



Friday 27<sup>th</sup> March 2020

Dear Parents and Carers,

### A hello and some reassurance

Greetings and hello at the end of our first and very strange 'new normal' week. We are missing the children and our school normality incredibly right now but know that, however hard this feels at the moment, it is the right thing to keep everyone safe and we sincerely hope you are all well and looking after yourselves.

We have spent some time this week thinking about the current situation, and know that for many, there will be feelings of stress and pressure, and feeling overwhelmed by everything that is happening – we certainly sympathise. We also know that this will be exacerbated by worries about the amount of work being sent home to you and how on earth you manage fitting in your own jobs whilst taking on the responsibility of educating your children.

We recently came across a blog post from another Headteacher, reflecting on the current situation – much of what was said resonated with us as a leadership team, and we have summarised some of their thoughts to share with you at this time;

- 1) This is **not** home schooling. This is an unprecedented emergency situation impacting on the whole world. Home schooling is a considered parental choice that you take on and own. You are your child's school teacher in whatever form you choose. Comparatively, the situation currently is, at best, distance learning and it is not something any of us chose to do. We are all working out what we are doing and what's right and wrong here.
- 2) You are, and always have been, your child's primary educator. If you decide that your child isn't going to engage with anything sent home and is going to spend the entire period playing in the dirt, or baking, or watching TV, then that is your choice. That is your right. There is nothing to stress or feel guilty about, at all!
- 3) Schools around the country are up against it - they had no notice, no preparation time and we were NOT told to 'continue to plan lessons as normal and just send them home' – that's NOT possible. If it were, we'd all be out of a job!
- 4) It is absolutely **not** possible to facilitate distance learning with a primary aged child and work from home at the same time. The very idea is nonsense. If you're trying to do that, stop now. You can certainly have activities where your child learns, but your focus is your job, and survival. Again, unprecedented. Stop trying to be superheroes.

The following are a list of questions shared on social media recently which may well strike a chord with you given your current situation. We have provided answers which we hope help.

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## **The school has sent home lots of work. How am I supposed to get through it all?!**

You're not, and don't try. The reality is that faced with a very unfamiliar and unprecedented situation, teachers, thrown into the deep end whilst also managing their own feelings about everything that is going on right now, gathered together enough work and ideas to send home so they could say they did their best and avoid getting complaints that enough didn't go home – they had to settle on a fine balance of providing work without overwhelming or under-delivering, especially in these very early days and without any information about how long term this situation will be.

## **The school keeps sending home links and emails with more work. How do I make it stop?**

We are trying to limit the number of communications sent to you each week. We have agreed with teachers that you will receive an email at the start of the week outlining suggested tasks and activities for your child to get on with through the week to support their learning. We will also make sure emails are now labelled by year group in the title so you know which email is for each child in your household. As already explained, the work set is a guide of suggestions and ideas because we feel we have a duty to send what we can. If you want to use these resources and find them useful, then brilliant. If you find that getting through this is overwhelming, or you feel that you are sinking, stop opening the emails. The reality is, no one will really know!

## **I know other families where children are getting everything completed but we have barely started. Will my child fall behind?**

No one knows how long this situation will last, but the reality is this – whatever children currently do at home will become the syllabus of the future. Come September, no teacher anywhere in the country will be able to return to school and start immediately on the next year's curriculum. We will all be teaching the curriculum content that has been missed in this period of school closure, and there will be plenty of opportunity for children to revisit some of the work they have been set to do at home to consolidate their understanding and in some cases, address misconceptions that may have occurred. This will be the case nationally, no matter what approach is currently taken by schools to send out or deliver content now.

Another reality regarding this question is – children learn at different rates. Even within our daily lessons, some children fly through tasks and others take a little bit more time to plod on through.

Your child will not fall behind. Any work you do with them now will help but honestly, if children could all learn new concepts without specific teaching, we wouldn't need teachers at all. The curriculum we teach is progressive and we regular revisit past content. What is missed, or covered differently now, they will cover again, many many times over.

## **I'm not doing any work with my kids. All they're doing is building Lego, cooking and playing outside.**

All of this is learning – very valuable learning. Give yourself and them a break. Give yourself time to find a structure or routine that builds in a comfortable balance of some of the suggested activities sent home by your class teacher if you don't want to do too much of what is sent at the cost of the building, playing and cooking.

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## **I've heard from another families that their schools are sending out work differently / organising things differently to Brookburn. Does this mean my child is getting a bad deal?**

Simply – no! Every school has to work with their body of staff, consider the age and needs of the children being supported, and find the best way to work through this period balancing expectations of parents (which vary wildly even within schools) and the well-being and health of staff, many of whom have their own families to be caring for and their own adjustment to the new normal to make. Everyone is worried about the current pandemic, and no one is in an especially fit state to start, in these very early days, throwing themselves into unfamiliar ways of working. As a Leadership Team, we have spent time this week exploring options and encouraging our staff to consider a variety of methods suggested for supporting distance learning and keeping in touch with the children. We will continue sharing work as we have done for the past week for the week ahead, and then plan to take a 2 week break away from setting work given that mentally, your children and our staff are ready for their Easter break.

After Easter, we will have given ourselves enough time to look at other options and by then, we hope to have more information and guidance from the government regarding timescales and plans. Should we then feel that there are other approaches or ways that we can help, we will but still being mindful of the challenges of distance learning as outlined in this letter.

## **How can I get three different lots of work done with 3 different kids of different ages?**

You can't, so stop trying. With older children, you can expect them to be able to get on with doing tasks set more independently. Otherwise try to do something they can all engage with like reading a story together, some free writing, baking etc.

## **What routine should I be following to support my child?**

In school, a typical day is as follows:

Phonics / Spelling session  
English lesson  
Break  
Maths Lesson  
Lunch  
Reading  
Topic lesson

But you are not at school, and you no doubt have plenty to get on with yourself. Trying to follow this sort of routine may not work for you, nor is it realistic to follow when you have multiple children needing different things. So make a routine that works for you and your family. It won't be the same as the next families, and that is absolutely fine because this is about making things work for you.

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We want to reduce stress and anxiety as much as possible for our parent community. We are education providers who value and recognise the importance of education, and see the worrying reality that a term of learning will be jeopardised. However, we also recognise that these are scary times and that we need to take a deep breath and have a sense of perspective - in the grand scheme of things, a term's worth of education is nothing compared to the safety and well-being of our community, and more worryingly, the world.

If you feel you can, please do keep checking in with the emails being sent by your teacher to get a sense of work being set. Pick and choose what you can and can't do and find a routine that works for you. As a bare minimum, if it all gets too much and you need a 'school email sabbatical', then ignore them and aim for the following;

- A bit of reading every day (independent or to them or via audiobook etc)
- Some free writing now and then in the week. If they'll keep a diary or something, great. If not, would they draw a comic?
- Practical hands on maths. Be that via cooking, cleaning, outside or some maths games, physical or digital.
- Some fine motor work. Lego, cutting, playdough, tidying up small toys.
- Physical exercise everyday
- Some art/music where possible through the week. Doesn't need to be guided.
- A project for your older children – get them to independently work on a project. Great for keeping brains ticking over. Get them researching in a book or online and putting together something to present to you or family – this can be linked to the topic sent out by your teacher or entirely of your child's design.
- If you have younger children, build in lots of imaginative free play, the more independent the better.

We hope that the information sent here is helpful and reassuring. The most important thing is that you and your children are happy and safe. You will be doing a brilliant job, however hard you are being on yourself, and we are incredibly grateful to you for taking on the mantle of being your child's primary educator. Please try to enjoy the opportunity and make it what you want to make it.

We continue to be here to help should you need anything. Please don't hesitate to get in touch.

Sent with best wishes,

The Senior Leadership Team

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