



LOVE ONE ANOTHER

SACRED HEART RC PRIMARY SCHOOL

WESTHOUGHTON



Friday 8th January 2021

Dear families,

THANK YOU

Thank you to all who have responded with such positivity to the letter issued on Monday evening. We have faced many challenges since the start of the pandemic; and all decisions we have made have been with the safety and welfare of our community as first priority.

When the Prime Minister announced that we were to *stay at home except for limited reasons*, he went on to explain the *problem that schools may act as vectors for transmission, causing the virus to spread between households*.

The latest government guidance, issued yesterday, states that *parents and carers who are critical workers should keep their children at home if they can*.

We have been both heartened by the number of children accessing learning, both on-site and via remote means, but also concerned at the very high numbers of pupils in school when we are challenged to minimise contacts to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. We know that home-learning comes with significant challenge, especially where households have more than one child and where devices are shared. We have loaned school laptops to some families without devices. No government laptops have yet been issued to Sacred Heart.

We are also grateful that we have resilient members of our education team, who have embraced Google Classrooms as the vehicle for daily live sessions, phonics groups, other pupil meetings and the wider provision of learning and feedback bespoke to their classes. Mr Stubbs continues to provide the government funded bespoke '*catch up support*' to identified children in school and to targeted individuals via Google Classroom. The government indicated that new statutory obligations for remote education would include requirement to:

- *Set assignments so that pupils have meaningful and ambitious work each day in a number of different subjects;*
- *Set work that is of equivalent length to the core teaching pupils would receive in school, and as a minimum: primary: 3 hours a day, on average, across the school cohort;*
- *Provide frequent, clear explanations of new content, delivered by a teacher or through high-quality curriculum resources or videos;*
- *Have systems for checking, at least weekly, whether pupils are engaging with their work, and inform parents immediately where engagement is a concern;*
- *Gauge how well pupils are progressing through the curriculum using questions and other suitable tasks, and provide feedback, at least weekly, using digitally facilitated or whole-class feedback where appropriate;*
- *Enable teachers to adjust the pace or difficulty of what is being taught in response to questions or assessments, including, where necessary, revising material or simplifying explanations to ensure pupils' understanding.*

We believe that this has been very speedily implemented, with all the above points being attained. We are contacting any family that may find Google Classroom difficult to access; and providing bespoke support. Please do continue to communicate with us if you are experiencing any difficulty or have any questions. Google Classroom is one of the two platforms, the other being Microsoft Teams, that the government invested in during the summer months to enable remote learning should children be forced to work from home due to pandemic.

At the last lockdown, when education was suspended by government, we regularly opened for approximately 10% of our school community who were children of key workers critical to the covid-19 response.

This week we have seen 183 pupils attend school, with some 18 further pupils currently isolating who will join that number, representing almost 50% of our school population. All of these places have been fairly allocated to parents who supplied evidence of being critical workers, who then sent their children into school as asked by the letter on Monday evening, or to vulnerable pupils who we encouraged to attend. This means that up to 32 pupils per year group have attended, with one teacher facilitating their learning and another working with those remote learners via Google Classroom. Yesterday afternoon's government guidance clarified that within the school's risk assessed safety measures:

We know that every school will have a different number of children of critical workers who need to attend. It is important that on-site provision is provided for these pupils, and there is no limit to numbers of these pupils who may attend and schools should not limit attendance of these groups. This is because we are reducing overall social contact across areas and the country rather than individually by each institution.

This backed up our processes and reassured us that the high numbers accessing on-site provision is in line with correct procedures. We know this is the case in many other schools too. However, our risk assessment does not allow greater numbers if effective provision, including feedback and support, is also to be made for those children working from home. Indeed, greater numbers in school would mean almost all teachers fully engaged with these pupils at the expense of those working from home.

We have been inundated with requests from parents. If we were to accept all the requests as well as the vulnerable children we have asked to come into school, we would have more than 50% of the school population attending school. **If you are working from home, or have another adult in the household who is not a critical worker, I would ask you to consider if you are able to access remote learning from home.**

OTHER RELATED UPDATES:

- **ATTENDANCE:** As with vulnerable children, critical worker parents and carers should let school know if their child will not be attending an allocated place. Similarly, if your child is remote learning and unwell, please let us know so that we do not expect work to be submitted by them, letting us know when they have recovered.
- **INCREASING DATA ALLOWANCES ON MOBILE DEVICES TO SUPPORT DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN:** BT working in partnership with DfE have launched [a scheme which temporarily increases data allowances](#) for mobile phone users on certain networks. This is so that children and young people can access remote education if their face-to-face education is disrupted. Schools can request mobile data increases for children and young people who:
 - do not have fixed broadband at home
 - cannot afford additional data for their devices
 - are experiencing disruption to their face-to-face education

For each request, DfE needs to know:

- the name of the account holder
- the number of the mobile device
- the mobile network of that device (for example Three)

Each provider will vary in how quickly they process requests. Once a network provider has processed a data increase, they will send a text message to the account holder.

- **PUBLIC TESTS:** The Secretary of State confirmed in a response to a question in the House that Key Stage 2 SATs will not be proceeding in 2021. The Standards & Testing Agency will be confirming the detail on primary assessments to schools shortly.
- **SCHOOL MEALS:** Those pupil premium pupils entitled to a free school meal may still access this via a meal bag able to be collected from the school catering team each day. Let us know if you qualify for and wish to access this facility. Note that *food parcels must be distributed in line with guidance on social distancing at all times. During the national lockdown, families can continue collecting parcels where appropriate social distancing measures are in place.*
- **SCHOOL SOCIAL MEDIA:** We will continue to post learning from home and school during this lockdown. The whole point of the social media stream is to enable parents to open learning conversations with their children. This enables those key workers who don't know what has gone on in school to know a bit more.
- **WRAPAROUND CARE:** We have made the difficult decision to withdraw our wraparound facility with effect from Monday 18th January until the end of lockdown restrictions. This is because this service relies on employing staff whose salary is completely paid for by those accessing the facility. Vastly reduced uptake means we must furlough these staff to prevent significant impact on the school budget allocated for the benefit of all pupils. If you currently use our breakfast and learning or creative clubs, the final session will be on Friday 15th January and school will then operate between the usual times.

Although this year has already come with huge challenges, there is hope because of the vaccine. In an otherwise dark moment, it may be helpful to reflect how amazing it is to live in a century when science can deliver a vaccine within ten months of a novel virus in the context of a global pandemic. Although it does not feel like it today, we are fortunate in this regard to live in this century. This is also why we do what we do. Our team at Sacred Heart are engaged in the most important task of civilised society - the education of our children. One day, our children will be called upon to solve the world's problems and they will step up to the task because of the work being done today.

Thank you for all your support. We pray, stay with us Lord on our journey. *'Most Sacred Heart of Jesus: I place all my trust in you...'*

Yours sincerely,

M Johnson

Mr M Johnson
Executive Headteacher

S Middleton

Miss S Middleton
Deputy Headteacher

C Walker

Mrs C Walker
Chair of Governors