



Head Teacher: Mr Chris Tofallis

5th May 2020

Dear Parents and Carers,

I hope you are all well and safe at home during this difficult time. I just wanted to update you all again in regards to what is happening with school and what will happen in the future. These are very frustrating and worrying times for all our children, parents and staff. Schools have been officially closed since Friday 20th March, and we are now in the seventh week of lockdown. However, in reality schools have not really closed. We are open every day for the children of key workers and the vulnerable pupils. The frustrating thing for everyone associated with our school, and other schools around the globe is that we would all love to reopen again. There is no substitute to attending daily school life and interacting with all the pupils and staff. Currently, staff are on a weekly rota to support the children of key workers and the vulnerable pupils. I wanted to thank all my staff for their dedication and support over the last few weeks in these unprecedented times. They have been planning all the online learning, organising activities, making videos, calling parents, reading stories on video, writing parent reports, responding to emails and using Purple Mash to write blogs and answer emails from children and parents. There has been no real cut off point for the staff as some of these things have occurred in out of normal office hours. All the staff cannot wait to come back into school on a daily basis and see all the children and parents again.

I am hopeful that things will change sooner rather than later and we await government advice and approval. We have drafted a plan for reopening and wait on the government's advice to eventually announce our return when the time is right and safe to do so.

I understand that having online learning and working with the children at home is completely different to being at school. We completely understand and appreciate this and all we can do is hope for an eventual swift return to school. Having spoken to other Head Teachers and liaised with Local Authorities I am very proud of the work that the teachers have put in to enable online learning for our pupils to take place at home. This has not always been easy. We have many parents who have fully embraced the homework, some managing to do some of the work, others all of the work and some even asking for extra work. It is very difficult to get the exact balance but the staff have done very well. I know all the staff are reading through the children's work frequently and thoroughly and they do look at all the work, the blogs and the emails. The staff have also worked through all their holidays as we have remained open and been on the rota to come in during these times. It has certainly not been easy for anyone.

I am aware that some parents would love to see the teachers live on Zoom on a regular basis. Unfortunately, at this time, this will not be possible. There are several factors that have been considered when making this decision. Firstly, the Academy Trust do not undertake live online Zoom lessons and we are also aware of other guidelines from other bodies that are not keen on Live lessons. Guidance from the NEU teaching union states: "Teachers should not live-stream lessons from their homes, nor engage in any video-calling, unless in exceptional circumstances with the parent".

"Online lessons are not desirable for primary children as the teacher-pupil interaction is not easily replicated." There is a strong emphasis on Safeguarding awareness and teachers' online safety. This is the main reason for no regular live Zoom sessions at present. This is also the general advice from Ofsted. We are in regular contact with other schools in the area and we are not aware of any of them doing live stream Zoom lessons.

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As I stated at the start of this letter, there is no substitute for proper schooling. We will hopefully hear more from the government this weekend and I will update you all again next week. I am really looking forward to our eventual return and would love to see everyone again very soon. We do not know yet what the government will say but when schools do reopen, they may stagger pupils coming back and there could be a situation where there is a part time timetable with smaller class sizes. There will unlikely be a full return to school in one go. This may last for a long time and carry over into the new school term. Let us see what the government says this weekend.

On other school related matters, I would like to say thank you to everyone at home for your efforts in engaging with the online tasks that have been set by the teachers on Purple Mash. We have started to give out Merit Certificates again for great work and great writing. Well done to Neve (Y1) for winning the Values poster competition on Fairness for April. She will receive a £5 e-voucher very soon for her efforts! Our Value for this month is 'Excellence' and we will be giving out a £5 e-voucher to the pupil producing the best poster, picture or writing on this value.

We have also been very busy recruiting new staff for September 2020 and we held successful teacher interviews this week. Next week we will be holding interviews for new lunch staff and we will be requiring more SEN TAs as well, ready for the new academic year.

If you have any questions, please blog the class teacher who will be very happy to help, or contact our school office on 0208 361 1881 or email: office@ashmoleprimary.org

Many thanks and best wishes.

Mr Tofallis

Head Teacher