

**Diocese of Brentwood**  
**St Bede's Catholic Primary School and Nursery**  
Canon Avenue, Chadwell Heath, Romford, Essex RM6 5RR

**Head teacher**

Mr Gary Nott B.Ed (Hons)



**Tel:** 020 8590 1376

**Email:** admin.stbedes@redbridge.gov.uk

**17<sup>th</sup> September 2021**

**Dear Parent/ Carer**

I hope you have had a good week. Last week, I wrote to you at the start, rather than the end of the week. From today, I am returning to writing routinely to you on a Friday.

As a school staff, we have tasks that are termed 'operational', which simply means day-to-day things – at other times, we work on 'strategic' matters – these involve longer term projects that typically focus upon the development of new ways of working. Some of you may use the same terms in the workplace. Ideally, I aim to spend a quarter of my week thinking strategically. However, due to the continuing impact of the pandemic, since our return to school Mrs Roberts and I have spent nearly all our time on day-to-day matters. I have made a promise to myself that Monday will be a fresh start. We must get back to some strategic thinking or else the school will not move forward – and we most definitely don't want that to happen! Now the emphasis is on living with COVID, rather than controlling it, we must be dynamic, not static!

### **COVID Risk Assessment**

I have updated our assessment during the week – we are now on our 12<sup>th</sup> version since March 2020. It will be available to read on our website from Monday.

It is true to say that we have had more pupils test positive during these first few weeks of September than we had in the same period last year. But the numbers remain very low.

I did say I would publish some commonly asked questions of us by parents, with answers. I know it is complicated – in some ways more complicated than autumn term last year. Based on comments made since our return to school, I thought the following might be useful:

#### **If my child has symptoms, what should I do?**

The three core symptoms remain the same: a temperature, no thermometer needed, the chest or forehead are hot to the touch; a new persistent cough; a sudden loss of smell or taste. If your child has one or more of these symptoms, you should arrange for them to have a PCR test. Your child should not attend school whilst you wait for the results, even if they feel better.

#### **I have been informed by Test and Trace that my child is a close contact of someone who has tested positive. What should I do?**

You should arrange for your child to have a PCR test, but whilst they wait for the result they should come to school.

*Personally, I was a little surprised by this one, but that is what we have been told.*

**When would my child be set work remotely?**

This would only happen if your child has tested positive. Work would be placed on Fronter.

**What happens if there is an outbreak in school?**

Were there to be a significant cluster of cases, I would liaise with the authorities and together we would decide if it was prudent to reintroduce some of the measures that were in place last year.

**Has the school decided what an outbreak would look like?**

Yes, it would be five more staff or children testing positive from within a class, or 6 staff or children from across a year group.

**How does the school monitor this situation?**

Mrs Morris reports the number of positive cases amongst the school community, children and adults, by class and year group, each morning to me.

**Will my child be vaccinated?**

There are no plans to offer primary school children the vaccine.

**Have all staff in school been vaccinated?**

I have not been made aware by any of my team that they have not been vaccinated.

*I hope this helps. If you have any additional questions, please email me.*

**GoRead – The Digital Reading Record**

I was so excited when Miss Green suggested we introduce this app. I am grateful to the handful of parents who have asked me a question about the new approach. I am forwarding these to Miss Green, who knows the detail better than I.

However, the app appears not to have been well received by some of our parents. If your child attends our school, it is an expectation that a parent reads with their child at least five times a week – every single day is better! If you do this, I can promise you that in doing so, you will put your child ahead in their reading by at least four months. Listening to your child read (or, reading to them) – is the most important thing a parent can do to support their education.

When I was in Y1, I was struggling with my reading. I can still picture my dad visiting my classroom one afternoon and sitting talking to my teacher at her desk. My Dad spent the next six years, reading with me every single night of the week.

When we are looking at the app in school, we can see that the number of parents who are supporting their children with reading at home has fallen by around 30% - that's 120 children not reading at least five times a week with an adult. I don't know why numbers have plummeted, but I am so concerned that I am considering returning to the old fashioned printed reading logs. Many of you would be disappointed to see us do this, I know. The app was such an appealing, modern way forward.

If you are struggling with the technology and don't have a teenage son or daughter, like I do, to show you what to do, you might like to see what is on offer at <https://go-read.co.uk/parents>

Our office team will also be very happy to help you if you are experiencing technical difficulties.

Bug Club continues.

## 11+ Examinations

It is the time of year when some of our Y6 pupils are sitting these exams. I am happy to support children in this way, but there appears to be some anticipated anxiety around children being turned from examination halls because their documentation is not in order. If we sign something in a particular way, we will always be confident that how we have done things will be acceptable to the schools in question. All such examinations should be held at the weekend. It is simply not fair to Y6 pupils or the adults who support them in our school to have children missing a day's schools in order to suit a secondary school exam. It is because I know that parents are put in a difficult position by Saturday examinations that against my better judgement I will authorise absence for a Y6 child on one occasion. It would be appreciated too if Y6 parents would not take their children to visit prospective secondary schools when the children should be in lessons at our school. After eighteen months of disruption and six weeks of school holiday, children need to be in class.

Whilst I understand that parents want to do right by their child, there are many 'outstanding' secondary schools, who unlike grammar schools, do not admit by ability. I did not go to a grammar school; instead, I walked to my local comprehensive. I grew up in Southampton, where there were no grammar schools. There are 3,456 maintained, not independent, secondary schools in England – of these, only 163 are grammar schools. I do not mean to suggest that going to a grammar school is not a great opportunity; however, I do believe that there are lots of other fantastic schools out there.

## After School Childcare Arrangements

If you are a working parent who relies on private afterschool childcare, it is very important that you communicate effectively with those people who provide it. If you change arrangements, everyone needs to know what is happening. I am full of admiration for those people working afterschool with children who have had a busy day with us. People who run afterschool provision, or who are employed to supervise and entertain children in this way, are paid a modest wage and some children, when hungry and tired, can understandably be a little fractious.

## OFSTED 2021/22

The school is likely to be inspected by OFSTED, Her Majesty's Inspectorate, in the near future. In September 2019, OFSTED stopped looking at somethings that previously featured in all inspections and instead added some new ones – lots of new ones! At the time, Mrs Roberts and I estimated it would take us two, very solid, years of **strategic developments** to be ready for the new kind of inspection. As I have previously shared with you, we have not had those two years. Unexpectedly, we were hit by the biggest crisis since the Second World War. An inspection will now be divided into five main sections: **Quality of Education (what is taught and how well children of all abilities learn and remember it); Behaviour and Attitudes; Personal Development; Leadership and Management; and Early Years**, sometimes referred to as EYFS – that is to say Reception and Nursery. Finally, an overall judgement is given for effectiveness, based on the inspection findings in the five areas.

Our judgement is that both Behaviour and Attitudes and Personal Development remain outstanding in our school. We do need to do more work on what we teach and what children learn and (very importantly!) **remember**. The accepted view now seems to be that if a child can't remember what they learnt, they were not taught it! We will get there thanks to our wonderful children, fantastic staff and our hard working parents. But, it is going to need everyone to be at their best.

## **Bicycle and Scooter Racks**

Those children who have secured a place in the rack will have now been told. We will give children who were disappointed this time round, an opportunity next term. Y6 children who have submitted a Redbridge 'Bikeability Certificate', may ride to school unaccompanied, if they have their parents' permission. I know some parents will be nervous about a ten year old riding unaccompanied. The Bikeability training is well done, but I must admit I speak as a man whose father did not allow his son to cycle on the road until he was twenty-three!

## **Wednesday Evenings 4.00-4.30pm, Meet the Teachers via Google Classrooms**

Each pair of year group teachers waited in excitement to talk to parents on Wednesday after school, but either the idea did not appeal to as many parents as we thought it might, or people quite simply forgot about the opportunity. I say this because fewer than 5 parents across the school logged on. Next week, I will ask the teaching staff to be available between 4.00 and 4.15pm. In this way, if parents do not need to speak with them, they can move on with planning and marking that is needed for the next day.

Should you wish to speak with me via Teams at any point, I would be delighted to talk to you.

## **Class Assemblies**

This year, you are again most welcome to join us in the school hall when your child's class presents their assembly. Staff are very much looking forward to seeing you again. Please check your child's class blog for dates.

## **This Week's Year 2 SATS Maths Workshop**

I am sorry that some parents of children in Y2 had technical difficulties logging into this important presentation. I am very much hoping that we will be able to repeat the session.

## **Y2 and Y6 September Assessments**

The children have now had an opportunity to answer the questions featured in previous SATs papers for reading and mathematics. Following the summer break, there is – always a great deal of progress to be made, this coming term. Many children fall back over the summer by as much as a term's work – they simply don't remember much of what they had learnt. After school tutoring will begin once again when we are into October. My sincere thanks to my staff for providing such tuition.

## **Reception Year**

When the new Reception are in Y2, they will not be taking SATs. This a change long planned by the Government. Instead their knowledge and skills are going to be assessed now, over the course of the next six weeks. When they are in Y6, they will take SATS and the school will be judged on the strides they have made since their Reception assessments. It will be interesting to see how it works out.

## **Final Thought**

Last Friday, I announced to the children in the Friday afternoon video call we share, that it was my birthday this week. I joked I was a little tired of being 27 and was looking forward to being 28! Bless them, some were kind enough to believe me! Others worked out you could add 30 years to the 27 in order to arrive at the truth of the situation. It did make me laugh. However I was reminded of Emily Brown, who then aged 8 and being taught by me in my first year of teaching, when invited to guess my age, said 58! She was speaking in 1986! I laughed less then...

**With every good wish for a great weekend**

Gary