



# St Peter's Newsletter

5<sup>th</sup> February 2021

Dear Parents and Carers

Thank you for all of your support to enable our children to complete so much home learning. We appreciate that it is not an easy task to juggle your own work commitments and your children's learning. This winter lockdown is harder, partly because we weren't expecting it, but let's remind ourselves that everyone is doing their best in unprecedented times. We have been hugely grateful for the messages of support and kindness that we have received this term, which have definitely boosted staff morale.

While we appreciate that everyone is up against their own personal challenges at the moment and there can't be a single family who would say that these times are easy, I would like to remind families that our staff also have home situations involving children learning from home, caring responsibilities and illness. We have also had staff off with covid-19 and others self-isolating.

A recent national survey has shown that teachers are now working many more hours than they would be in a normal teaching week. All of our teachers are now on 12-hour days and working most weekends. I am very proud that everyone has risen to the current challenges and is constantly looking for ways to improve the provision. We are aiming to meet the needs of almost 300 families who all have different routines and circumstances.

Nobody would ask to carry out their job in such a public online way, knowing they are putting themselves up to scrutiny from others when they are

carrying out their role in an environment the job was never designed for. Teachers were trained to work in a classroom, and we all know that face to face is best. Being filmed and recorded is not most people's comfort zone. Let us just hope we can get back to the classroom as soon as possible.

In light of this, may I remind a very small minority of parents: if you have an issue with anything the school is providing do contact us directly so that we can talk. It is upsetting for staff to see personal comments on social media when there are solutions to most problems. We are here to help our learners and support families- but this can only be productive if we work together.

The buzzword this week has been TEAMS! There is detailed information on our new learning platform below. Please remind your child about how to keep themselves safe on-line. Guidelines for KS1 and KS2 were sent out last week. Also, please don't forget to direct your child to watch the Whole School and Celebration assemblies each week. Assemblies are integral part of school life and will keep home learners connected with school.

Have a good week everyone as we lead up to Half Term. Reminder that Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> February remains an INSET Day so school is closed and there will be no home learning that day. Enjoy a screen free day!

Mrs Dunning

## HOME LEARNING – A blended approach

We have spent some time talking to other schools and comparing the different ways of engaging home learners. No two schools are the same and schools have different demographics and cohorts. We have decided on a blended approach which is now accessed on TEAMS. Blended simply means a mix of recorded lessons (in different formats), some live and some worksheets and set tasks.

We have explained our rationale below.

## TEAMS – a round up one week in

After just one week on the new learning platform, we are pleased with the way that it is working for home learners. There are still a few issues to sort but this is big change for staff, parents and children so we would expect a few snags in the first couple of weeks. We have had an hour's training session from another school on the educational potential for teams, but please remember that most staff are not technical experts and unlike the corporate world, there is nobody to train us in how to use new systems. It's a matter of googling for instructions and a few helpful tips from parents! Having said that we have been delighted at the response from parents and now have around 95% of the children logged in. We shall be supporting anyone who is not yet on board.

Thank you for sharing our Home Learning Expectations with your child. We would stress that the Teams platform is for learning and helps us to ensure that your child makes progress. It's been exciting for children to see themselves and their friends and also to be able to participate in chat. We knew the first week would have a novelty factor but please remind children that the chat is not for endless emojis or sound effects!

We are modifying functions as we go along, and will no doubt be picking up more short cuts as we move forward. We shall be sending out a questionnaire to find out how we can develop our provision further – but we need to embed the platform for a couple of weeks first. Here are answers to questions we've had this week:

1. Why did you change? I preferred the website system – It suited us to have the learning for a week ahead.

While we have had several families expressing their preference for the learning being posted on the website, the change was made after much discussion.

- It was unsustainable for teachers to be planning a week of lessons in advance.
- It was unsustainable for one person to be loading the website and organising the learning over a weekend.
- The website is a public platform so anyone can open the learning – not ideal.
- Videos could only be loaded in a video/youtube format so everything teachers prepared had to be converted before being loaded. With up to 90 videos a week, this was again unsustainable.
- Some families felt the week's learning at once to be overwhelming.

## Advantages of TEAMS

- Learning can be posted in a more manageable way for learners – the day's learning is in one place.
- There are clear expectations for each day in line with national expectations – three hours minimum for KS1 and four hours for KS2.
- Teachers can plan a more responsive and targeted lesson.
- The learning is loaded in a systematic way and it easy for staff to see how children are engaging and where common misconceptions need addressing.
- We shall try to upload worksheets which can be returned without the need to print – bear with us.
- The platform allows us the live chat and video links
- We shall be using TEAMS for small groups and supported learning
- We can respond to questions and offer support in a timely way

2. Why are there no live lessons? My friend's child has live learning all day.

The Department of Education has stated that there is no one way of delivering home learning. It is widely accepted that a blended approach works best. Our pupils have one live session a

day, an interactive chat facility for two hours a day and recorded lessons through videos or audio/AV power points across the curriculum. Live lessons are not as successful for primary aged children who need a lot more support to be able to engage proactively.

We will develop that live session and use it in different ways but bear with us as teachers discover what works best with the limitations of many children on one link. We are also realising that some of the school's hardware is struggling with some functions. Two teachers were not able to share their presentations on the first day-disappointing but it's not great to feel that you haven't done your best with an audience of 50 adults and children!

Reasons why we decided not to deliver continuous live lessons:

- A child needs to be in front of the screen all day and the teacher's voice will be in the home through the school day.
- We do not believe that children should be sat at a screen for four + hours a day.
- We have many families with more than two children. Each child would need a separate device and a personal space away from siblings.
- The Department of Education's latest research shows that the biggest barrier to Home Learning is the children's attention span. In many cases parents would need to be involved to support and this would be for most of the day at specific times.
- Recorded lessons enable families to fit the learning around their own commitments – be they work or family related. We have families who work shifts and would not be able to participate.
- We teach mixed ability classes. In-school learning is differentiated through questioning and support. We have a wide range of abilities in each class. One of the reported issues with remotely teaching a class of up to 35 with mixed abilities is that pupils who need more support often do not enjoy this very visible experience. At the moment teachers are supporting these children with differentiated learning where appropriate. Likewise, we are providing additional challenges for pupils who need to be stretched.
- We have a two teachers per year group: In larger schools where there are four/five classes in a year, there will be at least two people dedicated

exclusively to remote learning while the others are solely in class. Filming the children in school is not allowed for safeguarding reasons so logistically this would present issues with limited staffing.

- Many families choose St Peter's because of its broad and holistic curriculum. Throughout the Home Learning experience, we have included all subjects and outdoor learning. Many schools delivering live lessons are choosing not to include the broader curriculum.

3. What about feedback? What should I expect?

In the Home Learning Expectations communication, you will have read that we are committing to deep marking one piece of extended writing each week. This will enable teachers to assess progress. Teachers will be using the quiz facility on TEAMS for knowledge-based assessment. With up to 150 pieces of learning being returned for each year group a day, it would be impossible to return everything marked.

Teachers are monitoring what is being returned. They will not be able to comment on everything. But the expectation is that three/four tasks are uploaded by children. This is good practice and will keep them on track with their learning. We shall also be using some of the Home Learning to feed into assessment.

### **Forest School and Yoga**

Natalie Perry has made two videos and music tracks especially for our pupils. They will have been posted in your team this week, but please be aware that they're designed to have a long shelf life and can be used at any time that you feel your child needs some down time. The movements are told through stories – they are a great way to relax as a family. In school we would bring the movements into different parts of the day.

Mrs Webzell has been really busy preparing activities that home learners can enjoy in the outdoor environment. These are posted in the year group pages but there is also a section on the school website under Spring 2021. She has a competition organised for half term – details will be sent next week.

### Poetry Competition

Mrs Smith has sent details of a poetry competition. We are asking children to create a poem about their thoughts on lockdown. This is a fantastic opportunity to have a family discussion. For younger children, an adult could record their thoughts. Remember poetry is an open-ended art form. No need to be the best speller, no need to have punctuation and some of the best poetry doesn't rhyme. Please encourage your child to express their thoughts – positive or negative. We would like to compile a collection of work from across the school. Details are on the website and were also sent out last week.



### Global Connections

We have had communication from our three French schools – who are surprised to hear that we are closed! They have been open since the first lockdown. We have a global committee in school and we were just about to start a project with a couple of European schools when we went into lockdown. We were disappointed to receive a communication from the British Council on December 31st to say that UK schools are no longer allowed to participate in the EU E-twinning platform as a result of leaving the EU. This came as a shock as we have used this platform many times to link with schools across Europe for different kinds of collaborative learning. There was no prior warning that we would simply be barred from the link up site overnight! It does seem as though nobody was actually on to this schools' programme which comes under Erasmus. It was free to schools (kindergarten to 6th form) across the UK. We have expressed our concerns to Jeremy Hunt who assures us that in time, something bigger and better will be forthcoming!

That as may be, but that does nothing for this generation of children who gain so much from learning about school life and children in other countries. We shall look for other ways to link but this has always proved hard in the past. The advantage of the E-twinning site was that its members were all like-minded schools who wanted to open up new learning opportunities for their pupils.

### Fairtrade

Fairtrade Fortnight starts at the end of February. We shall be continuing with our cross curricular learning. We shall also be sending home details of some exciting Fairtrade challenges nearer the time.

Art in Farnham: Our Y5/Y6 children in school will be joining this. No idea at what level it's pitched but some of our Y6 children participated in this project. Why not join from home.. see below

FREE Zoom talk with sculptor David Mayne for Farnham schools on Tuesday 9th February at 10am. David is the artist who created the new Farnham Sculpture in Waggon Yard and the talk is part of the gallery's community offer. The talk focuses on questions such what is public art, what is it like to be an artist, and how artists make sculptures as well as why Farnham is the World Craft City.

David did two fantastic clay workshops with you in the summer term in zoom with year six (lead by Vanda Bolton) and will share images of some of the children's work included in the sculpture.

[The Farnham Sculpture: Meet the Artist David Mayne - Schools & Families Tickets, Tue, Feb 9, 2021 at 10:00 AM | Eventbrite](#)