



Dear parents,

First of all a very happy New Year to you all. 2021 has clearly not started as the bright dawn of a new beginning that we may have hoped for, so I am going to consider the next few weeks as an add-on to 2020. Before 1752 New Year's Day was 25th March, so let's reinstate that just one more time – roll on 2021!

I hope your Christmas was as good as expected, if not much quieter than most years. Having egg and chips on Boxing Day (followed by a cheese board) was certainly a break from Tutt family tradition. A usual Boxing Day involves my wife and I waiting hand and foot on a sizeable number of pensioners; most years we jokingly moan about it, but we desperately missed seeing the family and hearing the house full of laughter this time around.

I am sure that the Prime Minister's announcement that schools would be closed until half term came as much of a shock to you as it did to me. We are doing our very best to ensure that this time around we give the children daily face to face contact with their teacher. Our teachers are working from home and focusing on the children's learning, while our Teaching Assistants are providing the childcare at school for the children of critical key workers.

I am incredibly proud of the whole team here at the school and would like to thank them publicly for everything they are doing at the moment. I know that everyone is working a very long way out of their comfort zone, and that their single concern is the wellbeing of the children and the continuity of their learning.

I would also like to thank all of you at home, supporting your children and establishing new routines. You are not alone; the St James' family is the world's strongest community (I cannot back that up, but it is clearly true) and we are here to help you and your children through this.

Government announcements

I just wanted to make it clear that when an announcement about school closures or other significant change is made by central government in a briefing or leaked via the news, headteachers find out about it at the same time as you do. We are not contacted in advance or given any notice; last Wednesday I suddenly had to search various news pages and trawl the DfE website trying to get more specific information so that we could begin planning. I would like to thank you for being so patient with us when circumstances change so quickly.

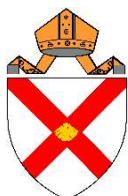
Home learning

I know what a struggle home learning is, and how difficult these next weeks will be for you. I understand that Monday's announcement must have been an unwanted shock as two weeks stretched into a whole half term.

Please do not let the home learning become a battle across the dining table – your class teachers are on Teams daily and are there to support your children, so let them have those conversations instead.

I hope that you are finding the remote learning more interactive than during the last lockdown. We have spent a lot of time refining this over the last couple of months and have learnt important lessons from Years 1 and 5 last term. It may take a while for everyone to get up to speed so please bear with us.

Access to technology



Please contact Lucy on lhayward@st-james.kent.sch.uk if you are struggling with access to a laptop, PC or tablet at home. We have some laptops available as well as some kind offers from parents for those who may be trying to juggle home learning for their children without the devices they need.

SATs and phonics screening

We have had confirmation that SATs for children in years 2 and 6, and phonics screening for children in years 1 and 2 have been cancelled this year. We will give you more information about how we will report children's progress to you later in the year.

Collective Worship

We will try to ensure that there are new assemblies available each week. These can be accessed via the school website under the "children" option. Apologies in advance for having to look at the rapidly ageing man leading some of them.

Key worker places at school

The number of key worker children we have at school is far higher than we were expecting. The government are being pressed to urgently review the key worker criteria, and they are aware of the pressure this is placing on schools. If you are a key worker and you work part time you should not send your child into school on your non-working days. Guidance to schools published today states clearly that "critical key worker should keep their children at home if they can".

Looking after the children of critical key workers is something that we do proudly, so that they can be in care homes, supermarkets, schools, hospitals or on the front line looking after us all. In order to ensure that these people are able to be at work saving lives or keeping the streets safe it is important to keep the numbers in our bubbles as low as possible; one positive case in a key worker bubble will have a big impact on a lot of people vital to the fight against COVID as that entire bubble will need to isolate.

Message from the PTA

Thank you to those who came along to last night's virtual PTA meeting - it was lovely to see some new faces.

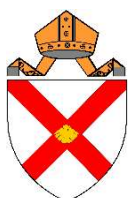
If you couldn't make it last night, but would like to be part of the team that supports the parents running the events, we could really use your help.

We need a new treasurer. This would initially be a co-treasurer role with Pete Smithson so that you can take over when you know how it all works. The treasurer manages the bank account and the banking after events, prepares the accounts and as part of the committee helps plan the programme of events and allocate the funds raised. We can put you in touch with Pete if you'd like to know more.

We need a secretary too. The main formal responsibility is taking the minutes at the termly meetings. You would also liaise with the school and class reps to communicate details of events and co-ordinate helpers. It's a really good way to meet lots of people in the school community. Again this is a committee role, so you would help plan the programme of events and allocate funds.

Finally, we need a new independent auditor of the accounts. You don't need to be an auditor to do this - the auditor's role is to review the annual accounts prepared by the Treasurer at the end of the year and ensure they comply with the Charity Commission's requirements. The Commission provide a checklist for you to work from.

Please do get in touch if you'd like to know more - stjamespta@gmx.co.uk or send a message through our Facebook page.



Thank you all, as always.

John Tutt

Headteacher

