate they would be, what their job would be aboard a pirate ship and braved the swamp avoiding stompy the croc!

We are now thinking about our own pirate adventures, what we need and how to make it. We were very grateful to our dad's, grandparent's and wider family who came to school on 22nd June to help us make pirate ships!
Mrs Coward

Dates for the diary

Here are some dates for the remainder of the term ahead. If you visit the calendar on the school website, the diary dates can now be imported into Google calendars.

28 th June	Sports Day – weather dependent
1 st July	Summer Fair
3 rd July	11+ Kent Test registration closes
4 th & 6 th July	Parent consultations (except Year 5)
21 st July	Last day of term
1 st September	INSET day
4 th September	Additional INSET day - see above
5 th September	Children return to school today (see above)

Kindest regards,
John Tutt

