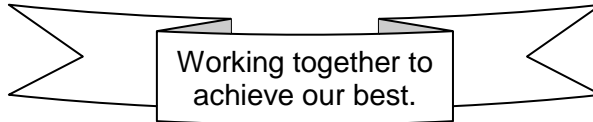




Newsletter

Issue No.1
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www.firslower.co.uk



Chair of Governors: Gareth Jones

Governors: Adam Campbell, Fran Sherry, Jon Wilson, Louise Haigh, Annette Anderson, John Ashley, Joanna Milne and Tom Stean

Dear parents and carers,

Strange Times

As Covid 19 impacts on the school and all its children, staff and parents / carers again, I wanted to say how struck I have been by everyone's resilience and the wonderful spirit of teamwork and positivity that has marked everyone's response.

The key worker children have come into school, coping with how different it all is, working in a different room, staff wearing masks, many children not being there etc. and they have taken that in their stride and got on with their learning each day.

I wanted to say that we all very much miss the presence of the children who are not with us at the moment. I sent a video greeting out which I hope your child has seen and I know that they will have had videos and/or Google Meet sessions with their teachers and I hope these have all helped to show how much the children are in our minds.

I want to say a huge thank you to all our staff, who have been so flexible and determined, to welcome the key worker children into school successfully, whilst also delivering high quality remote learning to those at home.

Thank you also to all our parents and carers for your support of the school, your patience with the last minute changes that occurred and the help you are giving children with their learning at home.

All in all, everyone working together continues to make The Firs the fantastic community that it is. Thank you to you all.

Enhanced Safety Arrangements

The enhanced measures we have implemented have been adopted in light of the raised risk presented by Covid 19 as a result of the spread of the new virus variant and the rising infection rates, both nationally and in Ampthill itself.

The measures go further than those that were in place last term and are in line with approaches now being taken in other FARM schools. They are designed with the expectation that with the gradual and hopefully expanding role of the vaccination programme, they will not be needed for too long. These measures will be reviewed regularly but will only be relaxed when it is safe to do so.

Additional in school measures include:

- Even more hand sanitiser stations have been set up round the school e.g. by the photocopier to minimise the spread of infection.
- Strict limits on the use of the staff room to ensure 2m separation at all times.
- Strict limits on face to face informal contact between staff - very much limited to staff in the same 'bubble' and not within 2m.
- All staff meetings of any kind to be virtual.
- All meetings with parents/carers, to be by telephone or virtually via Zoom or Google Meet.
- Only office staff are permitted to enter the school office.

- Face masks must be worn by staff in all communal / public areas indoors e.g. walking through corridors between rooms, the hall, the staff room (except when eating).etc.

In addition we are asking support from parents / carers:

- Parents/carers will not be allowed in the building, except in very exceptional circumstances.
- We are asking that parents/carers refrain from **any** face to face communication on pick up/drop off -**all communications must be by phoning the school office** on 01525 402735 **or via email** either to the office on office@firslower.org or to the class teacher.
- All parents/carers **must** wear a mask when picking up or dropping off children.
- We are asking parents/carers to go straight home after pick up / drop off, to maximise social distancing as much as possible.

Key Workers

Last time we had a partial school closure, there was time to write to parents and set out the criteria for registering a place for a child on the basis of being a key worker. There was also time to set out how we were managing the process etc.

This time of course, with the announcement coming so suddenly, there was much less time and as we have received some questions about the process, I thought it might be useful, to set out some information here for everyone.

The first thing to say is that the Government has widened the list to include more job titles in the Key Worker (KW) category. You may have noticed in the news that all schools are, like us, experiencing greater numbers of children coming into school as a result.

As part of our heightened safety processes (see above) we are ensuring that, despite the raised demand for KW places, we are not allowing any KW group to exceed 15 pupils at any given time. This does mean that **when a group is 'full' on a given day, we will not be able to accept any further children, even if they technically qualify.**

We had to get the system up and running very quickly but we are now in the process of contacting all the parents/carers for the details concerning their KW status (such as a letter from their employer). We will also be clarifying which days they work etc. as we only provide a KW place when there is no one at home to care for a child. This may mean that going forward, for some children, there may be a variation in the days they attend school each week.

I hope this information illustrates to everyone that there is a robust, fair and careful process that is being applied, based on Government guidance, to ensure that KW places are allocated in a consistent manner.

Reading Books

Whilst reading is always a huge priority for the school, we have looked at the issue of sending reading books home carefully and feel that we cannot continue with this provision for children doing remote learning at the moment as we feel it would be unsafe to ask additional adults to come on site at this moment and would not be supportive of the national lockdown restrictions.

We will look at the possibility of providing reading books to Key worker children in school once the survey of parents (described above) is completed and a final allocation of places / days is made.

eBooks

Just like in the first partial school closure, eBooks are available on Oxford Owl. These can be accessed by clicking on the following link:-

[Oxford Owl eBooks](#)

You will need to register or log in to Oxford Owl to access the books. Please note that if you are a new user, you will not be able to access the eBooks until you have clicked the 'confirm' button in your account activation email.

If your child is following the Read, Write, Inc scheme, please scroll down and click on **Series**, then select 'Read, Write, Inc' from the drop down menu. Then choose books from the same colour band which your child is on. Please note that it is beneficial for your child to read '**past**' books to help them develop fluency, expression and comprehension. If your child is on Grey, Gold, Black or Free Reader level, they are deemed to be 'fluent' readers and can read books from any series.

Remote Learning

We have shared the Remote Learning guide for parents ('*Remote Education Delivery at The Firs Lower School*') already. If you have not yet seen this then just click on the link below and it will take you to the Google Classroom page on our website where you can download it:

[Remote Learning & Google Classroom](#)

We have received some very positive feedback regarding Google Classroom and the improvement in home learning provision this time, compared with the last partial closure, which is very pleasing. Thank you also to the parents who have got in touch with us regarding any issues being experienced either with GC or in accessing remote learning e.g. due to a lack of appropriate IT equipment. If you have any problems accessing GC then please contact the school office or your child's class teacher and we will be very happy to help. (The link above may also be helpful as there is some guidance on the use of GC available on our website.)

We are looking at how we can support parents/carers who have limited or no access to appropriate IT resources and we will be in contact with those parents very soon.

Meals provision in school

The school will continue to work with Caterlink and our dedicated Kitchen Manager Candice Charles and her hard working team, to provide hot lunches. As before, YR KW children will eat school meals or packed lunches from home in the hall and other KW children will eat in their classrooms. The new menu for spring 21 is attached to this newsletter.

Provision for children entitled to free school meals (not universal free school meals)

In the previous partial closure, we provided vouchers for parents/carers who are entitled to free school meals. It is likely that we will be posting vouchers to you and having just received guidance we will get back to eligible parents next week.

Increasing data allowances on mobile devices to support disadvantaged children

This DfE scheme temporarily increases data allowances for mobile phone users on certain networks. This is so that children and young people can access remote education if their face-to-face education is disrupted.

Who can get help?

Schools, trusts and local authorities can request mobile data increases for children and young people who:

- do not have fixed broadband at home
- cannot afford additional data for their devices
- are experiencing disruption to their face-to-face education

Children with access to a mobile phone on one of the following networks might be able to benefit:

- Three
- Smarty
- Virgin Mobile
- EE
- Tesco Mobile
- Sky Mobile

Other providers may join the scheme at a later stage.

When help is available

Schools, trusts and local authorities can request mobile data increases when schools report a closure or have pupils self-isolating. We can also make requests for children who cannot attend school face-to-face because:

- they're clinically extremely vulnerable
- restrictions prevent them from going to school

How to request a mobile data increase?

For each request, the DfE will need to know:

- the name of the account holder
- the number of the mobile device
- the mobile network of that device (for example Three)

There's an [online guide to help gather mobile information](#).

Schools, trusts and local authorities need to [submit mobile information through our online service](#). Each provider will vary in how quickly they process requests.

Once a network provider has processed a data increase, they'll send a text message to the account holder. It's also possible to check the status of requests through the online service.

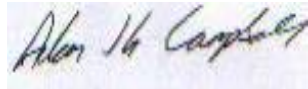
If you think this scheme might support your child getting access to remote learning, please contact the school office on office@firslower.org or phone us on 01525 402735.

Kids' Club

If any parents of key worker children need to use Kids' Club, please contact Kids' Club by email on kids.club@firslower.org to book your place.

I hope in these difficult times that everyone remains well and we hope that you all have a very enjoyable weekend. Take care everyone.

Yours sincerely,



Adam J G Campbell