



Mill Water School

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Friday 27th March 2020

Dear Parents and Carers

I hope you are all well and have in some way been able to enjoy the sun's rays, either directly in your gardens or through a window, which can still feel pleasant. School has been much quieter than usual and I have missed the regular hustle and bustle. The tiny number of staff and pupils on site have lived like Little House on the Prairie: eating together, walking in the grounds and basking in the sunshine.

Thank you to everyone who has emailed me about what's going on at home. It has been an absolute joy to see photos and video clips on Evidence for Learning or emailed directly to me. Without adding any further pressure, please keep them coming as I have smiled every time I have seen the faces we all miss so much.

In regards to "home learning", you will have seen the webpage that André has created. Teachers, key therapy leads and support staff have been beaver away to research, try out and upload sites and resources for you all to use. Not everything will be suitable for your child, but please remember the wide range of pupil needs we are catering for. We have decided that we will update the website on a regular basis but not daily, to ensure families do not feel overwhelmed or that resources get missed because of the volume added at one time. We would value reviews and any ideas you come across that work for you - please share with us too.

Most importantly, remember you are only required to do what feels right for you and your family. We have heard from some parents/carers that sometimes there is a bit too much work and sometimes too little. Please let us know and teachers can make the necessary changes for individual families.

I have stolen words from a head teacher who was so concerned about the pressure his parents felt to "keep up", he emailed them the following:

"This is not home schooling. This is an unprecedented emergency situation impacting on the whole world. Let's keep perspective. Home schooling is a choice, which you considered, which you planned for and you are your child's school teacher in whatever form you choose. This is, at best, distance learning. Use them... (learning packs...) if they suit you, don't if they don't suit. If you're getting stressed, stop opening the emails. No one will know! You are doing enough. You are loving your kids and supporting them through a difficult time."

Over the last week or so, I have been involved in daily video conferencing with Devon County Council leads for Education, Health and Social Care. These daily meetings will continue into next week and beyond to enable head teachers to have the most up to date information and guidance in regards to school openings. This means that although technically it is the end of term for Mill Water, I will be in

school daily with key staff, keeping you informed of all latest DFE, Public Health England and Local Authority guidance. There are updates coming in every day and again I have to say the staff have been incredible at responding to rapid changes in working protocols.

One thing that hasn't changed, however, is the very clear advice to stay at home and save lives. Social distancing guidance is clear, guidance on being at home is clear and the open letter from Minister Ford (Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families) made it even clearer again by writing:

*For those on SEN support, schools, colleges and local authorities have discretion to use the same risk judgement to decide whether home or school is the **safest setting** for these children. It is, however, important that as many children as possible remain at home during this time in order to help reduce transmission rates.*

Schools may be open for frontline keyworkers, but the reality is that this encompasses a very small number of our pupils. A local secondary of 1500 pupils has 7 pupils in on a rota basis, to give you an example of how minimal staff exposure to pupils should be.

I am working closely with DCC leads and health professionals to get explicit guidance on how special schools can operate safely and mitigate the risk of spreading the virus around immediate school communities and beyond, due to the nature of special school pupils. There will be a need for personal protective equipment and for education staff working practice protocols to be in place before I am prepared to risk anyone's health and open the school to a child whose parents aren't frontline workers.

Over the Easter holidays I am coordinating the deep cleaning of the school building which is absolutely key to the safe opening of Mill Water in April. This will depend on the availability of a large team of staff and you will, of course, understand that every school across the county is requesting the same actions from a depleted work force. I will keep you informed.

I don't know what Mill Water's provision will look like after Easter as the situation changes daily and as heads we have been told to expect a worsening of the situation before we see improvements. I certainly want to be open as soon as it is safe to do so, however we can only open for those pupils whose levels of risk we feel can be managed safely whilst this pandemic continues to pose a health risk. I will of course keep you updated as much as I can so you can share the information with your children.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Pickering
Head Teacher

I have included some resources/ideas below which I hope you will find useful.

Toolkit for families in isolation

We found this resource which you may find useful at <https://familyresource.eci.org.uk/toolkit-for-families-in-isolation/> from Devon Family Resource who work with families as part of Exeter Community Initiatives Service.

Keeping phones clean

It is possible that students may be spending more time than usual on their phone and so in order to stop cross infection, below is guidance on cleaning mobile phones with a small amount of soap and water with microfibre <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/technology-51863924/coronavirus-how-to-clean-your-smartphone-safely>

DiAS have had quite a few questions from parents and carers about the changes taking place at school and in wider SEND services during coronavirus. We have published two new pages on our website to help and support you:

- Questions and Answers about coronavirus, school, education and SEND <http://soc.devon.cc/9ADuf>
- Useful resources, including information for children and young people, resources to help with anxiety, home learning resources and support for parents. <http://soc.devon.cc/KEdYC>

Devon's Local Offer also has information about Devon services and support which is updated regularly. You can subscribe for updates on the website. <https://www.devon.gov.uk/educationandfamilies/special-educational-needs-and-disability-send-local-offer>

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