



WHYTRIG MIDDLE SCHOOL

One of the Seaton Valley Federation of Schools

Elsdon Avenue, Seaton Delaval, Northumberland NE25 0BP

Tel: 0191 2371402 Fax: 0191 2371830

Email: admin@whytrig.northumberland.sch.uk

www.svf.org.uk

Executive Headteacher: John Barnes

Head of School: Jonathan Souter

21 May 2020

Dear Parent or Carer,

I hope you and your family are keeping well and are managing to remain positive in these challenging times. Certainly, at the start of the New Year none of us could ever have envisaged that I would be writing to you under these circumstances at this stage of the school year. As a Federation we have tried to ensure a co-ordinated approach for home communication with letters from Mr Barnes, information on the website and also through our social media channels. However, as we approach the final half term of the year, I wanted to take this opportunity to share information and some of our thoughts with you.

Usually before the half term holiday, I would be reflecting on how the SATs had gone for our Year 6 pupils in school, as well as looking ahead to next half term. The children had all worked really hard this year, as had our staff and we were expecting good outcomes in Maths and English. The cancellation of the 2020 end of Key Stage 2 tests back in March (as well as all the other end of year examinations for older children) and the impact on all those young people truly hit home. Depending on your viewpoint, it might have been considered a mixed blessing for our Year 6 children to avoid enduring the potential stress that can be caused by SATs, however there was also that feeling that it was extremely disappointing too, given their progression at that time in these subjects. Of course, we now know that Year 6 now have another significant role to play in school before the end of term.

On 10th May, the Prime Minister's announced the plan to begin the first stages of getting back to 'normality' by opening schools for some year groups. Technically speaking, we are talking about the return of children to our school as we have been open every day in the last nine weeks to some children from the three schools in our Federation. This provision has only been possible because of all the dedicated staff across the Federation of schools. For our middle school, Year 6 will be the first year group to return to school on 1st June. We have planned both as a Federation and as a school for this. Our approach has been meticulous following the Government guidance, as the safety of pupils and staff is always paramount in anything we do. That is especially the case in the current climate.

The Government have chosen Year 6 as the first year group to return (as well as two other year groups in primary schools). They state in their guidance to schools, "Year 6 children are finishing Key Stage 2 and are preparing for the transition to secondary school, and will benefit immensely from time with their friends and teachers to ensure they are ready". Of course, you will ask why this is happening when Year 8 is the group preparing for transition at Whytrig. The reason is that the Government have stated "We encourage middle schools to do the same and welcome back children in year 6, to ensure national parity for children in this year group".

The full details of the return to school plan, including safety measures and expectations will be shared with the parents of Year 6 children initially in a separate letter. I would just like to reassure everyone that if Mr Barnes or I did not feel it was safe to open, then we would not. We are confident the measures we have put in place will be robust enough to keep everyone safe whilst facilitating their return to school. It must be highlighted, for those children who are returning, school will not resemble what they were used to when they left on 20th March, which will be immensely hard for all of us as we care deeply about the school and the children in it. However, we feel

that with a lot of care, we can lay the foundations for other year groups returning too. It may then be possible to extend the offer to Year 5 before the end of the Summer Term.

Normally, as we approach the last half term, we are also thinking about the many activities that take place before we break up such as end of year trips. Naturally it saddens us that these will not happen this year and we hope everyone understands the reasons why. Our teaching staff would normally be about to start the process of preparing end of year reports, so it is still our intention to send a written report home in July, although it will not be in the usual format. We will all miss many of the usual end of term traditions this year, but one of the most significant will be when our Year 8 pupils finish their time with us. They have been a superb year group throughout our school and it is only right that the school let them know this at some point. Leavers hoodies are currently being organised and we hope that it will also be possible to offer our Year 8 pupils an opportunity to come back into school at some point before the end of term, even if it is just to spend time with their teachers in some form. We will of course also recognise Year 8 achievement as we always do at some point in the future but it might not be possible to do that in school this year.

As I have written in previous communications, we know that many children will be struggling with the changes that have occurred to their daily routines, even the most confident. We recognise the continued challenge around home learning and we really do appreciate all of your support and efforts at home since 23rd March. We would especially like to say thank you for persevering with Google Classroom; it's fair to say that working online isn't ideal, but it has allowed us to set new learning and for some interaction between pupils and staff, which is hugely important. Because of this, we can now see a role for Google Classroom at some point in the future for all of our pupils. This has also been the case in so many aspects of life in lockdown, where technology has played a positive role in keeping families, friends and colleagues connected!. If children want to complete any outstanding tasks in Google Classroom or if a parent wants their child to catch up on work that has not been done the holiday week could be viewed as a good opportunity to do that, but it is their choice; as a school we are not directing anyone to do so and our staff will not be setting any new work for pupils to complete over the half term holiday either. Once again, thank you for your support.

I also want to take this opportunity to once again thank our fantastic staff, teaching and non-teaching, who have been working tirelessly behind the scenes to keep things running as smoothly as possible. Throughout this period of time we have tried very hard to keep the lines of communication open and have been making regular contact with many parents and families. We are sending out weekly e-certificates and postcards to recognise effort in work and celebrate success; we just need to figure out to do virtual hot chocolates and biscuits for our stars of the week! This week we have had a big push to make phone contact with every family and hopefully allow teachers to speak to children in their classes; it has been really touching to learn how much this has been appreciated. As we head towards the end of the academic year, we will continue to send out regular communications from the Federation, as well as maintaining all the other areas of communication that have been improving week on week.

Hopefully over time, as the experts learn more about the impact of loosening the restrictions for us all, we can all return to the parts of our lives that we considered 'normality' before all of this. Sadly, for some members of society, we know that this will not be the case and we will always have this in the back of our minds. I do hope that you all have as good a bank holiday weekend and half-term break as it is possible to do at this time and of course, as always, from all of us at school, we wish you and your families continued good health.

Yours sincerely

Mr Jon Souter
Head of School