

'A Caring Christian Family Where We Grow Together'

## Bunbury Aldersey CE Primary School

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Dear Parents/ Carers

Firstly, I want to take this opportunity to thank you all for your patience, understanding and support for our school over the past 3 months during the period of school closure.

As I have previously said many a time for our school community, closing down on March 20th to the vast majority was one of the hardest things I have ever done. I know myself and all the staff felt great sadness at having to say goodbye to the children far too early.

There have been over 40 individual lengthy pieces of guidance for schools to navigate through since closure on March 20th. These were to ensure that initially settings provided care for the key worker children and then latterly to plan for a safe phased return allowing more children to return. It has been an anxious time for all and I appreciate that schools will have interpreted the guidance given in different ways. Over the past few months I have worked to put together an approach which I felt was right for the staff and children of Bunbury School. For some of you we may not have got it right but I know for the vast majority from your emails and messages that Bunbury Primary School has supported you and most importantly your children throughout the pandemic.

I thank you all for your unwavering support over the past months and I know staff have very much appreciated your supportive feedback and positive support.

From the questions, you have provided through your parent council reps I have tried to outline below some of the answers and provide you with the information I have to date.

### Home learning and communication

As you will be aware on 20th March when schools shut down our role was changed from educators to care providers - particularly for the families of critical key workers and vulnerable children. At this point no guidance was given from the DFE and schools took their own path depending on their resources, staffing and capacity. Each school in the country approached home schooling during lockdown in many different ways and there is a wide and varied picture across the country. There was no expectation from the DFE that schools should set any home learning, set up communication paths or indeed conduct zoom calls. In fact, the DFE created the Oak Academy which is an online school for parents to access and supported BBC Bitesize as resources for parents.

At Bunbury, we decided that we wanted to make learning during this time much more personal for our children and related to those themes we would have been covering in school. As a result, staff collated activities and produced a timetable for those parents who wanted the extra structure to their day. Staff have weekly set white rose, purple mash, mathematics and other activities to support parents and children during this time. As time increased, the padlet was created as a secure and safe way for children to keep contact with their teachers and friends - this has been a great way of sharing work and keeping in touch with each other and the class teacher.

In addition to this we also created the school closure email which parents could send privately any messages, work or home learning queries to teaching staff. There has been a weekly reminder of the contacts on our school newsletter and I know a lot of parents have used this to communicate very specific questions and those which they did not want to share on padlet. With regards to zoom meetings, we decided that for those children who would not be returning, it would be nice to get in touch with them and see how they were doing. Whilst we do not have the staffing capacity to offer this weekly we do plan to do two more meetings before the end of term.

Moving forward from June 1st when education 're-opened' we changed our course so that the children in school and those remaining at home would be provided with a similar diet. These plans are uploaded onto the closure page on a weekly basis and provide daily timetabled activities for those who want to follow such a structure. I appreciate that there is a lot of work uploaded and as I have always promoted there is no expectation for all of it to be completed as I know situations vary between households.



Unfortunately, we do not have the capacity to mark all individual pieces of work which have been produced as all staff are teaching, many leading classes in different year groups to their norm. However, the padlet will still be in operation as well as the school closure email address.

I have also added my email and my Assistant Principals email (Mrs Armitage) for school work related issues as we are not directly involved in the teaching of 'bubbles' and will have more time to support and feedback where needed.

### **Wider opening of school to other year groups**

You may have seen in the news and perhaps on social media that the government are encouraging head teachers to bring back more year groups and more children before the summer term ends. As I have said in our weekly newsletters, at the present time we do not have the physical space to bring back more children from other year groups, using the guidance that we have been asked to follow. At Bunbury, we will see 90% of children from Reception, Year 1 and Year 6 return to School and we will continue to provide provision for our key worker families. Therefore all of our learning spaces are being used and we also do not have the additional teachers, even if space were available. I appreciate that different schools will be responding to this situation in different ways. All schools have had different uptake with children returning, are different in size, physical space and staffing so there will be a range of responses.

### **September**

I know for many of you the uncertainty around the new academic year may well be adding to your current anxieties. At present discussions are taking place with Directors, LA, staff and the wider community of our trust schools to establish plans for September. These discussions are all in the preliminary stages and without further awaited guidance from the government and DFE they are at a very early stage. There are a number of factors which will affect the wider opening of schools, many of which are out of the schools control, for example if there was a second spike of the virus. However, I am confident that with a relaxation to 1m social distancing and the talk of class bubbles we will be able to safely open up to all year groups. Once I have firm plans and site of the guidance I will share these with you as soon as I am able.

### **Catch up programme**

As you will no doubt have seen, the government has allocated a package worth £1billion that will directly support schools over the next two years. Importantly, previous headlines suggesting a 'summer of catch-up classes' appear to have been replaced with a more sensible, long-term plan.

You may have heard there is an expectation the money will primarily be focused on small-group tuition. However, we expect there will be significant freedom and flexibility in how schools are able to use this fund. The government's endorsement of the EEF toolkit, which sets out a range of possible 'catch-up' strategies, suggests that schools will be able to draw on the evidence of what works to inform their decision-making. Furthermore, the minister for school standards, Nick Gibb, appeared on Radio 4 earlier this week and was asked directly if schools could decide how to spend the money. He confirmed they could and stated: "the people who know their children best are the head teachers and teachers and that's why we have allocated the money direct to the schools so that they can then decide how to deploy extra resources."

While we now await further details, on the surface, this announcement does appear to be a positive development, and it clearly represents a considerable investment

I hope the information above has helped to answer some of your queries and questions regarding the education of your children moving forward. As the weeks have turned into months I know for many of you it has been an anxious time with regards to distance learning. As a teacher, but also a mum to 3 children myself I share your worries and anxieties. I have always put educating children as my number one priority and will continue to do so but during these unprecedented times this may of at times been challenged in all our households.

Children learn when they are settled and happy and I just wanted to reassure you that the most important thing you can do as a parent at present is ensure that your children are safe, happy and well. When we are back in school, we as professionals can begin to support the catch up of learning. This is not how I envisaged the 2019/2020 school year ending and I am optimistic that we can get back to as 'normal' as possible very soon.

I want to again, thank you for your patience and understanding. I know that you are all working hard with your children at home - thank you for all the e-mails of support and praise for teachers and support staff who are dedicated in their roles, going over and above to make the best of an impossible situation.

Many thanks for your continued support.

N M Badger  
Principal