



### School closure update – 16<sup>th</sup> June 2023

Dear parents and carers,

I am writing with an update on the current partial school closure. The job of a head teacher is an impossible one at the best of times, but St James' do seem to have had more than our fair share of rotten luck.

Last night I was called by KCC and directed to close the main junior building with immediate effect. This followed a meeting between KCC and the DfE.

To contextualise this, recently the Institute of Structural Engineers issued new guidance which deemed that RAAC constructed roofs should be further supported. Issues around roofs constructed using RAAC panels have been in the news recently; the DfE took the decision on Wednesday that all schools with this type of roof construction should be closed with immediate effect to mitigate any risk.

In 2018, St James' was identified as having RAAC panels in its roof, and two surveys have been carried out to ensure they are in a safe condition. The junior school had its roof covering replaced in between the two surveys and no concerns were identified then either. However, following the DfE's decision, all schools with this roof type have to close, regardless of their condition.

The end result was my email to you last night. This morning I have spoken to Greg Clark, the diocese and KCC who are all supporting us. I think we all agree that remote learning for half of the school until the summer holidays is unthinkable.

KCC are beginning work to permanently support the roof from Monday and this should be completed by the end of the summer break. Until then, any part of the junior building with RAAC construction has to be closed.

We have identified three rooms within the junior building which are potentially RAAC free – although not ideal, we will move 3 classes to these rooms. Surveys on Monday will confirm their ability to be used. We will endeavour to find space within St James' for the Year 2, 4 and 5 classes (Rabbit, Stoat and Nightingale) to keep those year groups together.

Unfortunately we have no further space within St James' for the remaining year groups. We will therefore be making use of two local Tunbridge Wells schools. We will keep year groups together and our teachers will be staying with their classes. I already know one of those schools very well and I visited the other today.

Year 3 will be relocated to Rusthall St Paul's - the school has 3 spare classrooms and we already have a strong working relationship with them. KCC will support transport to and from the school using coaches for those parents with children in other year groups or who have no transport to call upon.

Year 6 will be relocated to Temple Grove Academy who are our nearest school and also have the space we need. They will have 3 classrooms and a hall, as well as outdoor space. KCC will also provide transport to those who need it.

I am deeply grateful to both of these wonderful schools for helping us get through this difficult time.



I realise that this is far from ideal, and that it will take a little time to organise the details. We are working towards having everything in place by Wednesday next week, with the classes currently at home having remote learning for Monday and Tuesday. We will get each class into a classroom as soon as we possibly can, and earlier than Wednesday if at all possible.

We will get all children back to St James' as often as we can – especially those in Year 6 who have transition events to look forward to.

I would like to apologise again for the disruption this has caused and is causing to everyone. I would also like to thank all of the lovely parents who have been kind enough to offer words of thank or support – they have been appreciated more than you know.

Kindest regards and deepest thanks,

John Tutt  
Head Teacher

