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Friday 20 March 2020

Dear Parents,

I write this letter with real sadness. This situation is unprecedented and none of us came into teaching to see families shut at home and children unable to come to school. However, we must make the best of this situation and above all else try to ensure a sense of normality and safety for our children. Everything we have tried to prepare is with this in mind, which I hope this rather long letter will explain fully.

The children will have a mixture of feelings – they may be rather excited by the prospect, thinking the next few weeks will be like the summer holidays. It will be difficult for them to adjust and realise it will not. They will also want to know how long this will be for, and like us as adults, they won't cope well with the answer of 'I don't know' – as humans it is stressful to feel helpless. Some children too may be quite worried about getting ill. I have also attached to the parentmail some 'social stories' which have been written primarily for children with Autistic Spectrum Conditions but might be useful for any of you to share with your child.

Key Channels of Communication

Please remember that we are still contactable via the adminoffice@upham.hants.sch.uk email, though bear in mind it might take longer than it might normally, to receive an answer. Parentmail becomes our key method of direct communication with parents, though I will also place copies of correspondence on our website – under the News tab on the 'Overview of our Current Closure' page.

Can teaching be replicated at Home?

In a word, no. Teaching in school is a communicative process, staff give children an idea, encourage responses – use that to measure understanding and feed tasks and next steps accordingly. Tasks are set at different levels for different individuals with a myriad of different supports, expectations and resources. When staff work with individuals, they do not 'tell them the answer' but carefully question and encourage in a planned direction. None of this can be recreated overnight at home.

However, we aim to provide some activities that your child could do mostly independently. If you want to sit and help them that's great but it's not

necessarily needed. They may need a bit of help accessing the right web-pages however to get them started, particularly younger children.

How is the website organized?

I have created the pages to support home-learning on the News tab of our website – deliberately separate from everything else so nobody gets confused.

The first page on the list ‘Overview of our current School Closure’ is a general information page mainly for parents, this is where I will put copies of correspondence/ updates.

The second page ‘Ideas for activities, home-learning and routines’ is a general list of guidance, ideas for other activities, links to useful websites that might help. I will also place some extra challenges here, such as a weekly Lego challenge, to try to keep weeks varied.

The next pages are specific to each class and not surprisingly, are called Class 1,2,3 & 4. These landing pages will link to other areas of ‘work’. These will be organised in a day-by-day approach so that children access things in a school-like manner. These pages are deliberately ‘chatty’ as staff try to replicate the feel of their classroom in a simplistic way. Please note that staff will try their best to keep updating these but the situation may prove challenging – they or their families could become ill which would make this difficult (that’s when the general page may prove helpful).

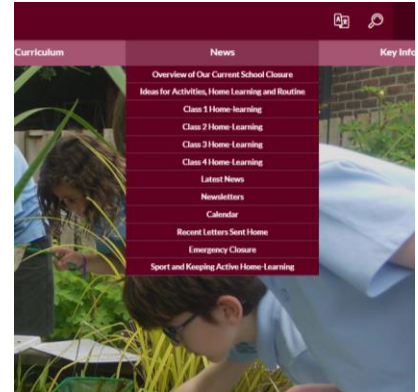
The next page is ‘Sport and Active Home-learning’ which will contain ideas and video clips of things to do to keep active. ‘Sports Dave’ will be uploading material to this, including some games lessons which you could do anytime or save for a Friday, just like school.

This means that access to a web browser on any device is going to be fairly essential which could create competition in the house with those of you home working/ between siblings. Don’t forget internet enabled TVs could be useful for your child – it would also feel like their school white board.

Email communication with teachers

The bit of teaching we cannot replicate is giving feedback (marking) during tasks – teachers do this throughout sessions and mark work to be reviewed/ edited sometimes before the next session. We do not have the infrastructure that would enable shared discursive work as many secondary schools or colleges might with their older students. However, we have created four new email accounts that teachers and LSAs can access:

class1@upham.hants.sch.uk
class2@upham.hants.sch.uk
class3@upham.hants.sch.uk
class4@upham.hants.sch.uk



Staff will not be able to continually respond to every piece of work and please do not ask them to, but we would request that once a week children return something. This will be the only vital way for children and teachers to connect so I would urge you to try to do this. This would be set up by the teacher on their class page. Older children could do this directly with their own email address or ask an adult to send it in on their behalf. For younger children, an adult is going to need to facilitate this. Please note that staff will not be able to respond to every conceivable question, please use this in the context of the class page instructions.

Social Isolation

One of the hardest parts of being at home is going to be not interacting socially – school is by its nature a social place and so much of their normal learning is collaborative, discursive or communicative in some way – the absence of this will be the most challenging thing. Therefore, if there are opportunities to work with others, such as via Sype, video conferencing, phone, sending emails/ texts/ messages to discuss or share things etc, then please take them.

Supporting their Caring and Thoughtful Sides

We continually talk to the children about being caring and thoughtful and they are so very good at it. Of course, in the comfort of the home and the pressures of family life and siblings this isn't always so evident. I have pressed on the children the importance of this and have written them a letter today (attached with this parentmail) with this aim. I have also given them (it's the last page of the letter) some kindness certificates they can cut out and give to siblings and to you too. I hope this will help them think about how they are behaving in the context of our usual Friday assembly routine.

Please note that the website company we use makes websites for the education sector and at the moment every school is attempting to do the same thing. It may therefore feel a bit slow – the company is attempting to add capacity.

Do they have to do it?

Everything we upload is there as a resource. It is up to you how much you feel is right to do. It would be right and proper to vary activities – such as during a particularly warm sunny day, spend time in the garden finding minibeasts or similar. It is also important to recognize how children are feeling. Please do not get into an argument with your child about the need to complete a set time – they will find this unusual manner of working strange and forcing things won't help either of you. They may just need some calm, relaxation time or physical activity.

Young children and play

Class 3 and 4, and to a certain extent Class 2, will be well able to access the website themselves. However, younger children, especially Year R are still learning through so much play. Their normal day involves lots of choice of whether to draw, build, run about, make, play with toys, build train sets, play

with dolls, dress-up and so on, so playing with toys should form part of their 'home learning'.

Routine

Trying to follow a routine will help your child, particularly to separate home-learning days from weekend days. You could try to follow the set routines of a normal class day, such as playtimes outside as breaks between activities. I would also suggest trying not to merge relaxation time and 'work' so spending time sat at a table working with the TV off would feel more school like.

I will add to the website some ideas for assemblies that children might like to do – they could even sing some songs just like we would in school. All this will help them feel like they are doing a 'normal' day.

Fitness health and mental health

It is really important for children to keep active. Remember they are used to three long outside play opportunities during the day – having 'playtimes' between periods of more static learning would make the day feel more normal. Since we are using the website as our key tool for sharing it will also be important to be mindful of how much screen time your child gets.

Keeping calm will also be important, especially as isolation time builds. Class 4 have already been shown the 'pilates' resources Miss Olver has produced, which they (and others) could replicate at home. I will place some mindfulness video links on webpages too that children can use – they might like the sounds in the background when working (which again mirrors how they sometimes work).

In addition, our sports coach, Dave, will be uploading some clips and videos of ideas of how to keep active at home, including some PE lessons. There is a bespoke page for this under the News tab.

Books

We have provided exercise books for children to record tasks and activities. Please encourage them to set work out how they would normally, with a title and a date. If they do extra little projects themselves, put these in the book too. The folder is to help organize any loose bits of paper they end up with. Try to use school-like pens and pencils; roller ink/ fine liners are better than biro's if possible. Avoid colourful gel pens, unless used for a specific art task.

If you've made it through this long text this far, I conclude by offering all of our best wishes for the next few weeks. I would also like to thank all of you for the kind, supportive things you have said to all of us this week. This period in our lives will soon pass and when we return, whenever that is, we will pick up the pieces. Children's learning will inevitably suffer but everyone is in the same boat and we will address this on return.

I leave you with a bright thought. Class 4 this week have spoken about not being able to see elderly family who are isolating, which has made them sad. They

were therefore motivated to do something to help these elderly members of the village who they sent Harvest cards to earlier in the year and who they knew would be feeling the same. They painted pictures of daffodils and wrote messages. Miss Olver delivered these cards today – to be met with overwhelming joy from the recipients for being thought of. I hope over the coming weeks you will too have these moments where you see the best of your children in adversity!

David Woolley