



Newsletter – 20th November 2020

Dear parents,

I was very pleased to be able to leave my house on Wednesday and come back to school. It was lovely to see you all and to see the children again. I am also looking forward to seeing the children in Nightingale and Year 1 once their periods of isolation are over.

I have realised that I am a hypochondriac – there is nothing like being alone all day (while constantly discussing COVID symptoms) for bringing out the hypochondriac in anyone. During my isolation I almost wore out my thermometer and continually questioned my sense of taste. Was that cough persistent? Did it matter that my coughing fit followed a swig of tea going down the wrong way? I am embarrassed to say that I actually went for two tests over the 14 days.

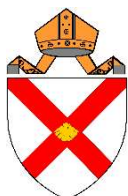
Both tests were thankfully negative, although after spending two weeks indoors, going for a COVID test almost seemed like a day out. I was however shocked by the number of cars on the road on both occasions, to the extent that I am now questioning whether this is a lockdown at all. Cars are everywhere. Traffic seems in even more of a hurry than usual – on my bike I was overtaken repeatedly on my Thursday morning commute by cars giving barely half a metre's distance. People are even driving to garden centres for days out; I am honestly unsure what people need to buy in a garden centre in November.

Looking back through recent newsletters, I am ashamed that since September I have not formally thanked the incredible members of staff we have at St James'. They are all committed to doing their best every day for the children of our school and I cannot thank them deeply enough or sing their praises highly enough. I would also like to thank my leadership team: Miss Hayward, Miss Greenfield and Mrs Wardell for everything they have done, not just while I was isolating, but every single day. Seeing the joy on the children's faces at lunchtime for simply being in school and playing with their friends reminded me again of the importance of the incredible work the staff here are doing.

Miss Greenfield has also asked that I add a 'Thank you' to the parents of children in Year 1. They have been so kind and supportive over the past few days and have all adapted to the new system of using Teams remarkably well. I know that Mrs Sparks and Mr Pritchard feel the same way about their amazing classes.

School meals in December – important message

We have had an incredibly generous donation to the school by an anonymous donor. They are covering the cost of school meals for all children in Key Stage 2 who pay for lunches for the 14 school days in December. Yes, you did read that correctly. Therefore, if you have a child in Key Stage 2 and you would like them to have a hot lunch, during December you do not need to pay for it, your child will simply have to let their teacher know each morning when the lunch register is taken. It does not matter whether your child usually has packed lunches or school dinners, the offer is there every day in December.



The donor has made this donation in recognition of the fact that this year has been truly awful for many people, and that many of us are dealing with particularly challenging (and sometimes frightening) circumstances on fewer resources.

Our donor has asked that, if parents genuinely feel that they do not need this help, they should donate the money they would have spent on school lunches or packed lunch ingredients to the Nourish food bank. Our donor wants to ensure that only those donate who can comfortably afford to.

You will appreciate that this is an incredibly significant amount of money and I am sure that like me you recognise and are overwhelmed by the level of generosity and compassion that this donation entails.

Class WhatsApp groups

I would like to spend the next few lines of this newsletter discussing the phenomenon of the “Class WhatsApp Group”.

As you know, I have three children and therefore understand this from a parents’ point of view. While I have not joined my own children’s groups, my wife’s mobile buzzes regularly with messages such as “XXX has just told me that the kids are supposed to come to school in pirate costumes tomorrow - [angry emoji]! Is that true?”. Another common concern seems to be the whereabouts of various misplaced items of clothing. Sometimes comments clearly hit a nerve and the phone buzzes continually.

I completely understand the utility of such a forum, and am always pleased to see the helpful responses which follow: “[emoji of undecided person holding up arms in confusion] or [emoji of crying with laughter]”. It therefore seems clear that Class WhatsApp Groups serve a vital communications role.

Where I would urge caution is where hearsay, or confused messages brought home by children are then either taken as fact or multiplied into calamity. If you are ever in any doubt or have any concerns, or something your child says strikes you as odd (e.g. my teacher definitely has COVID-19 and she was teaching me all day), rather than turn to the oracle of the WhatsApp group (where, granted, various parents may pitch in with helpful suggestions, “righteous” anger or explanatory emojis), we suggest that you contact the school directly or speak to one of us on the gate.

I know how important every channel of communication is for all of us at the moment and, joking aside, Class WhatsApp Groups (and others) are extremely useful for keeping in touch, helping each other get through these trying times and staying up to date. If you have any concerns though, it is best to ask us directly.

Christmas cards

Due to the infection risk, we are not allowing Christmas cards to be brought into school this year and exchanged. I am sure you will understand.

That is something I never thought I would have to write in a school newsletter. Strange times.

Year 6 children arriving early

We still have many children in Year 6 arriving early to school; on some days there are up to 30 children arriving before 9am, crowding the entrance and therefore jeopardising our bubbles. Children in Year 6 should arrive no earlier than 9:05am. Myself, Miss Hayward and the class teachers speaking to them



daily seems to have had little impact and so I am appealing to parents again for your support with this. The rationale of staggered starting only works if children arrive on time.

Remember that if you have younger siblings at school, they can all arrive at the later time and that registers do not close until 9:15am, so there is absolutely no need to drop them off early. Therefore, please estimate how long it takes for your child to walk to school, then decide at what time they should leave the house and then allow them to leave 5 minutes after that. If you can help us with this, we will not need to take further action such as making the Year 6 starting time later.

COVID symptom study App.

I have sent a letter alongside the newsletter about how to download this app and join in. This is completely voluntary, but I would appreciate it if you would read the letter and sign up if you can. If it stops even one vulnerable person from becoming unwell, or stops just one class from having to isolate, then it will be well worth it.

Pyjama Day

Your children looked very colourful and very cosy in their pyjamas today. It certainly gave them an extra spring in their step!

AR Winners - 20/11/20

Below are our winners for this week's Accelerated Reader competition.

Highest individual word count: Marley in Stoa with 1,106,426 words.

Highest amount of quizzes achieved: Viraj in Deer who has achieved 33 passed quizzes.

Highest class word count: Osprey class with 4,071,507 words.

Well done everyone!

Miss Stock

Have a good weekend and thank you all, as always.

John Tutt

November 2020

