

Dear parents and carers,

Firstly, I hope you and your families are well and are finding a way of managing our new circumstances. I would like to thank you for your ongoing support and appreciation for the hard work of our staff during this time. Whilst we haven't yet been able to respond personally to all the emails, we do read them and your words are very valued. I am extremely fortunate to lead a team of such caring, thoughtful dedicated staff, who are still striving to make this school as good as it can be. I would also like to thank all our parents who work in critical occupations – those who care for our health and our well-being and also those in other public services, farming, food shops and delivery service.

Although it is hard to tell, we are now at the end of the Spring term, which has been the most unusual and challenging term any of us have ever experienced. Schools run on routines, timetables, rules and blocks of six or seven week terms and then a holiday. The school year has a familiar rhythm and we always know where we are and what happens next. Sometimes we find this rhythm inflexible and exhausting but now it has been taken away, we can see how comforting and reassuring it actually is. I am sure I am not alone in feeling 'displaced', for want of a better word.

Home Learning Experience

We will continue to send weekly learning packs, (the next will be sent on 20 April) and set work through Purple Mash. Children can also contribute to the class blogs on Purple Mash. All of this work can be done in any order and to the extent that you feel is right for you and your children. There are many links available through these packs, on our website (please visit the pupil page to see new ideas for things to do (<https://www.bournschool.co.uk/pupils/>) and online generally, so if your child wants to do more, or take their learning in a different direction, this will help. Parents also have free access to Twinkl (www.twinkl.com/offer sign up as a new user and use the password CVDTWINKLHELPS.) This website has lots of worksheets to print if you would prefer to do this. I do advise you to keep up with the home learning packs as much as you realistically can, picking up again after the 'Easter holidays', as by then we will all be glad to re-instate the structure of learning.

Feedback from parents across the school to our approach to home learning has been positive. The teachers are phoning children weekly and both the children and the teachers are loving the opportunity to keep in touch. Parents have also said that the phone calls have helped them if they had concerns or questions about learning. The teachers have called every family but sometimes have not got through on the number they have. If you have not received a phone call, please email the office with the best number to contact you on. Remember, the number dialling you will show as 'withheld'.

You may have seen via social media or talking to parents from other schools that each school has approached the home learning challenge in a different way. We will continue with our approach because we know from your feedback that you welcome the activities in the packs and the flexibility to respond to your child's interests, but of course we will keep this under review as time goes on. I also know how difficult internet access is for many families, especially when parents are also working from home and broadband is stretched to

its limit. I am keen that we do not set expectations that parents might find hard to achieve and I really do not want any parent to feel that they are 'failing' in any way during this time.

In setting our approach to home learning I have to recognise that we are all experiencing this situation differently and this is why we have to be flexible in our expectations. Some parents are in a position to spend a lot of time with their children and others are not. Some children will not see their parents as much if they are attending Bourn Club every day because their parents are in front line services. All children will have different amounts of 1-1 attention depending on the number of adults in the home and the number and ages of siblings. I am not sure how effectively I would be able to supervise home learning with different school age children and a toddler, as well as trying to working from home. Some children will be easy to get into a home learning routine and some will resist it. Some children literally won't believe anything you tell them about school work because you are not their teacher (my children were like this, even though I actually am a teacher!) Unfortunately, some of us may also become ill. Negative experiences, such as illness or the fear of illness are distressing life events and can affect the mental health and well-being of children and parents. Children who are already prone to worry might be finding this situation extremely difficult, and this puts additional strain on us as parents as we allay their fears whilst having our own. For some families and children, home learning is not the main priority and I completely understand this. The absolute priority for all of us is to look after the emotional health and well being of ourselves and our loved ones, and to protect and nurture our relationships as family units. There will be days when this is easy, and days when this is really hard, but all we can do is take one day at a time and hold on to the belief that tomorrow will be better.

Reading Books

We know that practising reading may be proving slightly trickier for younger children who are on reading scheme books and some parents have asked whether we can set up a system of delivering books to parents' homes. Unfortunately this will not be possible, given that the virus can live on hard surfaces such as books, and also that our classrooms have been deep cleaned and we will no longer have access to them until the school opens again. However, the following website is amazing and has hundreds of reading books organised by age or reading level which can be downloaded. <https://home.oxfordowl.co.uk/>. Purple Mash also has lots of on line books and comprehension exercises for all ages. On the home page, click on Serial Mash.

The Gift of Time

When I welcome new reception parents to the school, I talk about the importance of even the youngest children becoming as independent as possible - if they can do it themselves, they should do it themselves. The enemy of this good intention, however, has always been a lack of time. Our children might be able to do their zip up or put their socks on, but it often takes them so long that we end up doing it for them because we don't have the time. Now we generally have nowhere to go, we can slow down and give our children the time they need to learn new things, such as how to do up their zip, tie their laces, use a knife and fork properly, make their beds, peel a potato, use the washing machine – the list is endless. We can give them what children always want most - quality time with their parents. We need to see the time we now have with our children, as being a gift. We are released from the busy-

ness of our previous schedules of work, after school clubs, swimming lessons etc and we can take the opportunity to slow down and do unstructured things with our children.

The Need to be Bored

Having said that, we must never underestimate the importance of allowing children to be bored. If children are given the opportunity to be bored, it will prompt them to find themselves things to do. As many children are so used to having lots of external activities and classes they may find it hard to entertain themselves and they may want you to do this. It is really important that you do not become your child's entertainments committee! As a child, if ever I told my mother that I was bored, she would declare that, 'only boring people are bored'! I remember thinking this was very unsympathetic and irritating (as well as being slightly insulting) but I soon realised that I had to look to myself for entertainment. I ended up inventing games with my sisters, making houses for fairies in the garden, inventing TV shows, pretending to be a horse and living in all sorts of imaginary worlds. As a parent, I didn't repeat my mother's words (although clearly I haven't forgotten them!), but I always made sure that there were plenty of days where my children had nothing planned and they knew they were expected to use their imagination to entertain themselves. The more structured your child's life has been up to now, the longer it might take them to learn to amuse themselves (without electronic gadgets) but it is important that you help them discover how to do this. I'm afraid this may result in a bit more moaning to start with, but it is worth persevering.

Sharing Positivity

Despite my warnings about not spending too much time looking at coronavirus related information on social media, it can be a force for good. We have set up a Twitter account as a way of sharing positivity and cheering ourselves up. For those of you already on Twitter, search the user name @BournBeCheerful and feel free to tweet us by starting your message with @BournBeCheerful. You can also reply to existing posts. If you would like to see the posts, but do not want to join Twitter you can still see them by going to www.twitter.com and searching for @BournBeCheerful.

Thinking of you all and wishing you a happy Easter.

Take care,

Laura Latham
Headteacher
Bourn Primary Academy



Picture by Charlie Mackesy