

Harleston C.E. Primary Academy

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Interim Headteacher: Mrs M Foreman

10th July 2020

Dear Parent/Carer,

Update from Headteacher

Over the last few days of standing at the gate morning and evening, greeting parents and children, it has hardly seemed like Summer after the amazing spring weather that we enjoyed throughout most of lockdown. Umbrellas and coats have been the order of the day! However, we have ultimately got ourselves even closer to the end of the academic year and the start of the new school year. Although we only have 7 days left after today, we will continue to set learning tasks on Google classrooms for everyone taking part in home learning and will hope that children access their remaining tasks before we head for the summer holiday.

I've had some interesting dialogue - some face to face (socially distanced, of course) and some virtual, over whether we will continue to set learning on Google classroom over the holidays. We had not thought about doing this until parents expressed their opinions; after all, the teachers do need to take a break from setting work and giving feedback to children. But then, on hearing how many parents still wanted their children to be active learners in their holiday, Mr Richardson and I had a chat to see if we could come up with a plan that would allow the teachers to have a holiday and for children to still find learning that they could do set for them on line! We think we have come up with a few good ideas and Mr Richardson will be talking to the leaders in school to see if they can add some ideas and then he will update you all next week.

Parents have also been talking to me about the transition of their child to their new class. Of course by now we would have been in full swing with this, as the year 6 children would have been at their high schools and we could have moved the classes to their new teachers. But we have teachers teaching in school and teachers working from home setting tasks and responding to children who are on Google Classrooms. This hasn't left us with any spare time to do extra things for the new classes. You can imagine how frustrating this has been for the teachers as well as for you and your children. The nursery and reception team have been working hard sending out information to all our new starters but the usual things like home visits and sessions in school have not taken place although Mrs Beaumont, Mrs Botwright and Miss Ingram have managed story times with the children passing from nursery to reception and pre school to nursery in socially distanced meetings on the school site that we share. Organising the start of these children into school has also been a challenge because we have wanted to have them in small groups, but in a safe way because of all the hygiene arrangements that we have to put in place between sessions. We know that we will not be able to please everyone with these arrangements, but we are trying our best to give the children the best possible start in school.

So, the actual face to face transition between all pupils and staff will happen in September, and the first week back in school will all be about transition, rather than launching back into the formal lesson structure that will be in place from the second week of term. This should allow children to get back into the routine of getting up and having breakfast at an earlier hour (for many of those who have been home learning), putting a school uniform back on, sorting out the reading book so it is in the bag to come back to class, and being ready to walk or hop into the car to get to school between 8.30 and 9.00 a.m. Then it will all be about getting used to school routines, school rules, school expectations. Some things will have stayed the same but some things will be very different and we will need to cover all of this with the children in that first week! We know that some children have found it very tough to keep up with home learning and these children will need lots of help to get them back underway as learners.

At this moment, I am not planning a phased return for children for different year groups, although other schools may do this. From our experience with children returning on 1st June, we know that we have a system where we can get children safely onto the site and straight into class and parents safely off the playgrounds and back into the streets around the school. The operation to collect children and leave the site has also worked well. Knowing how sensible you all are and how well everyone has followed the rules since June, I think that we can continue with these arrangements and even on the first day back, get every class up and running by 9.00 a.m. on Monday 7th September. Equally, I think we can have all children safely collected within our 30 minute window, just as we do now.

I am sure you will agree with me that we really do have to get all children back into school from day 1 of Autumn Term in September.

Other issues will include how we organise the school day including breaks and lunchtimes so that children are only ever in their 'bubbles' - which we will expect to be year group bubbles. All of this has to be thought through and everything covered in the very extensive risk assessment I have to produce and then match all my appropriate policies that may need updating. For this reason, I can't give you all the fine details of everything that will be in place for September as guidance is being produced (and changed) all the time. However, I am able to make a firm decision that all Key Stage 2 children (Years 3,4,5 and 6) will have packed lunches that are eaten in their classrooms - all children entitled to a free school meal will be provided with a school packed lunch - just as has happened in all classes since 1st June. On the other hand, I can fit the children from lower school into the hot meals dining room in their year groups so that they can have access to a hot dinner - since every child in reception, and years 1 and 2 is entitled to a universal infant meal. There will be sufficient time to thoroughly clean all tables and chairs between each sitting so that we can do this.

The other change to the school day that we must continue with as a continued temporary measure, is finishing the school week at Friday lunchtime, with children having lunch at school before being collected between 12.30 and 1.00 p.m. For working parents, we will be able to offer sports clubs run by external providers and a survey will shortly be sent to you all so that we can identify how many children will need this offer. Because we are still required to 'bubble' adults in school so they have limited close contact with adults and children outside of their year group 'bubbles', it will be impossible for us to cover the planning, preparation and assessment time that every teacher is entitled to without closing early on Fridays. Once the 'rules' on 'bubbles' are relaxed, we would be able to return to normal school hours on Fridays.

Please don't feel that children are missing out on learning time because with a reduction of lunchtime to 45 minutes per year group so that we can stagger time on playgrounds for each year group, there is a learning gain of 1 hour and 15 minutes a day through this. In addition, children who arrive promptly in school in the mornings from 8.30 also gain an extra 15 minutes per day which adds up to another 1 hour and 15 minutes a day. On top of this, children will remain in the classroom completing end of the day activities such as reading whilst they wait to be collected which should mean no loss of learning time here.

Next week I will write far more extensively about the arrangements for September and hope through this to answer all the questions you will have about the start of the new school year.

I hope the weather improves enough for us all to enjoy warmth and sunshine this weekend.

To leave you with a thought from Desmond Tutu:

'Life is more than breath and a heartbeat; meaning and purpose are the life of life.'

With my best wishes to you all for a purposeful weekend,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "M. C. Foreman". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'M' and 'C'.

Mary Foreman
Interim Headteacher