



Pas devant les enfants

Dear Parents and Carers,

We need to talk – and not in front of the children! If we are going to support our children and each other over the next few weeks we need to speak frankly and agree on a common approach.

You may have read in the press that the teaching profession are being cast as ‘scaremongers’ – however I would like to share with you how I am applying my ‘common sense’ as I was exhorted to do by our Prime Minister.

My common sense tells me that if children overhear adults arguing over whether going to school is ‘safe’ or not – there is a high probability that they will start to associate school with a sense of danger. This for me is heart-breaking because one of the real joys of my life is seeing your children eagerly skipping into school. I would prefer us to refer to things as being ‘sensible’. Children are well versed in understanding the difference between ‘sensible’ and ‘silly’. And if we use the word sensible – which we very often do when we are asking them to be more grown-up – they will find it natural that they might need to make a bit more effort. Even our 4 years olds like being asked to be more grown-up so my common sense tells me this could be a good way in as we prepare them for the differences there will need to be when the time is right for them to return to school.

One of the things I am really sad about is that, in all the pages and pages of guidance for teachers and parents, there is not one single reference to how children might be feeling (other than vague references to their mental-health and well-being). And as for what they will be missing most – that is virtually absent. I don’t need a crystal ball to guess that it is not phonics or fractions! The children will be missing their friends, and will be associating a return to school with a return to seeing their friends, and all the fun of playtime. It doesn’t matter how much you or I might be worried about gaps that may have appeared in their learning – until we’ve met that fundamental need we’re on a hiding to nothing. I am sure that you, like I, have noticed some problems and challenges in the current guidance relating to this.....

As I start to try to formulate common sense plans that will work for St Mary’s from the guidance provided, I will be holding this need at the forefront of my mind. I will be honest with you – I don’t have a solution yet, and however hard I try I can’t see that it can be all their friends straight away. But I will be honest with them as well as you and ask them to be patient as we work toward the best ‘sensible’ solution we can find.

Another thing that I have noticed with my colleagues is that those who have been working in school regularly are now quite relaxed in Skeleton school, but those who are newly joining us are initially quite nervous – and find being around bigger groups of people a little disconcerting. If it is like this for the adults we should anticipate that it will be the same for the children – and to me this indicates that we will need to tread slowly as we ease them back in.

I want to thank each and every one of you who have sent in messages of support. I am unutterably proud of my staff, who have gone above and beyond expectations at every stage of this journey. I believe we are providing really strong support for distance learning, and excellent provision for the children of our keyworkers. Whatever we do next I want to be certain will be adding to our overall provision – not detracting from it.

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I am fully engaged in an on-going risk assessment (sorry – checking that we have done all the sensible things needed so that it is sensible for children and staff to return to school). It's quite a big task!

I find that my common sense is urging me to be more cautious than the current guidance implies – but am very aware that we are stepping into territory where conflicting needs and demands of members of our school community could cause splits and unrest. We need to keep communicating – and we are here to hear your frustrations as well as your words of support!

I am sorry that I still can't tell you when your children will be able to return to school, or exactly how all that will be organized. What I can assure you is that when I feel I can invite them back it will be because I am confident that (even if I am a little nervous because we will be stepping once again into the unknown) I know I am offering a learning environment that I feel it would have been sensible for my own children to attend when they were small, and a working environment that it would be sensible for my own children who are adults to be working in now. You will, of course, remain entirely free to make your own choices.

I won't be able to do this without your support. We are all going to need to make changes to the way we interact with each other, and get our children to and from school – and you will be seeing signs of these in the coming days and weeks.

I hold in my thoughts and prayers all of you facing deep difficulties and sadness – but feel it is equally important that, despite this, we still throw ourselves wholeheartedly into our Sports week and Fun Run and have some fun. Our children need us to show them the way.

Best wishes

Sarah Lewis

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