

Tuesday 1 August 2017

Dear Parents,

As most of you will be aware, on Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> July the School received notice from the Department for Education of the Secretary of State's decision to de-register the School from the Register of Independent Schools, subject to appeal.

This is an unprecedentedly challenging time for the School. After almost seventy years of providing a unique and inspiring education to countless children, the School is facing closure. Many of you will be feeling shock and distress at this development, and we understand and share this sentiment.

At a whole-school meeting last Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> July, Trustees and SMT spoke to parents about the Department for Education's decision, and presented our proposed strategy to move forwards and save the school. The notes accompanying this letter provide a summary of the meeting for those who could not attend.

The headlines from that meeting and from this letter are as follows:

- **The School will be open in September**
- **The School is confidently appealing the De-registration notice**
- **We have a new and exceptional legal team to support with all the challenges RSSKL is facing**
- **The School is appointing a new Interim Headteacher starting this August**
- **The School has a new team of Trustees with the expertise needed in key areas**
- **This new leadership is implementing a strategy to put right past failings and win the appeal**
- **Parents will be crucial to this strategy and there is much you can do**
- **We are confident that we will meet all School Standards while remaining an authentic Steiner School**

## THE NEW STRATEGY IN DETAIL

First and foremost, **the School will appeal against deregistration**, which we do not see as justified. Despite the very real problems which have to be put right, the School provides a strong Waldorf education to its children and this must be supported and sustained.

**The School Term will start in September as scheduled.** There is no question that the School will continue to operate while the appeal is ongoing. We do not yet know when the Tribunal will happen, but it may take place sometime later in the Autumn Term. We are confident that the School will continue to operate until the end of the 2017. We believe that with the right strategy the School's appeal will succeed. Please see below for more details about contingency planning for pupil provision for all scenarios.

To initiate the right strategy, several important steps are being taken immediately:

- **INTERIM HEADTEACHER:** The School is introducing new leadership to chart a new course and ensure the School not only appeals successfully but thrives again. To this end the School is in the final stages of appointing a new **Interim Headteacher**. The preferred candidate is a former Michael Hall pupil with years of experience successfully turning around schools in the mainstream sector. His remit will be to ensure the School meets and exceeds all Independent School Standards, rectifies all failings that have been identified to date, while ensuring that the School remains absolutely true to its Steiner values and ethos in the way that it educates your children.
- **NEW BOARD OF TRUSTEES:** All Trustees previous to May 2017 are stepping down to ensure a fresh direction, with new Trustees taking their place. Peter Harrington – a former Kings Langley pupil (KG-Class 13) and an experienced School Governor in the mainstream sector – has replaced Sarah Greenleaf as Chair. Other new external Trustees will bring essential skills and experience to the Board.

- **LEGAL REPRESENTATION:** The School has new legal advisors with the firm Mishcon de Reya, with a team led by Anthony Julius. This is good news: Mishcon are a top tier firm and Mr Julius brings outstanding expertise to the task. We met with them today to discuss the strategy going forward.

**SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT:** The new leadership is putting together a clear and robust strategy for the coming weeks and months. Central to this is the effort to intensify the process of school improvement and correcting past problems. Great progress has been made, but more needs to be done, in particular to address areas highlighted by past inspections:

- **Safeguarding:** The School will further strengthen its safeguarding culture and procedures, including the maximum transparency possible and better communications with parents (see below).
- **Leadership and management:** The appointment of an Interim Head is a major step, and the strategy will seek to further develop leadership and accountability at the school, improve administrative functions, and to strengthen the Trustee body.
- **Teaching and Learning:** We want to maintain the areas of teaching and learning that we know to be strong, preserving the Steiner curriculum and its many benefits, but alongside it to develop better ways of monitoring and assessing pupil progress

**PARENT QUESTIONS:** Parents have a key role to play in the strategy to save the school. At last week's all-school meeting, many important and pressing concerns were raised by parents, such as the provision for pupils should the appeal be lost, outstanding safeguarding concerns, and how parents can help.

- **PUPIL PROVISION:** The School is confident that it can successfully appeal. However, parents were understandably concerned about what could happen if the appeal is lost. Will the School close mid-year? What will happen for exam-year students? What are the risks? We are waiting to receive detailed advice from education counsel about the possible scenarios, and will communicate that advice immediately we have it. At this point, we can say the following with confidence: even if the appeal is lost, the Tribunal and DfE will consider all factors and their impact on pupil progress and welfare, including the fact that pupils' Steiner curriculum does not enable them to easily switch Schools, and that pupils may be studying exam curricula that are not offered within a reasonable distance of the school. This would likely influence any decision over the timing of closure, and the School would petition for any closure to take place at the end of an academic year.
- **SAFEGUARDING CONCERNS:** The Trustees are keen to turn a new page in transparency, accountability and communication in Safeguarding, particularly in the light of the shortcomings identified in the May 2017 Ofsted report. To address the legitimate questions of parents, we are preparing a detailed communication on Safeguarding that will follow in the next few days. We will put in place more consistent and regular updates and communications on this and other areas.
- **HOW PARENTS CAN HELP:** The School is very fortunate to have such a committed and skilled parent body, and we want to ensure that they are activated positively in the effort to save our school. We are grateful for the many offers of support that have been flowing in. Going forwards:
  - We will be setting up a Parents Advisory Council in relation to the appeal, in coordination with the PTFA, where the many skills of our parents can contribute to the work ahead. This group will work closely with the Trustees.
  - All efforts to save our school need to be coordinated and coherent, so we ask that parents ensure that at all times their efforts are coordinated with the Trustees and SMT.
  - Its essential that in the coming months we find ways to showcase the amazing qualities of this School, of Steiner education, and of our children, in a positive and inspiring way.

Many other questions were answered in the meeting, and we kindly refer those not present to the notes provided. For some questions, answers will be communicated in the coming days. If you have a question not covered in the meeting and notes, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

We are sure you will agree that we cannot allow the School we know and love to close. Together we must commit every ounce of effort to prevent that from happening. This will not be an easy task. Despite huge improvements made at the School this year, and tireless work from staff, the School has yet to satisfy the authorities that it meets the necessary standards. This means we have more work to do, more learning and adapting. We must rise to that challenge with patience and perseverance.

If we do so, we are confident that the School will be successful in its appeal, demonstrating to an independent Tribunal that not only is RSSKL a safe place for children which meets the required independent school standards, but that at the same time it provides a distinctive and exceptional education for children in a complex and challenging world.

To all parents, we wish to say thank you for the huge support that you continue to give to the school and which was in abundance at last Thursday's meeting. We feel honoured to be working on your behalf, and for your children.

Peter Harrington  
Chair of Trustees

Julian Paine  
Chair of SMT

**On behalf of the Trustees and Management of the Rudolf Steiner School Kings Langley**