

## JANUARY 2021 NEWSLETTER

Dear Parents and Carers

So here we are again....not quite the start of term that we had all intended or wished for but at least this time round we know what to expect and we have experience of remote learning to draw upon. The partial closure of schools was looking increasingly inevitable over the Christmas period so I suspect that it did not come as a complete surprise to any of us. Given rapidly rising infection and the subsequent horrendous spike in death rates, there is little we can do but accept the situation for what it is and play our part as best as we can to protect the health of the nation.

**STAFFING:** I am very pleased to announce that Mrs. Rosaria Attanasio has been promoted to the position of Assistant Head Teacher, working closely alongside myself and Ms. Macci Dobie as the new member of the senior leadership team. Mrs. Attanasio currently shares part-time Y3 teaching duties with Ms. Fitzpatrick, she is our key stage one leader and our Special Educational Needs and Disability Co-ordinator (SENDCo). Her considerable expertise and experience will continue to be of great value to both her and the school in her new role.

**Partial School Closure:** At this time of writing we have managed to meet the demand for places requested by parents and carers of keyworker children and vulnerable pupils. The request for places is however significantly higher than during the first lockdown period and we are now running at approximately 25% of normal capacity. Scope for any further increase in numbers is therefore very limited except in the most extreme cases as increasing the size of our 'at-school community' will increase community contact and interaction to the point that it compromises our national objective to reduce transmission through

contact. It would also result in higher staffing levels and impact upon the remote learning offer, something we are very keen to avoid.

My thanks to our fabulous support staff who as always are prepared to go the extra mile to support and enhance our school offer. Our 'at school' bubbles are being run for the first fortnight at least by Mrs. Tyler (Nursery and Reception), Ms. Geldart (Y1), Mrs. Amoss (Y2), Mrs. Mansfield (Y3) with Mrs. Becker (Friday only); Mrs. Kissos-Boast (Y4) and Mr. Newman (Y5). They are doing a great job teaching and entertaining the children and I am very grateful to each of them.

**Remote Learning:** Our remote home learning programme continues to be delivered through Google Classroom. Ms. Fitzpatrick sent out a reminder of how it works and judging by the response, you seem to be having few difficulties accessing the daily tasks. Thank you in advance and once again, for supporting learning at home; we really do recognise and appreciate the challenge it presents and the juggling act that is required to balance home schooling and your personal work demands; indeed staff are especially mindful of these difficulties as many find themselves in the same situation as parents, balancing work and childcare demands.

Of course, nothing that we or any school can offer will match the experience of being in school but we are determined however to offer the best experience we can despite the inevitable constraints and obstacles in our path.

Class teachers will upload daily tasks to your child's Google Classroom. Tasks will be accessible by 9 am each day at the very latest. Literacy and numeracy tasks will be posted daily. They will be supplemented by other tasks and activities covering the full range of subjects we offer including worship links.

Please ensure that the children turn-in and upload their work for teachers to view and respond to. Teachers cannot make judgements about the quality of the work if it is not submitted (uploaded) and we cannot be certain that it has been completed at all if we don't see it! This also addresses the possibility that some of our older pupils might seize the opportunity to say that they have completed the work when they haven't even started it! Forgive my cynicism but it is based upon experience. Uploading work need not be another onerous task for the parents of Y4, Y5 and Y6 parents as most of them will have the technical ability to do this themselves but at the very least please periodically check that they are doing it to monitor their output.

It is also lovely to see photos of the creative activities the children are engaged in. Please do not feel constrained by the tasks we set as we are also happy for you, when you have the time and the energy, to think of your own rewarding and fun activities for the children. We marvelled at your creativity and your ingenuity during the summer and we would love to showcase some of the extra-curricular activities the children enjoyed with you. With this in mind we are introducing a page for everyone to see on Google Classrooms where we can display some of the achievements of the week. Named 'Mr. Gunn's Highlights' (Ms. Fitzpatrick's handiwork, not mine) we will upload wonderful examples of work completed during the week for all to see and enjoy.

Every day on Google Classroom will begin with a video or audio clip made by the class teacher. Teachers will explain the tasks and provide advice and guidance for completion. These clips are also motivational and once again I express my gratitude to my teachers for the encouraging, reassuring and warm manner of their presentations. I think that their

recordings are done so well that many of them could have a career ahead of them on CBBC!

We are always looking at ways to improve our offer and next week Miss Finn and Ms. Fitzpatrick are going to run training sessions for teachers in the use of 'Screenmatic,' a clever piece of software which will enable teachers in the production of daily polished and sophisticated recordings. It will be possible to present screenshots using Screenmatic and the visual nature of the recording will enhance the teaching aspect of the presentation.

Each week there will be a 'social meet' run by the class teacher. This will provide an opportunity for children to catch up with their classmates for 15 minutes once a week through Google Meet. We hope that this will be an enjoyable experience for the children especially given the prolonged period of isolation and separation from their peers during lockdown. These meetings are for children not attending school in the first instance.

We are always looking to improve our communication with you by also ensuring that you receive a weekly telephone call from a member of staff. These calls will provide the opportunity for the sharing of information and for staff to talk to the children. The calls will be restricted to 10 minutes as we are looking to make contact with every child in the school. Please note that calls will appear with the number withheld/private number as staff are calling from their own phones; I know that you will appreciate and respect the reason for this.

Learning will also be supplemented with familiar online learning resources such as Mathletics, Reading Eggs and Times Tables Rock Stars. These resources are effective and fun and they appeal to the children because of the video game style. Please encourage your children to use them regularly during the

course of the week as these are fun activities which the children can complete unaided.

I have received a request from a parent for '**live lessons.**' Contrary to what some may think, live online lessons are not the norm in primary settings and there is no requirement to offer them. Indeed, after very careful consideration, we do consider that they are not the ideal solution that some parents may imagine them to be.

Some of the difficulties associated with live lessons include: safeguarding and child protection – not all video platforms are considered safe. Multiple live lessons across the school require timetabling and for the majority of pupils adult supervision. Families with more than one child may find this very difficult to arrange and very time consuming when you are juggling your own work commitments and your children's schooling. Live lessons with young children are most effective when undertaken by small groups as they enable questions and interaction between pupils and teacher; teaching multiple lessons would take up large chunks of time when teachers are already busy planning and uploading work, marking and responding to work and interacting with children throughout the day via Google Classroom. Live lessons can also raise issues of fairness given that we know that in some households there are no computers and in many only one to be shared between adults and several children who need access at the same time throughout the day. In such cases (and they are not rare) some children would be at a distinct educational disadvantage regarding equal and fair access to learning.

We consider our offer to be broad and varied, comprehensive and stimulating in its current format and we are confident that the daily recorded message from every teacher, the introduction in the very near future of

Screenmatic, our recorded and written instructions which are available at any time of the day and the videos we upload which are professionally produced to support and scaffold learning, especially in maths, provide a comprehensive and effective remote learning offer. Our remote learning stance also draws upon the findings of the Education Endowment Fund whose research comparing live lessons with pre-recorded ones showed that live lessons are not necessarily the best option. They state that 'first and most crucial is that teaching quality is more important than how online lessons are delivered. What matters is ensuring the elements of effective teaching are present – such as clear explanations, scaffolding, and feedback – and whether those explanations build clearly on pupils' prior learning or how pupils' understanding is subsequently assessed.'

The EEF also mention that contact with peers and staff is important and this is something which we address through the Google Meets, telephone calls and the daily video recordings.

As with all things, we constantly review our practice and implement new ideas when we think they are helpful and improve our offer. This will continue to be the case with remote learning. In the meantime we remain grateful for your support and understanding and for the immense effort which you put into supporting your children's learning away from school. Like you, we are so looking forward to the day when things return to normal.

**Mental health and emotional wellbeing** remain issues for so many of us at this most difficult of times. You were sent an email about this on Friday and a letter from our skilled and valued learning mentor Shelley Sander. Ms. Dobie has created a dedicated mental health page on our school website; it is full of information and signposts to websites and

organisations offering help across a wide range of topics. We hope this will be of some help.

**Laptops, I pads and Data access; Xbox, Play Stations and pdf converters:** We have a handful of working laptops which we can loan to small number of families if you are without a computer in the household. Stock is very limited indeed but please contact me via Teacher2Parents (T2P) if you would like to be considered. Similarly we have lots of old I pads to lend. The old operating system is not compatible with many current apps and you cannot access Google Classroom or Google Meet with them but they do work for Mathematics and Reading Eggs and this might be of some help. Again please let me know through T2P if this would help you.

You may be pleased to know that **Xboxes and Play Stations** provide access to Google Classroom. I have uploaded instructions for this to the newsletter page of our website. This may go a long way to alleviating internet access issues if you are having difficulties on this front. There is also a government initiative to improve **data access**; if you or a family you know experience such difficulties, please let me know and we will see if we can help.

Lastly on this topic, we sometimes set worksheets in a pdf format. This means of course that you cannot work in the document. In such cases, children can complete the answers on a separate sheet which can be submitted to the teacher or you can convert the sheet into a word document using a pdf converter. Some pdf converters are free while others yearly subscriptions are relatively inexpensive. We are not promoting any product but Ms. Fitzpatrick has put together some products which you might like to investigate further: *These are good free ones – online use only for free ....*

<https://www.pdfescape.com/windows/>

<https://smallpdf.com/edit-pdf>

*This website recommend a selection of free website for PDF edit:*

<https://www.techradar.com/uk/best/free-pdf-editor#2-pdf-xchange-editor>

**Safeguarding, Child Protection and Online safety:** As we become ever more dependent upon the internet please give further careful consideration to your children's safe use of the internet. Refer to the 'Online Safety' page of our school website for advice, guidance and websites you can visit for specific advice.

Please remember that the school still continues to place safeguarding and child protection at the centre of our thinking. School designated safeguarding leads (DSLs) are Graham Gunn, Macci Dobie and Rosaria Attanasio. We are always available to respond to any need or concern and can be contacted via the school office or by text to T2P. Please do not contain confidential or sensitive information in a text or phone call to the office but leave a message for one of us and we will get back to you as quickly as possible.

Please do not hesitate to contact the school office, class teachers or the members of the leadership team if you ever need help or advice.

Graham Gunn  
Head Teacher

09.01.2021