

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

Head teacher

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Dear Parent/ Carer

I hope you are well and that your week has been good.

As we end this first half-term of our new school year, I have a mixed bag of things we would like to share with you.

Science at St Bede's

In the last seven weeks, we have had a particular focus upon judging the quality of the school's provision in science. Overall, we have been pleased with what we have seen, been told and read. There are areas for development, which will be pursued both this school year and next. I was hopeless at science when at school. My brain just was not wired that way I guess, or I was badly taught. My strengths – and therefore the things I liked best – were languages (English, French and Spanish), and the Humanities (History, Geography and Religious Education). Qualifications in **S**cience – and **T**echnology, **E**ngineering and **M**athematics – are now very much sought after both in further education and the workplace – the four subjects are often referred to by the acronym STEM. I believe that jobs that draw upon these skills are paid on average 20% higher salaries. It is boys who take on the vast majority of these jobs although we know that girls do better than boys at these subjects at the end of primary schools. **S**cientists, **T**echnicians, **E**ngineers and **M**athematicians are perceived – rightly or wrongly – to be male, and when I was growing up, we tended to picture them as dressed in white, wearing a laboratory coat!

Our children demonstrate that attitudes are changing. When asked this term, they said:

- someone who discovers things that people want to know (like how dinosaurs died);
- people who talk about elements and what they can do with them;
- test out things and make sure they are safe;
- mix chemicals together;
- someone who talks about things that have been discovered.

STEM teachings aims to foster critical thinking, problem solving, creative and collaborative skills. It establishes connections between the school, work place, community and the global economy. Archie, my eldest, was expected when selecting his GCSE options to take all three sciences – physics, biology and chemistry – so clearly there is much emphasis in Key Stage 4 (14-16) education on these areas of the curriculum. In light of this, I think it would be helpful to work towards making the school's science curriculum better. Our children clearly enjoy it and the subject is becoming increasingly relevant in the modern world of work.

Head teacher's Post Bag (AKA Email Box)

I have received a number of emails from parents this week asking me to change some of the things that we do. We have reflected on these and I can offer the following:

- (1) Some parents and children would prefer to wear plimsolls for indoor PE, as opposed to taking part in bare feet. Although I read the latter is kinder to legs when landing, having jumped from apparatus, I do not want parents or children worrying about being asked to do something that they perceive to be unhygienic. We will therefore allow children to wear plimsolls for indoor PE, if they or their parent so wishes. WE would ask that plimsolls stay in school, so there is one less thing for children – and parents – to remember. Children will continue to wear trainers for PE in the playground.
- (2) Some parents said that although they may not qualify for Free School Meals, they would struggle to find £10 a month for their child to attend a sporting school club. In light of this, I have looked again at the arrangements and am happy to say that no parent, should their child secure a place at a club, will be asked to pay.
- (3) A parent said that they would find it helpful if Miss A Play letters could be emailed to parents as soon as the sanction is decided – currently, notifications of Miss A Play come to parents at 6.00pm of an evening. The parent said that they would like to know earlier, so they could express their disappointment to their child without delay. I understand where this request is coming from, so again I am happy to change to this arrangement. However, I would be grateful if you do not attempt to discuss the matter with your child's teacher at pick-up. It is not appropriate for other parents to hear what might be being discussed between teacher and parent. In addition, at pick up time, school staff need to be focussed upon seeing that the children in their care have gone to an adult who is permitted to collect.
- (4) Based on another email I received, I thought it helpful to point out that children or staff who are displaying symptoms of COVID are asked to take a PCR test. As Head teacher, I cannot accept what a lateral flow is saying. I know this will be frustrating because we are told that lateral flow tests are now 99% reliable – they were 60% reliable when first launched. This is not something that the school has decided upon, rather it is the strong recommendation of Public Health England, who advise the NHS. Lateral flow test are intended to be used by people – adults and children – who do not have symptoms. I know that lots of people take them when they have symptoms, but that is not what they are intended for.
- (5) A parent asked me to clarify what the school does if a child says that poor behaviour was accidental. We do not sanction a child unless they say that they knew what they were doing or saying. We realise accidents happen. We also realise that a small number of our children may be tempted – on occasion – to say something was an accident when it was not. If we were to think this was the case, Mrs Roberts or I would ask the child to talk us through the incident. But again, we would not sanction a child if we were being told it was an accident. I will make this clear in the school's Behaviour and Discipline Policy.

My thanks to the parents who raised these queries and suggestions with us over the past week. We can only keep moving forward if we are told how people think we could usefully change for the better.

Books in School

The PA have kindly donated £7000 to the school. This is being divided amongst each class, so that reading corners can be restocked. Although all of our children read from our reading scheme books, which teach them the mechanics of reading in a sequential way, we also want the children to have a choice of what might be termed 'real books' so they are exposed to the excitement, adventure, mystery, suspense, laughter, tears, horror, knowledge that comes with reading the kind of publications they would find in their local book shop or library. Once a child can read, they will naturally want to pick these real books up. Having been given £7000, we can now spend £400 on the fifteen book corners that we have in school. Three cheers for the PA!

We will look to purchase titles that feature black characters. This is particularly important for our school as 2 out of 3 children in our school are black. Children, like all of us adults, benefit from seeing our culture and ethnicity reflected in what they encounter – either when watching or reading. However, the number of stories published each year in the UK with black lead characters is very small. In the last year for which there is data, 2018/9, only 4% of newly published stories featured black characters. The current percentage of the population that is black is around 3%, so I guess that these figures chime, but it is disappointing for our school community.

Winter Uniform

Children should return to school in their winter uniform so as to be comfortable as the weather becomes colder. Thank you.

Altar Servers

St. Bede's Parish Church will be looking to recruit new altar servers in the coming weeks. Children from Y4 onwards will be eligible. Please see the parish website for more details.

If you need to raise a concern or question over half-term with me, please email me – gary.nott@redbridge.gov.uk.

This is the last time I will write to you on a Friday in letter form. After half-term, our Lantern newsletter will return. It will be bigger and brighter. I am looking forward to it.

Have a lovely time with your children

God Bless

Gary

Dates for your Diary

1st November School reopens after half-term break
4th November 6.00pm PA AGM
5th November 10.00am Reception Parents Meeting
8th November 2.45pm 4A Class Assembly
9th November Flu Vaccination Follow Up Session

