



# Season's Greetings from Tokyo

Dear Friends around the World,

What a year this has been! We hope this card finds you and those in your community safe and in good health. We know that the pandemic has taken its toll on everyone, making it difficult to find holiday cheer, but that is all the more reason to remember with gratitude the people whom we love. We have not included a letter in past Christmas cards, but we thought you might be curious about the situation here in Japan and at Friends School.

While case numbers have started to rise again with the coming of colder weather, Japan has so far been spared the worst of the pandemic. The government made a sudden decision at the beginning of March to close all schools, meaning we were away from school for three months until the end of May. With mixed degrees of success we attempted to figure out distance learning, much of it taking a more analog form than might be common in other countries. We packed boxes with textbooks and other learning materials and sent them by mail to students at the beginning of the new school year. Students do all have iPads now, so we could also explore online-learning possibilities. It's been a steep learning curve, with the students often ahead of the teachers in their knowledge of how to use the iPads and online learning platforms. Thanks to the diligence of our students and the support of their families, when we were able to start teaching again in person we found that students had been able to make significant progress on their own during the stay-home period.

Students were able to return to school part-time in June, with half of all year groups attending in-person lessons on any given day and the other students studying at home. Since the middle of July we have been back to in-person classes for all students. Still, it is far from ordinary. Students wear masks and check their temperature morning and evening and only two year groups at a time are able to attend our daily morning meeting in the auditorium. Most extra-curricular activities — school trips, club camps and the school bazaar — have been cancelled and with them the sense of anticipation and the marking of the passage of the year. Fortunately, we were able to have a small school festival, though we were not able to open it to the wider community. It was a small celebration of community that lifted everyone's spirits. Despite all the difficulties, students and teachers have weathered the uncertainty and anxiety of the year with aplomb, remaining in good spirits and committed to learning.



*The Folk Dance Club performing in October*

Keeping everyone who is suffering in our minds and hearts, we welcome the Christmas season with its message of hope and joy, and we send to all of you our best wishes.