

Dear Parents,

Well, it's the end of a busy week and so I thought I would get in touch and see how we are all doing.

I want to take this opportunity to outline some things to you all as I'm aware that there may be confusions, worries concerns etc. So please bear with me if this newsletter turns out to be quite long!

Critical Worker/Vulnerable Children in School.

Much has been said in the national and local media about how many children are currently attending schools. It is true that nationally and locally there has been an increase in the number of children in school. I know of other local schools who have had to put systems in place to limit the numbers of children attending. It is also true that we have had a slight increase on numbers compared with the first lockdown in March last year – at this time we had 105 children attending – we currently have 163 children in school and so whilst this is an increase, it is approximately 35% of our school roll; this is a lot less than some schools in Trafford.

I know there have been concerns voiced on social media about actually who is attending school. The list of critical workers and vulnerable children can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-educational-provision/guidance-for-schools-colleges-and-local-authorities-on-maintaining-educational-provision>

It is a long list of critical workers and only one parent needs to be a critical worker for their child to be eligible for a place at school. When I emailed critical workers last Monday, I did ask them to only use us if there was no other way to keep children at home. Even the latest guidance states this. Lots of our critical worker parents got in touch and said they could do this – thank you. If you think you can now have your child at home, then please do so. I can also say that we have not yet had to turn anyone away who needs a critical worker place at school.

In addition, despite us being in a nice leafy suburb, we absolutely have children in our school who, according to the above link, are classed as vulnerable for many different reasons. We do have children who have free school meals; we do have children who are known to social services; we do have children who have special educational needs and we do have children who need support with their mental health and well-being. These children have had a personal invite from me to come to school and the reasons they are attending school are confidential. Needless to say, that I believe that the best place for any child I have invited in – is school.

I thought it may also be helpful for you to know some of the critical worker context of the children in school.

Of the critical worker children attending: 72% of these children have 2 key worker parents

60 children have parent/s who are NHS workers

52 children have parent/s who work in education.

The other 31 children's parents are therefore spread over ALL the other categories.

Please be assured that school has taken all steps necessary to verify employment and that starts with us knowing our parent body very well, checks that we did at the last lockdown and checks we have done this time round.

Please let me reassure you that every child who is in school according to the latest government list, is entitled to have a place here. I have had a number of parents getting in touch with me because they feel they are taking up a space and feeling guilty about sending their child to school because of what is being said in the media, so more critical workers might be feeling the same. Please let me be clear - your children are here for a reason and this is confidential and I will fully support your decision in sending your children to school. As always – we work together on this and please be reassured that we will do everything we can to support families who have vulnerable children, or who are key workers according to the list, or who are critical to the covid effort or those working all hours in hospitals saving lives.

Remote Learning.

I'd like to take some time to be clear about the Government's expectations for home learning during this lockdown. There are assumptions that this is like last lockdown – we set some activities on Itslearning and you can do whatever you can do. I think you would all agree that we have moved on significantly since last March. This time last year, the only people who used the word zoom – were our Reception children in their space topic! And yet here we all are using it for all aspects of our daily lives.

The government have been clear on what they expect schools to provide for remote learning this time round: from Gov.uk:

The remote education provided should be equivalent in length to the core teaching pupils would receive in school and will include both recorded or live direct teaching time, and time for pupils to complete tasks and assignments independently. The amount of remote education provided should be, as a minimum:

- Key Stage 1: 3 hours a day on average
- Key Stage 2: 4 hours a day on average

When teaching pupils remotely, we expect schools to:

- teach a planned and well-sequenced curriculum so that knowledge and skills are built incrementally, with a good level of clarity about what is intended to be taught and practised in each subject so that pupils can progress through the school's curriculum
- set meaningful and ambitious work each day in an appropriate range of subjects
- provide frequent, clear explanations of new content, delivered by a teacher or through high-quality curriculum resources
- provide opportunities for interactivity, including questioning, eliciting and reflective discussion
- provide scaffolded practice and opportunities to apply new knowledge
- enable pupils to receive timely and frequent feedback on how to progress, using digitally-facilitated or whole-class feedback where appropriate
- use assessment to ensure teaching is responsive to pupils' needs and addresses any critical gaps in pupils' knowledge
- avoid an over-reliance on long-term projects or internet research activities
- have systems for checking, daily, whether pupils are engaging with their work, and work with families to rapidly identify effective solutions where engagement is a concern

So, our expectations of what we provide and what the children do at home has been massively heightened. We are teaching the same curriculum that we would have had if we hadn't been in lockdown – your children are being taught what they would have been taught in school this term.

Because of this, and the experiences we learned when we had a closed bubble back in early December, we made the decision to use zoom as just one way to facilitate remote learning.

Obviously, with 15 different classes, we have had to timetable the zoom sessions or else there would have been a zoom crash! Each class has 3 timetabled sessions a day and the class teachers will decide whether or not to use them – depending on the children and what is being taught. Some classes will utilise the full time available and other may just do 10 minutes – it is all planned around the teaching and learning the children need to do that day. Sometimes zoom will not be used and other videos/clips will be used instead for the teaching input; there will always be a mix of online and on paper activities away from the computer. We are also limiting each session to 25 minutes, so that there is a 5 minute window to end a meeting and the next year groups to log on – this is particularly important when you have siblings!

We really, really do appreciate that you will all have your own work to be getting on with at the same time – and we know it won't be easy, but we have to ensure that the children do not lose out on their learning this time – we had caught up from the last lock down so much!

However, we want to try and build flexibility into everything we do as much as possible – so every zoom session now is being recorded and saved. The links to the saved folder are already on your class pages. This means that if your child misses a zoom, if you are working and your child needs to watch it at a more convenient time or if your child wants to watch it again to help with their learning they can. Please be aware that by joining a zoom call you are giving us permission to record and save the sessions which may then be watched by children from their own class. These recordings will be saved for the week and be deleted every Sunday.

As you all are aware, we put systems in place to keep our children as safe online as we can do; which is why we do everything from within ItsLearning - our secure virtual learning environment. Therefore, please make sure that you do not download these recorded zoom sessions – just watch them from within the links on itslearning and please do not share any passwords with anyone.

A huge huge thank you from me – the work the children are doing has been truly amazing. I have seen some fantastic pieces of work. I know our teachers look at all of this every day and feedback to the children, thereby continuing their learning and progress. I have been amazed by the hard work and independence the children have shown in these first few days (with your much appreciated help); it is apparent how far they have come and this is very encouraging. If children continue to demonstrate their excellence through their home learning, it will mean the gap in progress when we return won't be as considerable as before.

Names on Zoom

It is really important that we keep our children safe when they are using zoom and one of our zoom protocols is that we will not admit anyone into the zoom who we do not know. To make this crystal clear to everybody and to be consistent across the school, I want to tighten up on use of names on zoom. Children **MUST** have their first name and surname when on a zoom call at all times: (as an example I am going to demonstrate with my childand my dogs!)

Single child name display eg: Ellen Walmsley

Siblings name display eg: Ollie + Willow Walmsley or E + O + W Walmsley (if there are a few of them!)

(If Ollie was in 6C and Willow was in 5G both teachers would admit a child using this sibling identity as they can see their pupil in the display name)

Display must include first and surnames. Depending upon whether you are using the Zoom desktop app or a web browser, you may not be able to change names whilst in the waiting room so it may be that you need to start another zoom yourselves at home first thing and change names or as another idea; it may help for you to set up a second free zoom account for your children with their names – which they **ONLY** use for school zooms.

I am sorry but we will no longer accept parent names on zoom calls. Whilst some of the teachers know parents' names, we don't know all of them and certainly, if we had a staff member off and another covering they wouldn't know any parent details – so this is why it is important that we use the children's details all the time. It is only by using children's names that we can be absolutely sure we are not letting in anyone 'dangerous' into our zoom calls. Can you imagine if a stranger was able to get into a class zoom because we had admitted someone via a parent name we didn't know! So whilst I know it's irritating that you have to keep changing zoom display names; **I am absolutely positive you fully support me in safeguarding our children on zoom and will understand why this is a non-negotiable and we will insist on this.**

A reminder also please that backgrounds need to be appropriate for learning (and not messed with during the session). All clothing must be appropriate (and remember we can see adults in the back ground too – some of you have lovely dressing gowns!) and please be mindful that if your child unmutes to answer a question – we can hear your chat in the background too!

Please do not feel you have to sit by your child for the zoom session. I know the younger children will need tech help logging on etc. (and possibly learning how to unmute themselves) and our Reception children will need support too. However, our children are amazing learners and will learn quickly what they have to do. They do not really need you sat beside them doing their work for them – you wouldn't be there if they there were in school – your children are more than capable at independent learning and doing things for themselves. Our teachers are leading the learning so certainly in the juniors (and for the majority of year 2) children should be unmuting themselves and accessing their learning completely independently. Their behaviours should be those that we expect in our classrooms. Please see these zoom times as opportunities for you to leave them for a while and to get on with the jobs that you need to do.

After all of this, it goes without saying that I know there are lots of technical pressures on families so another reminder that if you need help with more tech at home, please please let us know!

Getting in touch

I am also aware that one or two moans have been voiced on one or two of the class WhatsApp chats about home learning. I also know that our parent governors are being approached too. Please let me make you aware that this is not the role for our parent governors – they sit on the Trust board and make the strategic decisions for the school – they are not there as parent representatives.

It goes without saying that what we are offering/doing will always have those who like it and those who don't. You can't please everyone all the time. However, please be assured that whatever we chose to do, whatever course of action we decide upon, it is carefully thought thorough and considered; on behalf of the staff, parents but MOST IMPORTANTLY what is in the best interests of the children at our school. I know we don't get it right all the time and I know that sometimes I have to make decisions that are hard – but every decision we make has the children at heart. As much as I am busy, I am never too busy to support my families and you know me well enough by now to know my door is always open (even if it's a virtual door at the moment!), so if you have a concern or a question; please email or call and speak to me. As we say to the children, we can only help if we know about things.

On the other hand, lots of you have got in touch to thank us for what we are doing, that the zoom sessions are helping your children with their learning at home and the structure of their day. I must say that the quick notes of thanks really do lift our spirits. As teachers (and public servants) we have been left in the wake of some terribly timed decisions and U-turns made by the government but every member of my staff has been ready to step in and deliver to ensure the best for the children and parents. The staff in school are working their socks off – they cannot be working any harder to support all of our children and to hear that their hard work is appreciated does mean an awful lot to them. Thank you for working with us and trusting us.

If any of you have any feedback with what we are doing with our remote learning offer, please email us. I would love to know if you like what we are doing, what is working and what is not and if there are other things we can be doing to support you at home.

And Finally.....



"This storm is making me tired," said the boy
"Storms get tired too," said the horse, "so hold on."



"We will get through this"