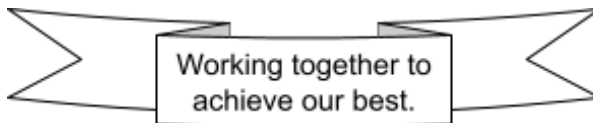




Newsletter

Issue No.4
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www.firslower.co.uk



Chair of Governors: Gareth Jones

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

Dear parents /carers,

Fun in the Snow

On Tuesday, the children we had in school enjoyed some fun in the snow and made the most of it before it all disappeared. We managed to take some photographs of the children and thought you would like to see them!





Celia Bennett's Retirement

Today we had a special virtual retirement celebration for Celia Bennett, when all the staff and children in school took part. Children in Saplings and in each year group in school contributed by thinking about one of the areas she has been responsible for in her time with us at The Firs.

Amongst other things, we thanked Celia for her tireless work, ensuring The Firs financial affairs are managed efficiently and prudently to maximise the provision we can make for children. We also reflected on her valuable work, leading the recent, sometimes challenging building projects that have led to the new Y3 classrooms and of course The Saplings.

At the end of the assembly she was presented with some flowers, a card and a gift, to celebrate her many years of service to the school and to wish her a very happy and well earned retirement.

Exciting Announcement regarding Read, Write, Inc.

We are very pleased to announce that, as of mid February, 109 RWI eBooks will be added to the Oxford Owl website. This includes all the core books from Ditty to Grey level. It also includes Sound Blending books which precede Ditty books.



The children will be given their own log in, so that teachers can assign certain books to children. This is in line with Ofsted's recommendations that books should be closely matched to a child's reading ability. Once books have been assigned to a child, they will be able to read 'past' books, which is so important to help develop fluency and understanding.

Reading is so important to us as a school and this will be such a fantastic resource to have, enabling children to continue reading and keeping 'Covid safe' at the same time.

Look out for more details about this in the next couple of weeks!

Mrs Mercer - RWI Leader

Remote Learning Update

These are strange times for all of us but it isn't stopping our children at The Firs learning and we are very very proud of all of them! We have just under a third of our children coming into school and they are doing a fantastic job and working as hard as ever.

We wanted to say a huge well done to all the children at The Firs, who are **not** in school at the moment and who have been accessing the remote learning programme via Google Classroom.

We have managed to fund the purchase of additional chrome books, to compliment those we have received from the DfE and this has enabled us to send them home, to support remote learning. We are hoping that even more devices, from a local charity being run by the High Sheriff of Bedfordshire, will make a further valuable contribution to this effort very soon.

Teachers have been so impressed with the fantastic responses they have received back from children at home and have been thrilled to see their happy smiling faces in live 'Community Time' sessions.

It has been great to get so much positive feedback from parents too, about Google Classroom and the learning that has been designed for children to access remotely...

'The resources on google classroom are excellent and really helpful to structure the day.'

'Homeschooling 2.0 was not top of my list of things to do this year but the lessons were great and no-one this end cried, so a win all round!'

'Thanks to all the Firs staff for their stirring efforts during this time!'

Thank you to all our hard working staff, in school and supporting learning remotely, they have done a fabulous job!

Any provision at a distance, with young children, in circumstances like this, requires some adult help and we really want to thank all of our brilliant parents / carers for all the fantastic support they have given to help with remote learning. We know it must be difficult at times and we are very, very grateful for their efforts!

So, it has been a great team effort and just serves to demonstrate what a fantastic community we have at The Firs.

Thank you everybody!

Remote Learning Survey

Despite the fact that we have had so many positive emails from parents recently (as mentioned above) we wanted to press ahead with the survey that we had been planning to do, as this is a very important issue and we want to get some feedback regarding a number of aspects of our remote learning provision.

With this in mind, we would be very grateful if you could complete the Google Form below by the end of next week (Friday 5th February), thank you.

[Remote Learning Survey](#)

Interim Reports

In January we always send out an interim report, which reflects on children's progress over the autumn term and gives an indication of what the current expectations are for their achievement at the end of the academic year.

Although the normal target setting and monitoring process is not happening in these difficult times, we thought these reports would be useful in giving you a snapshot of where children were at the end of last term and whether they were, despite the interruptions to learning at that point, still working at the expected standard (or above) for that point in the year.

As you would expect, we had already spent some time in the autumn, identifying gaps in learning from the previous school closure and we were already in the process of addressing these gaps, when this second partial closure occurred. Once children return however, we will review the situation again and continue with an amended additional support programme once more.

In the meantime, we hope that these reports, which will be sent by teachers to you next week, will provide you with some useful information, including how to assist with your child's learning, to support any areas in

which they need more help. As the staff are working very hard at the moment managing all the very important communications on Google Classroom, they have very little spare capacity and so we would ask parents to only contact the teacher regarding the report if this is absolutely necessary.

Staff Covid 19 Testing

I am pleased to be able to tell you that having received our test kits this week, we have been able to commence twice weekly Covid 19 testing of all staff working in school.

As you can imagine, this has given staff further peace of mind and has added another safeguard to all the other measures we have in place in school to keep everyone safe on site.

Half Term

We can confirm that the school will be closed over half term, including for key worker / vulnerable children following this announcement from the DfE:

'Schools will close as usual over February half-term and are not expected to remain open to vulnerable children and the children of critical workers during that week.'

Plans for reopening The Firs

Following recent announcements by the Government we can share what we know with all of you regarding when we may be reopening in some form:

- **Schools in England will not be able to open after the half-term break next month but could begin to return from 8 March, the prime minister has said.**
- Boris Johnson said a final decision would depend on meeting vaccination targets and schools would get two weeks' notice.
- He acknowledged the delay would be "frustrating" for pupils, teachers and parents.
- There was not enough data yet to decide when to end the lockdown.
- Mr Johnson told the House of Commons he hoped other lockdown restrictions could begin to be gradually eased at some point after schools reopen, but pupils returning to class would be the "first sign of normality".
- **In the week of 22 February, the government would have more information on whether vaccines block transmission and how the vaccine will reduce hospitalisations and deaths, he said, allowing them to plan for the "gradual and phased" reopening.**
- That would also depend on continuing to hit vaccination targets, the capacity of the NHS and on deaths falling at the expected pace, he said.
- **But Mr Johnson said schools also needed a fortnight's notice to reopen after the government makes its decision.**

Keep smiling

We are doing everything we can to reach out to our children at home in an effort to minimise the negative impact we know lockdown can have on children's general mental health and well being. I want to say thank you to YR staff for example, who started live Pine 'Community Time' sessions this week. We feel these sessions are an important part of that effort, to help children feel emotionally connected to their class, their teacher and their friends.



We will keep reviewing what we are doing and looking for ways to help all our children at home to keep smiling through this difficult time. Take care everyone!

Yours sincerely,

Adam J G Campbell