



Oratory Primary School  
Bury Walk  
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020 7589 5900

30<sup>th</sup> March 2020

Dear Parents,

As the second week of home learning begins, I am writing to thank you all for your positive communication during this new and very strange reality we find ourselves in.

All the staff are very touched that you understand that we are facing the same uncertainties and issues that you are at home. Your kindness and thoughtfulness is much appreciated; thank you very much.

All staff are working hard from home. In fact, they're doing longer hours than usual. When they aren't responding to emails from parents, or planning for the next pack of home learning, they are working on projects and tasks to make our school even better when we go back. That being said, all of us wish we were back at school- it's not the same without the children!

I have no doubt that you will have worries, questions and concerns about how the coming weeks will look for your children's education. I have guessed what these might be, and have answered them below. You may contact me directly if you have any other questions and I will answer them all in a similar letter next week.

### **Are you wondering about what communication you should be receiving from the school?**

- Classlist
  - Classteachers will post twice a week. At the beginning of the week they will write to the children to motivate them with their learning. Towards the end of the week they will post a short 'hello' video for the children.
  - Mr Alton is Senior Designated Lead for Mental Health, and also the P.E. subject leader. He is posting any resources he is sent to support you and your children in these areas.
  - I will regularly write with practical updates for parents, or a 'questions answered' post like this one. I will also write at the beginning of each week with ideas for prayers at home.
- Email
  - Classteachers check their emails every working day so you can ask them questions. They may reply individually, or post to classlist with a 'your questions answered' post, if the same question has been asked several times.
  - We are all enjoying seeing photos of the children's work. Please continue to send them if you can.
  - Mrs O'Loughlin can be contacted by parents of pupils with Special Educational Needs (she works Weds and Thurs).

- Mr Alton can be contacted with any concerns about your child's mental health or emotional wellbeing.
- For any other concerns, Mrs Steinart and I can be contacted as Head and Deputy.
- Telephone
  - I will be in regular telephone contact with parents of children of keyworkers regarding their care, and with parents of vulnerable children.
  - If you wish to speak to me over the telephone, please email me and I will call you at the earliest opportunity.
  - Other staff members will not be contactable over the phone during this period of closure.

### **Are you and your children missing communication with friends?**

- The Google group that Mrs and Mrs Trivino set up is having technical issues. Instead, please you can email your name and whole address to infoofni95@gmail.com and they will send you an invitation to join the group. This is a data base of parents who can link with others in their area to help with shopping, dog walking, etc if people are isolated. So if you would like to be involved and are happy for your data to be shared among the group, please contact them directly.
- Zoom and House Party apps are a great way for children to stay in touch during this time. Please organise these among yourselves- it would not be appropriate for the staff to do this. Please ensure that the children are supervised while engaging in this sort of online interaction- even the older classes.

### **Are you wondering whether the school will give work for the two week Easter break?**

- There will not be daily home learning set over the two week Easter 'break'. We appreciate that this is time for relaxation for you and your children.
- However, we know that this is not a usual break and that you may be grateful of something to help you keep the children occupied during long periods at home. Therefore, we will arrange the following:
  - I will set a collection of 'Easter Challenges' at the end of this week. These will be tasks for you to give to your children when you want some peace, or if you wish to keep to a routine. It doesn't matter if you don't do them- they are for your convenience. If you prefer to watch films, bake, and go for walks during the two weeks, then I won't be offended!
  - Teachers will set a homework task for the Easter break. Each class will be making a different A-Z book. Older classes will base their books on class topics- "World War II" in Year 6, for example. Younger classes may have more general focus. Your child's teacher will be in touch later this week to explain more. The book will have 26 pages (as it is an A-Z!), but we only expect around 6 letters to be done during the Easter break. Ideally, you'll make the books from A4 pages folded in half, but these are strange times so just use any paper or notebook you have available.

### **Are you concerned about what will happen after the Easter break?**

- At this stage, the government have said that schools will be closed until further notice, so we are already planning your child's home learning for 'closure weeks 3 & 4'.
- We will give almost exactly the same sort of 'pack' as we did for weeks 1 & 2. Although packs, will be in the same format as previously, teachers will not include too many 'worksheets' that require filling in. We need to proceed on the assumption that families have one computer and no printer. Any 'sheets' that they do include (lists of maths calculations, or handwriting, for example), will be able to be copied down into books if you don't have a printer.
- We are going to have to start introducing new concepts in maths, but teachers are aware that they will need to give you some guidance on how to explain things. We will provide short online animations where necessary.
- We will give the packs in time for learning to re-commence on Monday 20<sup>th</sup> April.

### **Are you wondering why we have chosen not to go completely digital with our home learning tasks?**

- Just because we *could* do it doesn't mean we *should* do it. Despite the rise in online offers from various companies, we are not giving 'e-learning' to be completed on the computer. This is because families are sharing laptops for working at home, and most families need to share between several children. It would be too difficult for parents to manage. Also, too much screen time is counterproductive.
- After the Easter 'break' we will begin to use some short animations to explain new concepts, but not so many that it becomes unmanageable for parents.
- Live streaming of lessons sounds like the ideal solution doesn't it? Children can 'watch' their teacher teaching. However, this is not the way primary teaching works. Class teachers do not lecture from the front of the class like university professors. There needs to be a great deal of 1:1 and small group interaction and feedback during lessons. This cannot be replicated during 'live' teaching.
- Over the past week, we have attempted to use digital platforms in small ways. We have uploaded videos for children to watch on classlist, and many parents cannot access them on their phones, tablets and PCs. We can't run the risk of technology stopping our children from learning. The home learning packs we are providing are reliable and flexible, and can fit in to the routines and schedules of all our families.
- Our school staff are in the same situation as you are at home: some of them are parents trying to home educate their own children; others have vulnerable relatives to care for; most are living in homes where other adults need to share their workspaces; broadband connection can be variable for some; some will be called into local schools to help on the rota to teach the children of keyworkers; and there is the possibility that some will fall ill. Can you imagine how hard it would be for me to promise our parents a reliable live streaming offer? I would rather our staff use their time to prepare the best quality home learning packs for you that they can.

## **Are you trying to find ways to support your child's reading at home?**

We know that, by now, your child will have finished the books sent home in their book bag, but there are things you can do to help.

- Remember the importance of reading to your children, and making up stories together.
- The following websites are just a few of the many that can be used to access reading materials and stories for your child:
  - [www.oxfordowl.co.uk](http://www.oxfordowl.co.uk) has a free e-book library, including the Oxford Reading Tree books used in the younger classes
  - [www.hungrylittleminds.campaign.gov.uk](http://www.hungrylittleminds.campaign.gov.uk) is a government based initiative for children 0-5 including story links
  - [www.teachyourmonstertoread](http://www.teachyourmonstertoread) is an award winning reading and phonics game
  - [www.audible.com](http://www.audible.com) is now free for children and students of all ages as long as schools are closed. Children can stream a collection of stories across six different languages
  - [www.worldofdavidwalliams.com](http://www.worldofdavidwalliams.com)/elevenes releases a free audio story every day

## **Is your child finding it hard to focus and concentrate?**

This is completely natural, and to be expected. This is an unusual situation for you and your children. Be mindful of this, and be gentle with each other! It makes no sense to get into a battle with your child over home learning. With sixteen years' experience of being a mother myself, I promise you, I have learned my lesson the hard way!

The following ideas may help:

- Engage your child in setting up their own workspace. You can call it your 'home office', even if it is just on the kitchen table. The children will like to be the same as the grown-ups who are working from home. Have fun making a little desk tidy, or putting a lamp or plant on a table to make it a special space. Put working things on a tray, so they can be moved for mealtimes. Try to have some natural light if you can.
- Take breaks, have some fresh air if you are able to. Even just getting up and stretching will help. 'Crossing the midline' is a technique that engages both sides of the brain- a quick Google will throw up plenty of ideas.
- Create a daily timetable so your child knows what's happening next. It can be as simple as:
  - 9am PE with Joe
  - 9.30 Quiet Reading
  - 9.50 stretching
  - 10 maths
  - 10.30 fruit and drink etc.

You can remove the timings, and opt for a simple list if that makes it easier. Try to include things you want your child to do to help you, like setting the table for lunch, or making their bed!

- [www.twinkl.co.uk](http://www.twinkl.co.uk) (UKTWINKLHELPS is the code for free access) has 'visual timetables' with pictures which help younger children, or children with S.E.N.

- You can email pictures of great work to the teacher, for a little bit of motivation. If the work is super brilliant, they may even forward it to me. I have brought my 'Golden Griffiths' stickers home with me, so I can award them virtually!
- If your child is really tired before you have finished the day's tasks, don't worry- stop and carry on tomorrow. Their minds and bodies are behaving differently than normal, and that's okay. It is not realistic to expect home learning to last from 9-3.30. The children will be unable to cope- just do what you can.
- Why not try a reward chart using stars or ticks for great work and concentration? A small reward can be given for achieving a certain number of ticks.
- You should limit your child's use of technology while they are completing home learning. All phones, tablets, and laptops should be completely out of reach.

### Is your child anxious?

- This is an extremely stressful and worrying time for everyone. Children can pick up on this- especially as we are all cooped up indoors. Try not to have the news on too often, and shield what the children are seeing in the media. Make sure older children don't have free access to their phones; there's a lot of fake news out there.
- Try to set aside a time each day for your child to air their worries and concerns. The school's Designated Mental Health Lead, Mr Alton, has uploaded resources on class list for you to access if you need particular support.
- Calm down boxes are a great little tool to use with children. They will enjoy making one with you, and can access it whenever they need to.

WHAT TO PUT IN A CALM DOWN BOX 	
<b>Items that provide proprioceptive support</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weighted lap cushion or weighted stuffed animal</li> <li>• Weighted vest or pressure vest</li> <li>• Stretchy resistance bands</li> <li>• Sensory tunnel</li> <li>• Mini massager</li> <li>• Body sock</li> <li>• Small blanket</li> </ul>	<b>Items for auditory sensory support</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Noise cancelling headphones</li> <li>• MP3 player with music</li> <li>• Audiobooks</li> </ul>
<b>Items to squeeze &amp; keep hands busy</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fidgets like Tangle Jr. or puffer ball</li> <li>• Rubik's Cube</li> <li>• Play dough or silly putty</li> <li>• Pipe cleaners</li> <li>• Stress balls</li> <li>• Bubble wrap</li> <li>• Bag of tissue paper to rip</li> <li>• Scarves or fabric scraps</li> <li>• Spinning top</li> </ul>	<b>Items for oral motor sensory support</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chew toy or chew necklace</li> <li>• Chewing gum, hard candies, or lollipops</li> <li>• Snacks with a variety of textures</li> <li>• Whistle, harmonica, party blowers, or similar</li> <li>• Rescue Remedy Spray</li> </ul>
<b>Items to support breathing &amp; relaxation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bottle of bubbles</li> <li>• Pinwheels</li> <li>• Straws and cotton balls or pom poms</li> </ul>	<b>Items that give kids a brain break</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Puzzle</li> <li>• Books to read</li> <li>• Blank notebook and writing utensils</li> <li>• Coloring books</li> <li>• Scratch art doodle pad</li> <li>• Small chalk board, Magna-Doodle, Etch-a-Sketch, or Boogie Board</li> <li>• Activity books</li> <li>• Photo album</li> </ul>
<b>Items for olfactory sensory support</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Calming essential oil spray</li> <li>• Smelling bottles</li> <li>• Scratch and sniff stickers</li> </ul>	<b>Items to visually calm</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visual calm down cards</li> <li>• Sensory bottle or calm down jar</li> <li>• Light up toys</li> <li>• Flashlight</li> <li>• Plastic snow globe</li> <li>• Kaleidoscope</li> <li>• Hourglass</li> <li>• Eye mask</li> </ul>
<b>Items to get kids moving</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Book of yoga poses or yoga activity cards</li> <li>• Skipping rope</li> </ul>	

### **Are you finding balancing your child's home learning and working from home difficult?**

You can't manage everything. Please don't try to; you are doing your very best! When setting the home learning packs, the teachers wanted to give plenty of home learning tasks per day. However, it may be impossible for you to manage if you have several children, plus a job of your own.

If you can't do everything every day- don't worry! When we return to school, the teachers will understand that some families have been unable to complete all tasks. Just do what you can when you can. The physical and emotional wellbeing of your family is the most important thing right now.

The home learning will be challenging for your children at times. They should not worry about not being able to complete a task. If they are stuck, please encourage them to tell you rather than a sibling or friend. It's not helpful for an older brother or sister to tell them the correct answer! If you need support, please ask your child's teacher.

### **Does your child finish their home learning too quickly?**

We have planned very carefully that there are a good balance of activities for the children, and enough learning on a daily basis. Make sure they take their time to complete things carefully, that they check and edit their work and tell you about it afterwards.

We also recognise that your children need time to play, and to relax- now more than ever before. However, if your child wants to do more, you could ask them to: write a diary; write a prayer; make up a play; research a historical figure; learn a poem off by heart; sketch a 'still life' (they know all about those... ask them!).

### **Are you worried that your child will fall behind?**

Every child is in the same position, all across the country, and millions across the world. Don't worry. When we return to school, we will help and support them, just as we did before. We will assess any gaps in class knowledge before pressing ahead with new learning and we will create intervention groups for those needing extra support. The teachers will know just what to do- it's our job!

### **What will happen about rescheduling parent/teacher meetings?**

These were supposed to go ahead earlier this month. We had hoped to be able to reschedule but we have decided that it is better to write to you instead.

At the beginning of 'closure week 4', classteachers will email you with a short summary of your child's progress since the last parent teacher meetings in November. They will concentrate on English, Maths, and Personal and Social development.

## **What can I do to keep my child's faith alive now that I cannot take them to Mass?**

- Please take a look at the daily prayers I have been sending out each Monday. Begin with the short contemplation in the video.
- Download the list of prayers from the R.E. section of the school website. This gives you suggestions of prayers that you can say at home for different age groups.
- Don't forget to encourage your child to continue to keep their Lenten promise and add to the charity appeal for the Catholic Children's Society.
- Encourage your child to be spiritual and reflective when completing their R.E. home learning by playing some quiet music.
- Create prayers together: asking prayers, sorry prayers, thanking prayers. Decorate them, and make a book, or hang them on a string or from a little twig to make a 'prayer tree'.
- Connect with your local parish provision: <https://www.bromptonoratory.co.uk/holy-mass-livestream>.

With my good wishes and prayers for you and your families,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jane Griffiths". The signature is written in a cursive style and is centered on a light blue rectangular background.

Mrs Griffiths  
Headteacher