



Cottesmore St. Mary Catholic Primary School

THE DIOCESE OF ARUNDEL AND BRIGHTON



Headteacher: Rachel Breen B.A. Hons.

27th April 2020

Dear parents / carers

How are you all? Well I hope?

As we find ourselves in week six of the current situation, I just wanted to take a moment to reach out again and remind you that, as ever, the staff team and I are always here to help you in any way you need. As I always say, we are a school family and we are always here to support and listen, please just get in touch. You are not alone. A reminder that my email can be found on the Contact Us section of the school website and that all teacher emails can be found under Year Groups and then by clicking on the relevant year eg. Year 2. This is rather full letter and not as uplifting as previous I'm afraid, as it's mainly informative but hopefully helpful. I will write again later in the week with a newsletter full of pictures that celebrate what the children have been up to at home – much more heart-warming!

Financial or food help

Please don't forget that, if you have any financial worries, or are struggling to feed your family, you can contact the school for help. Thanks to parental and staff donations, we have our own Foodbank that can be accessed for those in need. Please don't struggle on alone. Please also remember to visit our website for our key document that signposts local financial and food aid. This can be found in the Current Updates section on the Home page. If usually in receipt of Free School Meals, due to low income, and you haven't yet received your vouchers, please also get in touch. As said above, you are not alone so please don't just try to struggle on. We can help.

Home learning and calls home

It has been super to hear about so many children engaging so well with Home Learning. Thank you also for all your support with this. I know it's not easy, juggling family life, your own work, family wellbeing plus, in some cases, more than one child's home learning. Your time and input really is appreciated. As I have said before, please just do your best. Obviously the more you can do the better, but, emotional wellbeing and a harmonious family life is much more important at present so please just try to get the right balance.

Over the next two weeks, every teacher will be calling every home to check in and say hello. They would like to speak with you to see how your family is managing and to see if there is anything else that you need. The teachers can also answer any questions that you might have. Teachers would also like to speak to your child so that they can keep that connection with them so maybe have a chat with them beforehand so that they are ready. Obviously if children would rather not chat, then this is totally understandable, no pressure at all. If you are finding it a challenge to motivate your child to engage in home learning, then maybe raise this with the teacher who can then give them a gentle nudge if they do chat! That said, the teachers do just want to say hello really and remind your child that they are thinking of them and remind them that they are still a very special part of our school. Many of the calls will come through as unknown numbers so please do look out for them and ideally answer your phone.

Regarding Home learning, a reminder that you receive, via PING, a weekly Home Learning Grid. These can also be found on the school website under Year Group pages. These activities are designed to be non-computer based as we appreciate that not every family has sufficient, if any, technology, whilst some might not want children to be using computers, each day. In addition to the Home Learning Grids, there are also the usual activities that can be found on the school website and are promoted by the school. For example, Head Teacher Challenge, Activity Passport, Times Tables Rockstars, Bug Club, My Maths etc. Please do keep promoting daily reading and use this time to really consolidate spellings and times tables.

As you know, we are really pleased, that, in addition to all that is noted above, the children also have access to our Learning Platform called Seesaw. Almost all children have been uploading work so that their teacher can see it and they will often write a comment. Teachers have also been posting additional activities, motivational videos, comments on work and a range of other fun tasks so, if your child is not using it at present, please, if possible, take the time to explore it together. Even if it's just to post work a couple of times a week. A reminder that work does not have to be completed online but can be uploaded photographs, audio comments or videos of learning that can all be done offline and uploaded when possible. Our use of Seesaw is a great way to support connections between home and school and a hello video from me was even posted this week. Thank you to all the teachers for their work with regards to home learning also. If, due to financial hardship, you require assistance with technology, books, paper, pencils, or any such resources required to complete home learning, please do get in touch with your child's class teacher as we can offer resources to help you.

Post further reflection, some of the initial features on Seesaw have been changed or turned off. For example, the ability for children to 'tag' their classmates in their learning has now been changed, so only the teachers can do this if they feel it is something that should be shared. A class blog feature has been added which is also managed by teachers but is a nice way for the children to share work. If children are particularly proud of a piece of work, or an activity, that they have completed, they can now request that teachers add this to their class blog. This allows their whole class to see their post and children can comment, again at the discretion of their teachers. Everything children write, upload or post will be seen and approved by children's teachers. A reminder that all comments made should be positive and that we will gently encourage children to move away from the initial flurry of potentially excited, over commenting.

Four weeks ago, we also sent out a list of excellent websites that could be used to support learning. These also included organisations who were offering great free links to eg the theatre, literature, exercise, wellbeing etc. These are still active and we still recommend them. Lists remain on the website again, under Year Groups. On your child's Year Group page, please scroll down to the PDF that says Home Learning Websites and Resources. In addition to the original list, we are attaching a new guide with further websites and links. If you have a spare moment, and would like to offer some further variation to your child's day, please do take time to explore the suggestions further.

Please note the original links (from the first document) aren't on this, so you will need to refer to both. This new one is called Home Learning Websites and Resources Part 2. Thank you to Mrs McFarland for collating these. Please also make reference to my original Home Learning letter, also found on the website, which offers guidance with regards to suggested daily routines. For example, I wonder how children's daily Joe Wicks workouts are going? Will we have a school full of even more, super fit children on our return?! I am sorry to say that my workout efforts are sadly less than inspiring but I begin this week full of promise...!

Behaviour

A reminder also that we expect children to be potentially pushing boundaries a little at this time. As you know all too well, if a child refuses to do something, it's often because they are trying to exert control in a situation. As this situation is one that they can't control, they might be doing things such as, refusing to complete home learning, as that is something that they do have control over. In these cases, I would suggest chunking work into smaller tasks, offering as much opportunity to go outside and get fresh air or exercise as possible, helping them to get a good night's sleep, talking through any worries using a worry box or by visiting some of the wellbeing activities and mental health guides found on our website, and trying again tomorrow. You can do this and your child can do this! Today just might not be the day but please don't give up. You can also email your child's class teacher who would be happy to post something personalised and motivational.

Summer overviews

Every half term, we send out an overview of what the children will be learning. Even though lessons aren't being taught at the moment, and lots of the activities set are to help consolidate previous learning, we have included the new Summer Overviews on the school website. Again, if you go to Year Groups and scroll down, you will find these. This overview will show you what the children would have been learning, should school have been open, and is something that could be used by those of you wanting to move on children's learning even further. Home learning Grids might include some of these activities but, for eg new maths topics, objectives won't be covered until children are back in school receiving teacher lead input. No one will miss out.

Zoom

A few parents have enquired about Zoom lessons. In the primary sector, lessons aren't being provided to pupils as per in the classroom. There have also been various concerns regarding teachers using platforms such as Zoom, hence our choice of Seesaw and the range of learning options listed above. If tasks set are not challenging enough, or too challenging, please do contact class teachers, via email, who can ensure tasks of adequate pitch - we imagine that this will be quite rare as there is such a range to be working from. The aim is that Home Learning tasks, and Seesaw, can be used independently but we do appreciate that this is often harder with younger children. Ideally, children will continue to upload work, via Seesaw, so that teachers can add a comments and can provide encouragement that way. This will hopefully help to motivate the children to complete more and, as said previously, maintain that personal connection with school. Again, please don't worry too much though and just do what you can, this is a challenging time.

Mental Health and Wellbeing

Please do continue to visit the website for a range of information to help support you during this time. If you visit the Current Updates section on the Home page and scroll down, you will find a link to Mental Health and Wellbeing Support where there are a range of helpful documents, websites and links to organisations who can help if you, or your child is struggling. There are also lots of recommended documents to help you to talk to your children about what is going on and how to address matters in a supportive, realistic and non-frightening way. Both myself and Anna Mullans are contactable daily. If you also visit the Inclusion page, there are also extra documents that can be used, for example, if your child is struggling with anxiety or needs extra help with regard to resilience.

If your child has any specific wellbeing needs that you would like to discuss, in addition to supporting your ourselves, we can signpost you to specific professionals such as Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) or Primary Mental Health Workers. We also still have access to our school counsellor who is working via video link with children. If you feel that your child would benefit from this, then please contact Anna Mullans (email on the Contact Us section of the school website). However, please note that there is currently a waiting list for this service. If you would like to talk to a Primary Mental Health Worker directly, you can email SWSConsultationLine@brighton-hove.gov.uk or call 01272 293481. You will need to send / leave your name and phone number and a PMHW will call you back. This not a crisis number, so, if you require immediate support, please contact your GP or call CAMHS duty care on 0300 3040061.

Thank you to Miss Fletcher, who has compiled the attached list of family friendly wellbeing activities that can be completed at home and is also on the website. In addition, you can also make reference to my previous letters for activities such as a making a gratitude jar, making a worry box and offering a daily positive affirmation. I would recommend these for every family in order to help maintain a healthy mind and positive outlook. A reminder also that the school mediation track can also be found under Catholic Life, Prayer Spaces on the school website as can links to weekly Mass and other resources that will offer sanctuary and spiritual nourishment when needed.

Community

We have created a new website section called Community which can again be accessed via the Home page (there is an icon that you can click, just under the headings and next to Current Updates). Here, you will find my previous letters to the children and my recent video. More importantly, you will find a video to celebrate Clap For Carers and it will soon house our own Rainbow Wall. Please visit the website page for more information and, as it states, please send any photographs of your child holding their rainbow image to Mr Cutting. A video has also been added to celebrate Captain Tom Moore who has amazingly raised over £29 million for NHS Together Charity. I will write to the children saying a little more about him later in the week but I have included a short blurb on the website page in the meantime. This page also includes a video of our very own Jack, from Year 6, who has created and performed a Lockdown Jam at home in order to help keep our spirits up plus some other children in Year 6 children have taken the initiative to create a home activity guide. Please do take a moment to visit all these and share them with your children.

Online safety

Some families have been using apps such as Zoom or Houseparty to keep in touch. These days, we are lucky to have access to technology that has made not physically seeing friends and family easier to manage. That said, please do continue to be aware of online safety and remember that these apps can be hacked and other, none invited, guests can sometimes join, so we would suggest that they are only used under adult supervision. I have attached documents that have also been added to the Current Updates section on the website. These highlight ways to keep your child safe when online. Sussex Police have provided a document regarding online safety when using Zoom plus and Mrs Marchant, our Computing Lead, has compiled an excellent document regarding general online safety reminders for parents (this is useful at all times of the year). There are a range of linked websites which are certainly worth visiting.

Medical needs

Thank you again for staying indoors as much as possible and really working to follow Government guidance. I am sure it's not been easy for you all. Please also find attached guidance from the NHS regarding ensuring that the current situation doesn't put you off getting medical help for your child if it is what they need. This too has been added to the website. The document's key message is that, whilst coronavirus is infectious to children, it is rarely serious (the documents words, not mine). The document states that, if your child is unwell it is likely to be a non-coronavirus illness, rather than coronavirus itself (again, their words). It also notes that, whilst it is extremely important to follow Government advice to stay at home during this period, it can be confusing to know what to do when your child is unwell or injured. It reminds families to remember that NHS 111, GPs and hospitals are still providing the same safe care that they have always done and shares a traffic light grid that might help you decide which help route is best taken if your child presents as unwell.

Domestic violence and safeguarding

During these differing times, it has been noted that, nationally, there has been a rise in cases of domestic violence. We want all individuals to know that, as part of the Cottesmore St Mary family, no one ever has to face difficulties alone. We will always believe you, no matter what you might be told by others. Anyone struggling, can contact myself or Anna Mullans for confidential support or signposting. RISE is a Sussex based charity that supports people affected by domestic abuse and violence. If you, or a family member, need support from RISE, or if you are worried about a friend or neighbour, you can call the helpline on 01273 622828, or contact them via their online portal. You can also contact the National Domestic Violence 24-hour Helpline on 0808 2000247, and, if ever in danger, call 999, if you can't speak out loud, press 55. Similarly, if you have any safeguarding concerns regarding children, or families, please report these to Front Door for Families on 01273 290400 and, again, in an emergency call 999. Similarly, you can also contact the school. I have attached a document to remind you of this and again, added it to the website. The poster reminds you that, if you see or hear something that worries you, you must say something. It also highlights that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility.

Ramadan

To those of you who might not be aware, Ramadan has started. Just as it was different for Christians over Easter, it will be different sort of Ramadan for Muslims, as Mosques are closed and gatherings not permitted. However, we would like to wish those of you preparing, all the very best for this important month. We recognise and understand that the marking of Ramadan may also mean changes in routine and create more challenges with home learning.

Thank you key workers

Finally, I would like to thank all the key workers, amongst our school community, who are busy doing such an incredible job. There are many of you doing so many varied roles and we really are very appreciative. Mr Burns is currently working on our own Rainbow flag that we will hang on the school gate. I would also like to thank my staff team who have put the wider community, first by coming into school on their rota days in order to provide childcare. Wishing you all the best and hoping that you all continue to stay safe and well.

Rachel Breen, Headteacher

