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*Acting Headteacher: Mr S Parker* ***‘Growing Together. Empowered to be more’***

Tuesday 8th September 2020

Dear Parents and Carers…

Although we’ve tried to ensure that our communication with you all is as thorough as possible, we wanted to write an additional official welcome letter to this new academic year at Urmston Primary.

We know that there will inevitably be some bumps along the road in these uncertain times (and some schools are already experiencing these) but we must say that we have been so impressed and greatly encouraged by how your children (and our staff!) have returned to school after such a long absence. Attendance for our first two days was over 99% which speaks volumes in the mutual confidence and trust that we have as a school community. Long may it continue!

This week is transition week. It is a bit of a tricky one as, from Year 2-5, it will mean changes to start and finish times for some and finding out new teachers for our Reception and Year 1 children. We’ll be sending out some texts to you to remind you of how and when these will change, but essentially, Year 2-5 will change times from Thursday and Reception and Year 1 from next Monday. We’re sure it’ll go smoothly(!) and thank you for your patience and understanding in our reasoning for undergoing this process this week rather than at the end of the summer term...which may have left some rather nervous and uncertain kiddies over the summer holidays.

We’ve been monitoring how drop-offs and pick-ups have been working and feel that although mornings are very calm, afternoons are a bit crowded, despite the staggered times. We are liaising with the grammar school about this and Mrs Wall, the principal, is sending a message to students and parents today asking them to find an alternative route, rather than passing UPS, so that we have a little more space outside our school to ease congestion and waiting at the gates. We’ll continue to keep a close eye on things.

**A quick note about symptoms...**

By now, we all know that the key symptoms of coronavirus are a continuous cough and a high temperature. Of course, we are coming towards cold and flu season and so distinguishing between what is coronavirus and what is not is going to be decidedly tricky without having a test. Whether your child comes in to school or not is largely your call. We fully expect children to get colds and a little cough to clear the throat may well be part of that. If that cough is a phlegmy one along with a runny nose and perhaps a sore throat, we might go with the odds and assume it’s a cold and the NHS advises that if a child has mild cold-like symptoms they should continue to go to school. If, however, the cough is new and continuous, or there is a fever/high temperature (or perhaps they’ve lost a sense of taste or smell), we’ll be telling you to keep your child at home and to get a test for coronavirus. If you are unsure, please give our office a call – none of us our medically trained and so where possible we may have to err on the side of caution. All procedures regarding this and our current health and safety measures can be found in our risk assessment on our website at https://urmstonprimary.com/information/covid-19-procedures.

**Where do we go from here? What are our priorities?**

We’ve said on a number of occasions that our children’s mental and emotional wellbeing will be our priority upon their return and that we would review how things are going before delving into any means of assessing where our pupils are academically following lockdown. To be honest, the children have been tremendously focused and ready for learning so we have already begun looking at Y2-5 reading ages and areas for development in spelling and reading. We’ll be doing some maths and reading assessments at some point next week so that we can begin to look at where our academic priorities lie. There will most certainly be some children that are in need of pastoral support, some due to their lockdown experiences and some not, and, as always, we’ll be keeping a very close eye on the individual support that your children need going forward, and will communicate with you regarding this as necessary.

Academically, our priorities as a school for this first term will be based upon core skills in reading, writing and maths. We must ensure that we are monitoring our children’s progress and attainment, and their needs in these areas, so that we can best fill any gaps following a sustained period away from school, but also to nurture their ability to be independent in their learning.

**How are we dealing with the remnants of Ofsted?**

We said that we’d be keeping you updated on our progress with regard to our Ofsted inspection in February. Those of you that have read our Ofsted report will know we had real strength in reading, writing and maths, and that the areas that were needed to develop were with our broader curriculum, specifically with how Art, DT, Music and R.E. are embedded into our curriculum to the same degree that History, Geography and Science are. Although under the circumstances it has been difficult to get staff together and move this on, we are very pleased with the plans going forward and have already made great inroads. It will be a fine balancing act to ensure that we do not lose sight of the importance of these subjects whilst supporting and challenging our children in the core areas of English and Maths. Religion and the arts are so important to children’s holistic wellbeing and we’ll make sure that we keep this firmly at the fore of our plans and let you know how things are developing. Another focus was on integrating our Nursery a little more into the life of Early Years and the rest of the school in general and huge work has already been done on this and is very much taking shape under Mrs Steele and Mrs Gilbert. Very exciting stuff!

**Your children’s new classes...**

By Monday, uploaded to your children’s class webpage will be some introductory information from their new class teachers, welcoming you to a new academic year and letting you know exactly what is going on this term, particularly regarding some of the topics they’ll be covering. As we did last year, we will be having our first parents evening in mid-November, although as yet we do not know the format that these will take.

Last year we held welcome afternoons in September for each class where parents could come and chat to the teacher and take a look at their child’s classroom and see what they’ll be learning about. For obvious reasons, this cannot happen, but we are looking at some alternatives so that you can get a feel for what things may be like. Watch this space...

We are fully aware that this is no ordinary start to a school year so if there are any anxieties or concerns that you have, we urge you to speak to us or your child’s class teacher.

**Communicating with you**

Along with this letter, is a copy of our **home/school agreement.** We’d normally send out a paper copy to be signed but we won’t be doing so this year. Nonetheless, it is still important in outlining what is expected from all of us in being part of our school community so we’d appreciate you taking the time to read over it with your children.

An integral part of our school ethos is togetherness and so welcoming parents, carers, grandparents and all family members into our school has been key to nurturing these essential relationships. We place great importance in welcome afternoons and evenings, parent workshops, partnerships and forums and so we are challenged this year to come up with new ways of creating togetherness and communicating with you all. It may be that you (and us!) need to brush up on your Zoom skills, but we’ll keep you posted here.

A particular welcome to all of our new children and families in Nursery and Reception. You’ll have had your visits by now and we’ll be having a think about how we can welcome you in a socially distant manner!

**Working Together**

Our Home/School agreement emphasises the need for us to work together to support your children. We will work tirelessly here to ensure that we support and challenge your children with their learning but we’ll need your help. Our homework policy states that (other than perhaps in Year 6 which may be a little more focused) homework will be focused on three things: reading, spelling and timestables.

*READING:* We will be letting you know our plans for reading books and journals very soon but we expect you to write in these journals to let us know how your children are doing with their reading at home. Further up the school, children may make entries themselves. Reading is going to be key in reigniting our children’s love of learning and we’ll need you to encourage them with this.

*SPELLING:* In order to support our children in recapping and re-embedding their use and application of spellings, we’ll be sending home spellings for many of our children. We’ll let you know how this will work but, again, we’ll need your encouragement.

*TIMES TABLES...ROCKSTARS:* A bit of homework for you here Year 3-6 parents and carers...get the ***Times Tables Rockstars*** app downloaded on your tablets and phones asap! The children’s logins are the same as last year but you must let us know if there are any problems. We’ll be communicating with you soon about how to get your children fully engaged with this – times tables are vital to maths knowledge and understanding and the more time our children spend in practicing these, the better they can use and apply their new skills throughout all areas of maths!

**Growing Together. Empowered To Be More.**

Our motto is more important than ever this year and we’ll be discussing the importance of our school values with our children, both in everyday school life and within our curriculum. We will be trying to continue with our links with Urmston Manor Retirement Home (although this shan’t involve visits) and will also continue to support our chosen charities. In light of our values of responsibility, respect and kindness, UPS sponsor an Amur Leopard with the WWF (Happy and Larry the Leopards – our whole school awards - symbolise this). We hope that contributing to the WWF will not only support this rare breed but indeed support all of the work that the World Wildlife Fund does for the environment and the natural world.

We’ll still be paying monthly contributions to our year group charities which link in with the learning that children will be doing in each class this year. Although the payments will come out of the school’s account, we are politely asking our children to contribute 5p a week, which can be put in a class jar for the teacher to collect at the end of the month. We do so not because we aren’t willing to contribute ourselves, but because we hope that our children will get a feeling of responsibility in being kind and looking after others in our world. The charities we’ll be supporting include, Guide Dogs, Unicef, The Red Cross, Water Aid, The Woodland Trust and Place2Be. We thank you for your support with this and you’ll find more information soon on class web pages! Furthermore, we follow these charities on Twitter so please follow us @urmstonprimary and we’ll retweet all of the useful info.

**Equality, equity and diversity**

We sent you a letter over the lockdown period in response to the Black Lives Matter movement, where we stand as a school, and the importance of raising awareness of equality, equity and diversity, both for our pupils and our wider school community. We have a new policy and scheme relating to this which we are putting to governors this term and which will include community forums, which will need to be remote. Again, we’ll be sure to keep you up to date with developments here and our policy and scheme will be on the website soon, along with numerous other policies that have needed to be reviewed due to current circumstances.

**Class names!**

We have also been having a think about class names this year. Teachers have looked at their curriculum and the values of our school and have named their class after a person whose words and deeds can inspire our children in their year group. Your children will let you know these soon.

As always, if you have any further questions, queries or concerns, please do not hesitate to come and talk to us and we’ll be happy to help.

Yours sincerely,

*Mr Parker and Mr Doherty*

Head and Deputy Head Teachers

***PS – Don’t forget school is closed to pupils tomorrow! We’ll see you on Thursday...***