

ST THOMAS OF CANTERBURY CE JUNIOR SCHOOL

"Realising the potential of every child within a caring, Christian community"



NEWSLETTER

8th January 2021

Happy New Year!

This year, I hesitate to wish you all a Happy New Year. In light of the announcements that took place over the Christmas period and followed by the Prime Minister's decision to impose a third period of national lockdown it feels anything but happy. Unlike the second period of lockdown when schools remained open this new lockdown has sadly forced schools to once again close other than to children of critical keyworkers and vulnerable children.



Much of the announcements affecting schools took place on 30th/31st December which left us very little time to respond to guidance and make plans for the start of a new school term. Thank you for your patience and understanding as we made sense of the impact this would have on schools firstly in Brentwood and then later nationally. It was all very confusing and unclear but with your support we have made a fairly smooth transition to face-to-face learning for some and remote learning for most. This week we have seen an average of 40 children attending school. Next week we will be moving to year group bubbles to help us reduce the numbers of adults that need to be physically in school. This is very important to reduce unnecessary contacts and try and drive down the transmission rates in our community and further afield.

Sadly, some of our staff had their Christmas interrupted by positive COVID-19 tests but I am glad to say that most have made a good recovery and following their period of self-isolation are back at work. Unfortunately Ms Marshall (6M) continues to experience difficulties and her recovery is taking longer than hoped. On the advice of her GP she will be absent from work for the next few weeks but robust cover arrangements have been put in place to ensure both in school and remote learning can continue for this class. My thanks to Mrs Coughtrey, Mrs Gore and Mrs Ashby for supporting this period of absence. I am sure you will join me in extending our 'get well soon' wishes to Ms Marshall.

Whilst you remain at home please continue to adhere to our obligation to follow national guidance, restrictions and protective measures.

On Wednesday we were able to bathe in the light and joy of the Epiphany; where simply being in the presence of Jesus provides the hope and trust needed to navigate the year ahead with joy. *"With gold of obedience and incense of lowliness, kneel and adore him, the Lord is his name!"* Fr. Mark led a socially distanced Epiphany Eucharist with Miss Blakes' (3B) class where we were able to explore and focus on the story of the arrival of the wise men.

Despite the challenges we are all facing the staff and I look forward to your continued support, trust and confidence over the coming term and hope once again we can continue to work in collaboration and partnership with you and your children. Together I am sure we can 'Realise the potential of every child within a caring, Christian community.'

Staffing Update

As mentioned above, Ms Marshall will be absent from her role in school until further notice. The Year 6 Team will continue to work collaboratively to ensure all the children in 6M, whether in school or remote learning from home, have the same Year 6 work set, marked and feedback given. The teachers covering Ms Marshall's absence are all very familiar with the Year 6 curriculum content and know many of the children very well. Please continue to engage with the 6M Google Classroom and send in completed work and any questions or queries you might have.

On a much more uplifting note, I am delighted to share with you the exciting news that **Mrs Anna Dunn** has announced her pregnancy and is expecting her second child in June 2021. I am sure you will join me in congratulating Mrs Dunn and her family on this wonderful news. The Governing Body will be discussing and exploring arrangements to cover her teaching commitment in school and ensuring that the high level of support for our children and families in Year 3 (3DW) continues. We will update you as soon as these arrangements have been finalised.

Remote Learning – 'Google Meet'

None of us relish the prospect of remote learning and I am sure we are all in agreement that the best place for children to learn is in school. However, with this period of national lockdown schools will remain closed to most until at least the February half term. Please be aware that our Remote Education & Contingency Plan policy is available from the school website via the 'Learning at Home' tab.

From Monday this week we moved to our remote learning offer accessed through Google Classroom. Some children experienced this new platform before Christmas as they may have been in a class bubble that was asked to self-isolate but this week we have seen almost everyone engaging with this Department for Education (DfE) approved learning platform. Understandably there have been a few teething problems but by today almost all children were able to access their classroom and complete and hand in work. We have been acutely aware that some families are experiencing difficulty with access to devices or multiple devices. This is especially apparent where we have more than one child trying to access learning on one device or the household device is also being used for adults working at home. Thankfully we have received some laptops through the DfE 'Get technology for schools' scheme and can distribute these to families who are having difficulty. If you find yourself having access issues then please do make the school or your child's classteacher aware – we might be able to help!

From next week we are pleased to be introducing twice daily Google Meet sessions for your child. The first session will be held at the start of each day as a 'registration' session and to introduce and explain the teaching for the morning. Another Google Meet session will be scheduled after lunch for another 'registration' and to discuss the afternoon learning. All children are expected to join both sessions with their classteacher. The invitations and joining instructions for these sessions will be sent to your child via Google Classroom.

These Google Meet sessions will also be used as our way of monitoring children's engagement and welfare. If your child is completing their daily work and 'seen' each day at the Google Meet we will not telephone you each week as well. If this is not the case and your child goes 'missing' we will follow this up with a welfare call to check you and your child are safe and well.

I am aware that some trial Google Meet sessions have already taken place this week and the staff and I would like to set a few ground rules and Google Meet etiquette ahead of the official launch next week.

Google Meet Rules and Expectations

- 1) **Join the meeting with both video and audio (we need to be able to see you!)**
- 2) **Mute yourself so that we are not all talking at the same time**
- 3) **Click on 'Raise Hand' when you want to speak or ask a question and wait to be unmuted by your teacher**
- 4) **Use polite, respectful language when talking to adults and children**
- 5) **Leave the meeting when asked. Your teacher will leave after everyone else has hung up.**
- 6) **You must wear appropriate clothing and sit in an appropriate location. This must not be a bedroom and should be at a table/desk where you can listen and learn.**
- 7) **Make sure there is an adult present in the room at all times. They do not need to be on screen or engage in the Google Meet.**



We feel Google Classroom provides many advantages. Communication and work sent in by children is immediately responded to as the teacher is sitting 'live' to give targeted support and review work submitted, often with immediate feedback and direction. This is personal and bespoke to the learner and does not rely on a child waiting on screen with their hand up or having to speak over other children who are trying to ask questions.

Thank you for your continued support and understanding.

Curriculum Information Leaflets for Parents – Spring Term 2021

Next week you will receive, via Parent Hub, a copy of the new Spring Term 2021 curriculum information guide for parents. These are produced by teaching staff as a guide and indication of the themes and topics being covered this term. Please take the time to read this through and discuss it with your child. We hope it will give you some ideas about how you can support your child's learning and homework. Usually we would highlight the opportunities to research curriculum themes at the local library, via the internet or by visiting a museum – obviously some of these things are harder to do at the moment! The most important thing is to talk to your child and find out what they have been doing and learning. Copies of this guide will also be available via the school website under the 'Curriculum' tab. If there are any aspects of the work your child is covering which you feel you may be able to offer help or advice with then please approach your child's classteacher. Thank you for your support!

School Eucharists & Collective Worship

Fr. Mark will be continuing with our socially distanced year group bubble Eucharists this half term and we are keen to invite children who are remote learning at home to join us too. To enable this to happen we will send a Zoom invitation out via Parent Hub a few days before the scheduled Eucharist. At the moment we have the following dates confirmed:

Year 3 – Wednesday 27th January 2021
Year 4 – Wednesday 10th February 2021
Year 5 – Wednesday 20th January 2021
Year 6 – Wednesday 3rd February 2021

The Eucharist tends to last about 45 minutes and is a fantastic opportunity to share fellowship and remind ourselves of the importance of spiritual nourishment.



In a similar way we would like your children to join us for collective worship on a Friday morning with Fr. Mark and myself. This will take place on a weekly basis with the first one scheduled for Friday 22nd January 2021. Again this will be on a repeating Zoom invitation – to follow. Collective worship will start at 10:15a.m. and last for approx. 15 minutes. Please do join us!

IMPORTANT REMINDER: Primary School Admissions – September 2021

For those of you with younger children due to start school in September 2021 now is the time to make your application. This applies to all parents of children born during the period 1st September 2016 to 31st August 2017. You can now apply for primary school places between 9th November 2020 up to and including the closing date of 15th January 2021. Please apply online by visiting www.essex.gov.uk/admissions

There are now new admissions arrangements for Year 3 junior school places. If you have a child at an Essex infant school (Year 2) you must apply for a September 2021 Year 3/junior school place between 9th November 2020 and 15th January 2021.

The School Admissions Regulations (Admission Arrangements and Co-ordination of Admission Arrangements) (England) 2012 requires that all parents of Year 2 children in an infant school will need to make a formal application and submit this to the Local Authority by the statutory national closing date. Offer places will then be communicated to parents by the LA in writing on the national offer day. The application form is available to be submitted online and in a hard copy on request for those parents unable to apply online. To access the online application form please visit www.essex.gov.uk/admissions selecting 'Apply for a School Place'.

I have previously written to parents/carers of children in Year 2 at St Thomas of Canterbury Church of England Infant School with further details of how to navigate these admissions arrangements.

Finally....

Just before Christmas, in amongst the excitement of the festive preparations, I received a letter from the PCC of St Thomas of Canterbury Church; contained within the letter was a cheque for **£1,000**. I was delighted to receive the cheque from the PCC of St Thomas' towards the school's work relating to supporting the Christian ethos of the school and the Church of England principles. On behalf of all the Governors, staff, parents and children I would like to express our sincere thanks and gratitude for the generous donation which will be used for the benefit of all within our school.

Please continue to support each other at this very difficult time and look after your family and loved ones. With an ever growing vaccine roll out this will end soon. I pray for a time when we can consign COVID-19 to history.

Take care and stay safe,

Mr D. Moran
Headteacher



And...please remember if you have any questions or queries or comments feel free to contact us:
admin@stthomasjnr.essex.sch.uk