

7th January 2021

Dear Parents,

This is the first official newsletter of the term – though it may not feel like it given the week we have all faced!

As you will be aware from my previous communications, I am deeply appreciative that the staff who work at our school have chosen to place the needs of the children so highly, despite their completely understandable concerns regarding their personal safety and the well-being of their own families.

At a time when the country is being told to stay at home for anything other than essential reasons schools continue to be open for certain children. The regulations around the Government definitions of critical worker and vulnerable children are very different from those of the first lockdown in March 2020 in that many more employment roles are now included, and currently only one parent needs to be employed in these essential jobs. The Government have also removed the capping of numbers permitted to be in school during the lockdown. The outcome of this for our school is that we currently have very many more families who fall into the eligible critical worker categories who are requesting the children to attend on site. This places huge pressure on the staff who are ensuring learning at home for the majority of children on the VLE and responding to their learning questions, whilst simultaneously caring for a number of children completing the same learning as independently as possible in the classroom. It is challenging to maintain lockdown indoor social distance guidelines in our classrooms, which increases the levels of concern of both the staff and those children who really must be here due to their personal family circumstances. The guidance for the country remains that the safest place for us all is at home, and we are appreciative of those parents who are juggling their work and shift patterns to keep their children at home when they can.

Throughout this past year we have made every effort to maintain the education of the children as directed. As with the regulations, the direction is very different from last summer. At that time consolidation and some learning activities were considered appropriate; now schools are required to provide at least three to four hours per day of meaningful learning covering all areas of the curriculum. We are also held accountable for the progress the children make during their learning at home. Hence daily learning on the VLE with assessment activities included as appropriate. We do understand that you are not teachers and many of you are supporting your children whilst working from home. Therefore, we are making every effort to present these learning activities in a way such that your children, and those on site, can attempt them independently. However, as I stated in my communication on Tuesday, your children are expected to engage with the learning provided in order to continue their education during these difficult times.

Last year for families with children in Y1 to Y6 and in September for those families in YR, we conducted an Access to Technology Survey. Only a proportion of families responded, but the analysis showed that the overwhelming majority of our children do not have individual access to technology, and some with no access. The well-publicised Government scheme has allocated our school only three devices, which we will request as soon as the portal for primary schools opens. We have, on moral and equity grounds, to base our provision so that as many of the children as possible can access the learning at home. Therefore it is not equitable for on-line live teaching to be part of that provision. As I have

already communicated we are keeping the situation under review and will keep you informed of any further developments. We note that Joe Wickes is planning three fitness sessions, and the BBC are offering learning for primary age children from next week. The staff will be communicating with your children around engaging with these activities in a way which matches our curriculum requirements.

Please could parent general questions and comments be sent to the office e-mail address. The VLE is for the children to ask learning questions of their teacher, which includes any operational queries such as how to upload work. Thank you.

We are very appreciative that all adults who have needed to come onto the school site have worn a face covering. Thank you. It is one more small way that we can all help to keep each other as safe as we can.

If, due to your circumstances, your child is attending on-site, please do ensure they have additional layers of clothing under their uniform. These do not have to conform to our customary uniform colours – it is important that the children are warm. I am sure you understand the importance of fresh air especially to support the well-being of the staff in these stressful times.

Thank you to you all for your understanding and support. As you can imagine this has not been the start of term we were planning or would have chosen.

Mrs K. Tamlyn

Head Teacher