



3rd July 2019

Dear Parents and Carers

Happy Days Pre-School

Thanks goes to all the parents who have emailed concerns and questions following our letter regarding the future of Happy Day's Pre-School. As CEO of Pickwick Academy Trust, I felt it would be appropriate to answer and clarify these questions and specific issues that may have been misunderstood.

Background

Parents and carers of pupils in EYFS and Year One will know that structural engineers have recommended that in certain weather conditions such as high wind or when it is snowy, pupils have to be evacuated from the Pratten Huts into the main school. When this has occurred EYFS pupils have been cared for in the Ivy Hall which has access to toilets and space for inside PE and other learning activities. Year one pupils are accommodated in the main school hall. So far this arrangement, while inconvenient, has worked well. The school offered Happy Days the use of the "Nest" in the new block to use on these occasions but staff felt the area was not suitable and as we have no other space available in the school, in the event of these weather conditions the Pre-School, sadly, made the decision to be closed for the day.

As you know during the Easter holidays, Ivy Hall was set on fire, we now know the building repairs that are needed, we anticipate will not be completed by our insurance company until early 2020. The knock-on effects have impacted on many aspects of school life; no kitchen to cook hot dinners, no space for additional PE lessons and most importantly no space for EYFS pupils to go, in the event of an evacuation from the Pratten Huts.

Over recent weeks the school has worked tirelessly to answer the question: "when will Ivy Hall be repaired?" It was only on Wednesday 26th June 2019, when emails were received outlining the quote for the building work in the region of £100,000 and the scale of the work became clear, our dream of Ivy Hall coming back into use by October 2019 was not going to be achieved. During this time, the insurance company has verbally agreed to siting two temporary small classrooms on the playground adjacent to the car park, we are hoping these will be delivered soon. Due to the delay in repairing Ivy Hall, the insurance company has also agreed to provide a kitchen POD and set of toilets, which means we will be able to provide hot meals again in the autumn term. But this creates an additional problem; the kitchen POD, toilets and two temporary classrooms will all be on the playground leaving little space for anything else. We cannot put the temporary classrooms on the playground in front of the Pratten Huts as the space between the Victorian building and the new two storey block is too narrow to crane in temporary accommodation.

We would reiterate again that we are in the hands of the insurance company who commissions the repairs and so we have very little influence over the speed, timings and cost which has been very frustrating for us all.

The replacement of the Pratten Huts has been a priority for Governors and the Trust and over the last two years, plans have been put in place resulting in a complicated bid being submitted to the Department for Education (DfE) last November 2018. The replacement building includes four classrooms and a new pre-school classroom. In March of this year, we heard that our bid had been unsuccessful by only one percentage point based on the DfE scoring criteria. The Governors and Trust have appealed against the DfE's decision and we are keeping our fingers crossed that we will be successful when our bid appeal is independently reviewed. The results of the appeal is not expected to be published until the end of July 2019.



The original bid submitted to the DfE was based on the assumption that the building work would start in the summer holidays, enabling most of the demolition of the Pratten Huts and grounds works to be completed when the children were not on site. At the same time, five temporary classrooms were planned to be sited on the playground and back field. The issue to do with accessibility for site and emergency vehicles mean that the temporary classrooms now have to be narrow and rectangular in design and could not be located on the field due to crane access. This has meant all temporary classrooms now need to be on the playground and only two 2-storey buildings can fit in to ensure play space for children, and vehicular, this is in addition to the kitchen POD and toilets. If our appeal is successful we know some of the difficult demolition and grounds work will happen during term time now, making the build far more complicated. We will continue to work hard with the appointed contractor to ensure disruption is controlled, for instance it is planned to construct the new classroom building off site making the build process much quicker.

It is the fire that has tipped the balance, anyway you look at it, the need to locate a kitchen POD and toilets in addition to the two classrooms if the appeal is unsuccessful, or four classrooms if the appeal is successful, means there is no space left on site for the additional Pre-School Classroom.

We have spoken to contractors and porta-cabin/mobile classroom providers about locating mobile classrooms on the top field in the hope Happy Days temporary accommodation could be sited there. All have come back and said it is impossible to crane any building through the top gate – it is just too small. All in all, we are left with little option as we outlined in our letter of the 28th June 2019.

After the news from the insurance company about the Ivy Hall refurbishment delay (26th June 2019) and the fact that we could not place any temporary accommodation on the top field, we felt we would be failing in our duty if we did not talk to Happy Days immediately. As we already had a meeting planned for the 27th June 2019 to speak to the Chair, we felt this provided us with an opportunity to break the sad news.

Understandably there has been a lot of concern about the decision to terminate Happy Days lease but not all of the comments received are correct, we will try our best to answer some in no particular order:

“You promised Happy Days temporary accommodation during building works, you have reneged on your promise.”

We have held meetings with the Chair and Manager of Happy Days Pre-School, they have seen our new building plans and we have discussed temporary accommodation during the construction phase, this is true. We had no idea the fire would occur or that temporary accommodation could not be located on the top field.

“Although the legal position of Pickwick Academy Trust is likely to be sound, the moral and ethical stance taken is questionable.”

We have not taken the decision to terminate the Happy Days lease lightly. We felt it was better to inform the Chair as soon as we knew, we believed this was fair to all involved. We could have made the decision to delay the meeting, but we recognised the risk that parents might then not be informed until the summer holidays, when a lot of alternative pre-schools provision is closed. This did not feel right to us.

We fully accept the upset this decision has caused for Happy Days staff, families and of course the children. We have contacted local schools to see if any have spare classrooms that could be used and have informed the Chair of possible options to explore, in the hope alternative accommodation could be found at short notice.

“You must have known about this weeks ago, you have been misleading everyone.”

To reassure you, we only heard from the insurance company on Wednesday 26 June 2019 and we took advice from our legal advisors on the same day. The final decision was made to terminate the lease on the morning of the 27th June – the day we met with the Chair and a member of his team to provide the maximum time possible for Happy Days to seek alternative accommodation.



What will the school do with the Happy Days classroom?

The school has no plans to use the space as the building will be eventually be demolished.

“Why are you doing this when you don’t even know if the Pratten Replacement Bid has been successful – you should have waited?”

We can understand why parents and carers would think this to be the case and there is no doubt that the situation is complicated. I think I have explained the difficulties regarding the building and fire, however in situations like this there are always other things going on which I will try my best to explain.

Happy Days original lease was operated by Wiltshire Council; when Ivy Lane, along with Corsham Primary, Queen’s Crescent and Aloeric Primary formed the Trust, all leases in all the school transferred to the Trust. Due to the possible building works, Governors at Ivy Lane felt it wise to extend the Happy Days lease for a further year, to be extended to July 2020 instead of July 2019. Governors then planned to go out to tender to a range of pre-school providers, including Happy Days, and would then draw up a new longer term lease in the new building. Over recent months, the Happy Days team have expressed concerns about the necessity to evacuate the building as, quite rightly, children have to be sent home at short notice causing disruption to working parents and their children. Understandably Happy Days are concerned about the consequential impact of their financial losses which we also understand. With limited options available to solve this problem, we have sought legal advice and our solicitors have suggested that Ivy Lane is “vulnerable” due to the fact that we are unable to provide consistent accommodation which would not necessitate evacuating children, a situation which would continue in the event that we are unsuccessful with the Pratten Hut building appeal. The terms of the lease are clear that the landlord (Ivy Lane School and Pickwick Academy Trust) have the right to terminate a lease agreement with three months’ notice plus five days.

While I recognise and acknowledge the decision to terminate the Happy Days lease has caused so much upset and concern, I am also deeply worried at the level of abuse the school, Mrs Lammin and other members of her team are suffering as a result of misinformation being inappropriately spread on social media and through other channels. Mrs Lammin is a true professional who has always conducted herself with dignity. She cares deeply about Ivy Lane and works hard to ensure our lovely school continues to provide the best education for the children. I know parents will be shocked to read this paragraph and I hope by being honest and open, will demonstrate Governors and Trustees commitment to working transparently with our school community.

Yours sincerely



Fiona Allen
CEO
Pickwick Academy Trust

