

1<sup>st</sup> September 2023

Dear Families

I hope you have had a good summer and your children are looking forward to returning to school. You may be aware of recent press coverage regarding public buildings and schools across the country that have been reported as having Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) structures. This coverage has increased significantly over the last two days.

You can view some recent coverage here:

- [RAAC: Schools told to prepare pupil evacuation plans](#)
- <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-66673971>
- <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-essex-66678434>
- [Everything you need to know about the new guidance on RAAC in education settings](#)
- [More than 100 schools advised to close buildings due to concrete risk](#)
- [Schools in England told to be ready to evacuate buildings at risk of collapse](#)

Honywood is one such school that contains RAAC components within some parts of the school buildings and is one of the 104 schools that have been identified in the country - over 50 of them are in Essex. The Department for Education (DfE) carried out a survey just before the summer in line with their own guidance and as part of an overall management strategy. As we entered the summer holiday, the DfE issued a report on each of our buildings. At that point, their own guidance stated that only schools rated critical needed to take immediate action and implement any structural mitigation. Of the four possible ratings from the survey (Low, Medium, High, Critical), the majority of the Honwood site was low. We had no areas rated critical, therefore the next step was to develop an action plan of remedial work - the first step being to receive a more detailed DfE survey and develop a long term structural plan.

However, on Wednesday 30th August, when the DfE returned from their summer holiday, they changed their approach to the risk assessment ratings and deemed that any building that contains RAAC cannot be used until structural mitigation work has been carried out. Very sadly, they have decided that these parts of the school should not be open. We were informed of this change only in the afternoon on Thursday 31st August, which has meant that we have had to react rapidly. We have a significant number (22) of classrooms that we are no longer able to use and must be closed with immediate effect. We appreciate this news will be very unsettling for everyone, but we must follow what the DfE is requiring us to do.

We have been very proactive in managing this issue and have been working closely with the Trust, reacting as soon as we have been informed. I have already met with the Trust, Local Authority and DfE Caseworker. Our priority is to mitigate risk and minimise disruption to learners and staff during the new school term. You will understand we have had to make plans very quickly so that the children's education

can continue as disruption free as possible. As a result, I expect that our plans will change and evolve over time as the picture and landscape becomes more clear. The purpose of this communication is to inform you of the problem and to explain our short term measures for the first two weeks of term whilst we develop our longer term plans.

Our mitigation approach is likely to follow the following lines:

- Short term mitigation will be a disruption arising from a partial closure followed by remote and blended learning (combination of in school and remote using iPads and video conferencing - similar to Covid provision)
- Medium term mitigation will be to source additional teaching spaces in the form of portacabins or off site provision along with the transportation needed to access it.
- Long term mitigation will be to complete a series of structural support works in the affected classrooms and phase their opening once each is complete.

### Short term plans for week 1 and 2

#### Week commencing 4th September

- Monday 4th Sep - Staff Training Day as planned (*No Changes*)
- **Tuesday 5th Sep - No Learners in School (This includes C7)**
- Wednesday 6th Sep - Only C7 in school (*No Changes - this is now their first day*)
- **Thursday 7th Sep- Only C7 in school (Change affects - C8, C9, C10, C11)**
- **Friday 8th Sep - Only C7 and C11 in school (Change affects - C8, C9, C10)**

#### Week commencing 11th September

- Monday 11th Sep - **C7 C8 C11 in school (C8s to collect iPads)**
- Tuesday 12th Sep - **C7 C9 C11 in school (C9s to collect iPads); C8 remote learning**
- Wednesday 13th Sep - **C7 C10 C11 (C10s to collect iPads); C8 & C9 remote learning**
- Thursday 14th Sep - **C7 C8 C11; C9 & C10 remote learning**
- Friday 15th Sep - **C7 C9 C11; C8 & C10 remote learning**

**For families of learners in the HUB then all hub learners are to attend from Monday 11th September. Access to the HUB remains unchanged but there will be some timetable room changes.**

Following this, we have plans for a whole school blended approach of learners in school for about two thirds of the term and remote learning for the other third. However, we may be able to move to our medium term plans during this time, should our portacabins arrive on site. I shall provide a progress update on Monday as part of our ongoing communication after I have received further updates.

Lastly, I want to reassure you that whilst nobody expected this news, I am absolutely determined to make this experience as positive as it can be for the children. I have an incredibly strong team at Honywood and I want you to know that everyone will be

doing everything they can to not only make this work, but for the children to continue to have an excellent education with us throughout this time.

I attended a local authority meeting this morning and they assured me that they would be sending some FAQs for parents later today. In the meantime, at the end of this letter I have included some extracts from the DfE guidance to answer any immediate questions.

Yours sincerely

James Saunders

## **DfE - information on Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC)**

### **What is RAAC?**

RAAC is a lightweight form of concrete. The Standing Committee on Structural Safety (SCOSS) has noted that: "Although called "concrete", (RAAC) is very different from traditional concrete and, because of the way in which it was made, much weaker. RAAC was used in schools, colleges and other building construction from the 1950s until the mid-1990s. It may therefore be found in any school and college building (educational and ancillary) that was either built or modified in this time period.

### **How and why has the way we deal with RAAC changed?**

We have been helping schools and responsible bodies (such as local authorities and multi-academy trusts) to manage the potential risks of RAAC since 2018 by providing guidance and funding.

However, new cases have made us less confident that buildings containing RAAC should remain open without extra safety measures in place.

As a result, we're changing our approach and advising education settings to close any spaces or buildings that are known to contain RAAC to allow them to put mitigations in place. This is a precautionary step, but the safety of young people and staff is always our priority.

To minimise any disruption, all education settings with confirmed RAAC will be supported by a dedicated caseworker to help them through any necessary changes.

### **Why have you done this now?**

The Government has been aware of public sector buildings that contain RAAC since 1994 and we have been monitoring their condition since 2018. We continually assess new information and research about RAAC to ensure the safety of schools and pupils.

In 2022, the Department for Education sent a questionnaire to all responsible bodies, asking them to provide information to help us understand the use of RAAC across the school estate and make sure the correct support is in place.

Recent cases have now changed our assessment of the risk that RAAC poses to building safety.

We are taking immediate steps to ensure the safety of staff and pupils in line with this.

### **How many schools are affected by RAAC? Will all of them need to close?**

No – not all schools affected by RAAC need to close.

Just over 50 settings have already been supported to put mitigations in place this year, including through additional funding for temporary accommodation, and all children are receiving face to face learning.

This week, we have contacted all 104 further settings where RAAC is currently confirmed to be present without mitigations in place, to ask them to vacate spaces or buildings that are known to contain RAAC.

The impact of RAAC is varied – some settings may have very little RAAC present with limited disruption as a result. For example, this change in approach could lead to the temporary closure of one school space, like a single classroom. In most cases, children will be able to continue attending school as normal.

### **How are you supporting schools and education settings where RAAC is present?**

Most education settings will be unaffected by this change in approach. For those settings that are affected, we're working to make sure there is minimal disruption to education and the vast majority will remain open for face-to-face learning from the start of term.

All settings known to contain RAAC will be assigned a dedicated DfE caseworker who will work with the responsible body to assess the site's particular needs and help them put in place individual solutions.

This could include using other on-site buildings, local spaces, safety measures in the affected area and, in some cases, erecting temporary buildings.

We have also published further [guidance](#) for schools and colleges on identifying and managing RAAC. This will set out how the department will provide support and capital funding to schools and other settings so that face-to-face education continues safely.

- [ASCL Press Release](#)
- [NEU Press Release](#)
- [NASUWT Press Release](#)