



15 January 2021

Dear Parents/Carers,

I hope you are managing to keep safe and well; and thank you for the many messages of support we have received this term. This has been a very challenging time for both families and the school. However, with the increasingly rapid vaccine rollout, we will hopefully all see a much improved situation soon for everybody.

This **newsletter** will largely provide some additional information about how school is operating currently as a result of the Prime Minister's 8.00pm announcement on Monday 4 January. In 'normal' times, we would communicate much more information to parents in advance of significant changes to our operating procedures, particularly those that directly affect families. However, with late night announcements of major changes that schools are expected to implement immediately, we have been reluctantly thrust during this pandemic into taking emergency actions with little time to communicate beyond the essential information needed to operate in the short term. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your patience, and your co-operation in responding quickly to requests for information; this has been extremely helpful.

Attendance at school

Please remember that, for those children attending school currently, normal operations continue. For example, if your child is going to be absent from school (e.g. sickness), you must still follow the same procedures as before in notifying us. Children allocated a place are expected to attend every day unless they are unwell or for COVID-19 related reasons i.e. self-isolation.

Please remember to ensure that your child has their PE kit, water bottle and correct uniform, including appropriate outdoor coat, scarves and gloves in school colours.

Number of pupils attending

You may already be aware from the media that many schools nationally are reporting very high rates of attendance during this lockdown period, significantly higher than last year. St Alban's attendance rates are also very high, particularly in some of our classes where around two thirds of children are still attending school.

A small number of parents have raised concern about the high number of children attending during this lockdown period and I understand why they might be concerned as most of us probably anticipated much smaller numbers of pupils in attendance, to support national efforts in reducing rates of transmission. Government guidance is clear that schools need to continue to provide school places for eligible pupils, and the eligibility criteria for pupils who can still attend has expanded since the first lockdown period with more pupils now able to attend.

Critical worker families with children attending school

The expectation for critical worker families remains the same, that they only send their child to school if no other arrangements can be made (including use of support bubbles and informal childcare etc which is still permitted). Government guidance states that parents and carers who are critical workers "should keep their children at home if they can". If you are a critical worker and feel that your circumstances have changed, or it may now be possible to keep your child at home, please could you consider this carefully so that we can reduce the overall numbers of children on site; this will help to significantly reduce the risks of Covid transmission at school which benefits everyone.



Can I still apply for a Critical Worker school place for my child?

We have now reached capacity in some classes with the very high number of pupils attending. We have accommodated all eligible requests to this point but I do have to ensure that we have the staffing capacity and physical space to be able to balance the demands of providing high quality remote learning whilst managing the on-site provision in a way that reduces the risk of transmission through social distancing and other measures. If there are exceptional circumstances which you need us to consider, please email us so that we can review your request. Please remember to provide the following information for all parents living with the child who needs a place to help us review your request:

- Employer details, including your job title/role
- Actual hours of work
- How your work is critical to the Covid 19 response
- Where you work (at home or at a specific workplace location)

Please remember that the Critical Worker list is very specific. Simply having a job that cannot be done at home does not meet the criteria for Critical Worker status. (It is the actual work undertaken and how it is critical to the Covid response that is assessed).

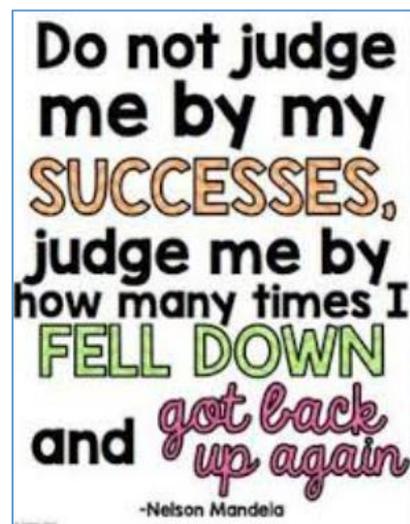
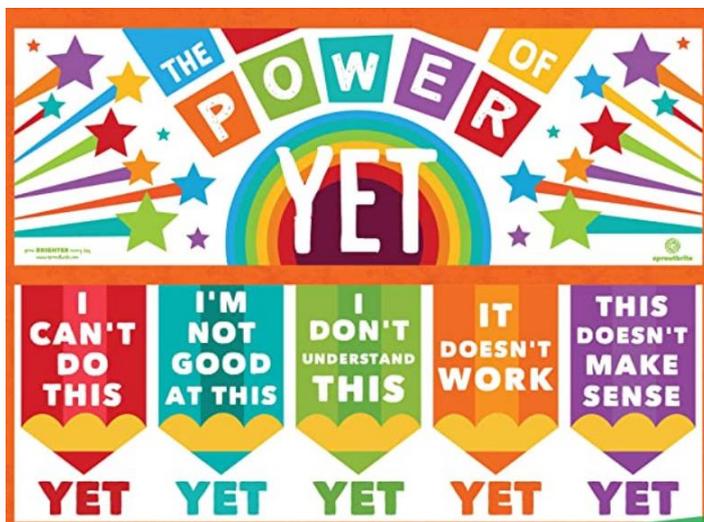
Please note that we will be unable to review requests until this information is provided for all parents living with the child/ren.

Remote learning

Thank you for the positive messages and suggestions we have received regarding home learning. This is a challenging situation for both schools and families and we are keeping remote learning under constant review so that we can find as many ways as possible to make it more effective and manageable for everyone. I appreciate that the circumstances for our families can be very challenging with many of our school community attempting to work from home, or caring for family members for example, while also supporting their children's learning. I would like to thank parents who are supporting their children with home learning for their great resilience and perseverance in getting to grips with this new way of life.

The Government requires schools to use a digital platform for remote learning, rather than providing paper packs of work. This is largely to ensure that there is daily interaction between teachers and their pupils and feedback on learning. However, becoming skilled in using a new platform can be tricky and we appreciate the efforts families are making in trying to become more familiar with Google classroom and other remote learning platforms

We promote a 'growth mindsets' approach with children when they are struggling to learn new skills and become disheartened. This approach is equally as important for us as adults in situations such as this as we all learn new skills, parents and staff alike, to cope with the situation we find ourselves in.



One positive that we hope we will be able to take away from this very difficult situation, is that children, staff and parents are becoming quickly upskilled in many new technologies that will stand us all in good stead in the future. Please do try to persist with these new ways of operating as you will soon become more familiar with them and at ease in using remote technology and platforms such as Google classroom.

Through our ongoing reviews of remote learning we have identified some additional strategies and approaches that we hope will improve the experience for children learning at home as we do appreciate that this is a very difficult position for families and children to be in. Some parents suggested that it would be helpful to know the day before a little more about what is coming up so that they have time to prepare and support their child more confidently.

We agree that having the online lessons uploaded to Google classroom in advance would be a helpful strategy for our families and have been working with staff this week to find ways to move to this approach as much as possible. It is likely that we will be able to have information uploaded by around 9pm the evening before. We do have to allow for the times when this could be an issue, for example staff sickness, technical issues and so on, but will be aiming for this approach as much as possible and hope that parents will bear with us on the odd occasion if staff have not been able to do this as they will be working late into the evening to facilitate this and will naturally have their own home life to manage alongside. Although we are aiming to upload work the evening before, please bear in mind that teacher's will not be responding to questions/queries in the evenings and will be doing this during the normal working day.

We have also identified additional strategies that will enable teachers to dedicate more of their class teacher time to those learning at home remotely, whilst still maintaining overall responsibility for the children attending in their class. Our staff have received intensive training on Google Classroom to resolve many of the additional technical issues which arose from the need to provide remote content to so many children at very little notice last week. We hope that through continued daily interaction within Google Classroom, provision of tailored teaching content and high quality feedback to those children learning at home, we can continue to improve the experience of our remote learners.

Live lessons

We have had some enquiries from parents about the possibility of offering live Zoom type lessons to children. We have considered the feasibility of this as an option and I thought it would be helpful to share with you why we are not taking this approach at this time.

Unfortunately, being a one form entry school with only one teacher per year group, we cannot assign one teacher to remote learning and one teacher to on site provision in the way that 2, 3 or 4 form entry schools are able to. Teachers in our school are simply having to do double the work to simultaneously support children at home and the high numbers of children still attending school during the school day. Providing online live 'Zoom' lessons is particularly problematic in a one form entry school.

There are many other reasons why we are not providing 'live video 'Zoom' type lessons which are based on a thorough evaluation of their actual effectiveness. As there is little evidence that the use of 'live' lessons is more beneficial for children's learning, we performed an in-school review to consider our choices during the summer and autumn of last year. During the autumn term we had a staff member trialling a range of different options for 'live' lessons with children learning at home. Although 'live' lessons may seem to offer a preferred learning format, the ability to offer meaningful learning experiences, constructive feedback and good outcomes with even our oldest, more independent learners were very limited. Those children and families involved found them more labour intensive due to the need for parental supervision at specified lesson times, with technical and sound limitations making learning in this format stilted and frustrating. From feedback during the initial national lockdown, we are aware of the challenges facing families where multiple children are using the same device for remote learning and parents working from home. This remains the case for many of our families. By not using scheduled 'live' online lessons, we enable our families to organise their learning routines as flexibly as possible and have received positive feedback that this strategy is supportive to many families.

The use of recorded content, whether from approved online sources or recorded by our staff team, offers children more chance to engage with learning, independent of their working parents. They have the option to pause and review teaching content, which is particularly helpful if a child has not understood or forgotten some of the content taught. Teachers are also responding to queries and giving feedback to work completed during the day with opportunities for children to engage in google chats with their teacher and classmates; this gives good opportunities for children and teachers to keep in touch on a daily basis. Our approach is also in line with Government requirements: *'Where remote education is taking place, it should include recorded or live, direct teaching time from the school or other educational providers (such Oak National Academy), and time given for pupils to complete tasks and assignments independently'*.

Governor update

Happy New Year and welcome to the second report from your Governing Body.

As I suspect for both parents and carers, Governors have also really missed being able to go into school in person, the opportunity to experience the stimulating environment we have grown used to and to actually have personal contact with others in the St Alban's community.

Governors have been continuing to monitor the delivery of the school's educational programme to your children through extended individual calls with staff. Whilst this has been a different way of operating for all of us, and could by no means ever replace those face-to-face meetings, it has shown us how important it is to allow sufficient time for such discussion as well as to reinforce just how hard the staff are working. Their commitment to enrolling in their own professional development, outside of usual school hours, and to sharing this new found knowledge with colleagues is surely testament to this. Just as for the pupils, peer support is essential.

Remaining positive is crucial in these difficult times when levelling criticism at others can often be the easy option. Being both kind and compassionate is an intrinsic component of the St Alban's ethos for a very good reason. We can all surely take a leaf from Captain Sir Tom Moore's book and adopt the mantra 'tomorrow will be a good day; things will get better'. The former army officer raised more than £30 million for the NHS in his centenary year – now there is ready made inspiration for you!

Whatever is in store for us all over the next few months, I hope you will join me in offering unqualified support to Mrs Hordell and her staff. The Governing Body will continue to act on your behalf and always with the best interests of the children at heart.

Hilary Herson (Vice Chair)

On behalf of St Alban's Governing Body

Pastoral support while children are home learning

Although some of our children are learning at home, we still wish to offer pastoral support to both home and in school learners where this is needed. We consider all children, whether learning at home or school, to be 'attending' school and their welfare remains extremely important to us. If your child has any particular wellbeing concerns or worries, please let us know so that we can support.

SATS

The Government have confirmed that statutory **SATS tests for Year 2 and Year 6**, and other tests due to take place in 2021 (e.g. Phonics, Y4 Times Tables) are cancelled. We will of course still assess children and part of this will involve giving children 'past papers' to help us make accurate judgements.

With best wishes

Mrs Hordell

Headteacher