



Important Information

Firstly, I would like to wish you all a Happy New Year and hope you had the best holiday period possible given the current circumstances. Since March 2020 we have all grown accustomed to an ever-changing daily routine as the nation has moved in and out of various Covid-19 restrictions. At all times we have tried to share key information relating to schools in a prompt, timely and professional manner. At times this has been challenging due to the late timing of the announcements made by the Government and occasionally, this has meant not being able to provide immediate answers to parental or pupil queries, because quite simply we haven't received the necessary detailed information. However, following the Prime Minister's announcement of a national lockdown on Monday evening, we found ourselves already preparing to move to remote learning on Tuesday, which meant that the transition was as smooth as it could have been and ensured we have been able to provide learning for all children whether they are in school or at home.

This current period of national lockdown feels somewhat different to those previously and I want to reassure all of our parents that it is very much 'business as usual' in school. All staff are working full time in their usual classes to deliver formal teaching to children of critical workers and our most vulnerable; whilst at the same time being available to support the learning of children who remain at home. Our approach to learning for this lockdown is also different. Teachers are fully planned for the Spring term and the work being provided for children is what the new national curriculum content that was planned and prepared to be taught, in school, in the Spring. Therefore, it is most important that children who are learning from home are fully engaged in the learning tasks set for them each day. Our approach focuses very much on a 'blended learning' model where it doesn't matter whether you are in school or at home, the learning content remains the same.

In a change to the previous lockdown, teachers are now providing work daily as opposed to weekly, so it is really clear for pupils and parents what needs to be completed each day. We aim to provide learning tasks that would take the equivalent time to that normally spent in the classroom which would be between 3-4 hours, depending on pupils' ages.

You will also be aware that we have moved away from using our school email and Twitter to access home learning, instead we are using a format called 'Teams'. Most families have managed to access this although some have had some teething problems. This is to be expected as staff, pupils and families come to terms with using new technology. We are hoping to supplement the 'Teams' format, in the coming weeks, with a learning platform called 'Seesaw' which offers much more opportunity for interaction with our children. We want to encourage and promote excellent communication throughout lockdown giving pupils the chance to complete work, send it to teachers and receive feedback really quickly - just like would happen in the classroom.

Added to this, in the weeks ahead we are going to be offering more interactive ways of working with children at home. Examples that we will be trialling include one to one 'check in calls' with children and staff via our School Cloud video conferencing system which you will have used for the Autumn term parents evening. We will also be offering some elements of live teaching, where appropriate, once we have agreements signed by all families which will cover code of conduct, acceptable user, GDPR and sharing of images, in order to ensure safeguarding is in place for pupils and staff. We will also be using pre recorded lessons which are quality assured, taught by 'real' teachers and are based on current national curriculum learning objectives which are appropriate for age and ability of the children for whom they are set. These will be sourced from the government's Oak Academy which has been set up at great expense, for this very purpose and is highly recommended for schools to use. We will also be using a number of other trusted and quality assured providers such as White Rose Maths. We are aware that access to technology can be a real barrier for children being able to take part in everything mentioned above, so if you do have issues with technology at home, please get in touch and we will do our very best to help with this. We are also trying to produce work which does not need printing out. However, we are able to provide physical packs if requested to support pupils at home.

We are currently awaiting our government allocation of government laptops (8) to be available for use. If you would like to be considered for the loan of one please contact school.

We will be providing food parcels for those who would normally qualify for Free School Meals. These will be available to collect on a Wednesday after 10am. If you do not require a food parcel please contact the school office.

Finally, thank you for your patience, support and understanding throughout this week. Stay safe and please be reassured that we are here to support you, our families and community throughout these challenging times.

Critical Worker Public Health Message

Can I remind all parents / carers who are currently using the Critical Worker facility that this is to be used as a last resort only if you cannot keep your child at home. Children are safer at home and should access remote learning from home wherever possible.

The Lockdown has been called to minimise the mixing of households and restrict movement within and across areas to reduce the infection rate and prevent the NHS from being overwhelmed.

Childcare and support bubbles can still be used and should be used wherever possible.

As of today, the rates of positive cases per 100,000 have risen to 788 in Hartlepool and remain the highest in the North East. We are all being urged by Public Health to help reduce this by reducing our contact with other households, including by attending school when an alternative is available. Whilst pupils may not contract the virus as easily or become as ill as adults do, it is proven that they are often asymptomatic and spread the virus to other family members, especially those who are vulnerable or older.

If we reach full capacity in all Critical Worker places, unfortunately, we be forced to triage our places again and re allocate to those of the highest priority such as NHS, Social Care, Education and Emergency Services.

Please help us keep our Critical Worker places available for those most in need by keeping your child at home wherever possible.

WhatsApp

We are aware that many of our parents belong to 'WhatsApp Groups' which are a great way to get to know and communicate with other parents. Unfortunately, we have already had a couple of instances where parents are 'confused' as mixed messages are being shared on the groups. If you have any concerns or are unsure of any policy or routine please do not hesitate to contact school via phone call, or email. We will respond as soon as possible.

Home Learning

If your child is learning from home at the moment please ensure:

- they log in to Teams each morning to take part in their learning;
- they send completed work back to teachers on Teams when completed;
- you let us know if you have problems with the work via the Teams email, School email or contacting the office;

You may find that teachers put work for the next day onto Teams the day before. Please avoid letting children complete the following day's work in advance.

Teachers and support staff will be available to comment and reply to children on Teams between the working hours of 9am and 4pm, Monday to Friday, but please be reminded teachers are also teaching in school, so a reply to your child may not arrive instantly.

Finally, please ensure your child receives regular rest breaks throughout the day and aim to put in place a clear structure and routine that would align to a normal school day. Also, make sure children have family time at the weekend away from online learning and take part in some form of daily exercise.