



"We are called to be the hands and face of Jesus as we learn, love and grow together"

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Dear parents and carers

Happy New Year! Congratulations to everyone! We have made it to the end of the second week of the Spring Term despite all of the challenges that have been presented to school and home following the Christmas break. Thank you sincerely for your cooperation as plans have changed and systems tweaked. It has certainly been a busy few weeks. We all hope and pray that with the prospects of continued vaccinations, 2021 will bring us a new sense of hope.



Numbers on site

On average 308 children are taking part in remote learning each day, whilst 138 critical worker / vulnerable children are provided with in school access to the same learning. All eligible critical worker / vulnerable children have now been provided with a place. As a result, some classes are now at their maximum operational capacity. This capacity has been set to ensure that enhanced social distancing is possible. I am aware that there may be critical workers who didn't apply for a place as they had other childcare options and, in line with Government advice, have kept their children at home. If there are any critical workers who require a place for their child but have not previously applied, please email admin@stvincent.herts.sch.uk. You will then either be offered a place or will join the waiting list for a place.

The school is dealing with significant numbers on site at a time when infection rates continue to be of great concern; it is imperative, therefore, that we adhere to Government guidance and our own thorough risk assessments. As such, we are unable to offer places to anyone who does not meet the criteria. Likewise, it is impossible for us to go beyond the operational capacity that we have set for each class.



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A continued cautious approach

As we prepared to return after the Christmas break, we spent much time and effort considering additional precautions that would be implemented alongside our current mitigations. Even with reduced numbers on site these precautions remain a significant aspect in our fight to ensure that we remain as safe as we can be. I cannot declare that we are 'covid safe'; I can, however, assure you that we are doing all that we physically can to keep staff and pupils as safe as possible. Our measures include:

- All staff wearing masks throughout the day
- Pupils are permitted to wear masks as long as they can use them appropriately and safely with independence
- We promote increased social distancing measures between pupils and staff and between all adults, recognising that the risk factors are greater for adults than children.
- Enhanced cleaning of the environment and equipment continues
- Bubbles have been reduced in size and we have set an operational capacity for each classroom based upon the risks associated with available space
- Increased hygiene protocols exist for any staff who need to cross bubbles
- A reduced footfall on site (strictly one adult per child) and a continuation of staggered start and collection times remain a key aspect

Reporting positive cases of Covid

It is pleasing to hear this weekend that cases in Stevenage appear to be reducing. However, we remain on high alert. School families have been impacted by positive covid cases and often this has carried through entire households, **with children testing positive despite being asymptomatic.** Although the effect on children is often minor, an asymptomatic child can easily pass the virus onto an adult. A number of our staff have suffered considerably, some with long lasting consequences. Even if your child is not currently in school, please continue to report via absence@stvincent.herts.sch.uk if your child needs to isolate due to symptomatic individuals in the household or in relation to positive test results. This anonymised data is communicated with the Department for Education who continue to monitor the impact on children, families and schools.

Please remember. If anyone in your household develops any of the following symptoms, the whole household must isolate for 10 days and a test should be arranged immediately:

- a high temperature – this means you feel hot to touch on your chest or back (you do not need to measure your temperature)
- a new, continuous cough – this means coughing a lot for more than an hour, or 3 or more coughing episodes in 24 hours (if you usually have a cough, it may be worse than usual)
- a loss or change to your sense of smell or taste – this means you've noticed you cannot smell or taste anything, or things smell or taste different to normal

Less common symptoms may include aches and pains, headache, sore throat, nasal congestion, red eyes, diarrhoea, or a skin rash.

We encourage everyone to take a cautious approach and stay away from school until any of these lesser symptoms are explained.

Similarly, it is entirely possible that an adult member of the household will tests positive but an asymptomatic child in the same household will not appear to be ill despite having contracted Covid-19. As such we ask that if a member of the household has tested positive,



even though all are isolating, please arrange for any children who have attended school to be tested. If you struggle to arrange a test, please contact the school.

Staffing

As we have significant numbers in school a bubble operates in each class. These means that all teachers are in each day directing the learning of those in class at the same time as the learning of those at home. Each teacher is supported by a teaching assistant. As such, I am very aware of the wellbeing and workload implications for the staff team. Those supporting learners at home will be aware that many staff are uploading and responding to work late into the evening too. We are blessed with an incredibly committed team and I am so grateful to them for all that they are doing to ensure that all children are able to engage with learning. With this in mind, I have explained to staff that I do not expect them to answer email queries in the evening; as such, responses may be delayed. If your contact is urgent, it may be wise to copy in head@stvincent.herts.sch.uk.

Learning – remote and in-school

All children, whether learning from home or in-school are given the same learning opportunities. Children make use of the same materials and, as far as possible work through these with a level of independence. Based upon feedback from families, we are trying wherever possible to reduce the number of documents that you may need to open for each day's work. In many classes most of the day's learning is included in a PowerPoint. This good practice will be replicated across the school over the course of next week. Each week the teachers meet to review what has gone well, to share good practice and to discuss any barriers to engagement with learning. As a result of this week's meeting, you may begin to see more video content in the learning materials. This may also include a short recording of your child's class teacher introducing the day's tasks. I know that the children at home will enjoying engaging with the familiar and friendly face and voice of their teacher! We have also ordered some maths and English workbooks for the children this week which will support maths and English skills across the school. Once these arrive, we will be in contact to arrange collection. We are all learning rapidly, and our remote offer will continue to develop over the week's ahead.



The Government expectation is that in KS1 schools provide access to three hours of learning (less in the EYFS) and in KS2, four hours. We are aware, however, that all families are different, and their needs vary widely. We do not expect everything to be finished and are very aware that on some days completion of tasks will be tricky. We suggest, however, that you keep to a learning routine with your children and encourage as much independence as possible as this will make things easier in the long run

We recognise that there may also be days when the learning with your children takes its own exciting turn and the planned tasks of the days become something very different to the original intention. This is entirely fine – you know your children best. There may also be days when the stresses of remote



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learning prevent tasks from being completed – again, you know your child best, and will make the right decisions for them on this occasion. I appreciate how hard it is to support the learning of your children at home, particularly when many of you are working from home too. Please be kind to yourself; family life is precious, and learning should not be to the detriment of this. As I explained during the last lockdown period, there may also be some benefits of home learning and where time permits, the science and maths learning that will come from baking a cake together and the physical satisfaction from an afternoon labouring in the garden will far outweigh any formal learning opportunity. Do not be afraid to utilise this opportunity to do something a bit differently if you can. We are committed to supporting you so please do get in touch if you need any support and when staff call you, they do so supportively, not to check up! No one is judging!

We love to see pictures of what the children have been up to at home. These can be shared via Twitter (tagging @svdp_school) or emailed to Mrs Sherry (rsberry@stvincent.herts.sch.uk). Any photos shared will be included in our weekly Pupil Post which is ParentMailed to all families and shared via Twitter and the school website.



We are keen to understand what is working well for our families and what could be improved as we expect this way of operating to continue until at least half term. As such please email feedback@stvincent.herts.sch.uk with any constructive comments that you have. Although we will be unable to respond to each email received here, the Senior Leadership Team commits to reading and reflecting on them all. We will also share the positive feedback we receive with the full staff team as this is excellent for morale.

Digital access

Over the past two weeks the school has distributed laptops and a number of SIM cards to families who are struggling to access remote learning. Access to ICT has been high profile in the media but it is important that everyone is aware of the finite nature of school resources, despite media and government spin. Although we have distributed 17 loaned laptops to school families, the school was only provided with 11 extra devices by the Department for Education. We will, of course find ways to support families who are struggling to access the remote learning and will provide further devices if they are required. However, it is important to note that the school isn't holding back any nationally provided devices. In fact we are currently requesting that the DfE release more devices, however the system states that we have received our full allocation. It is also important to note that schools in other areas of Stevenage have been provided with significantly more devices than us and others, less. This weekend we have been provided with access to a significant charitable donation which will allow us to provide a further 10 devices. If you are struggling with access to remote learning, please email devices@stvincent.herts.sch.uk detailing what the specific issues are. We may be able to help you by loaning a laptop or providing internet access through a SIM card.

Being aware that in many households, devices may be shared between siblings or with an adult working from home, we have tried to ensure that our remote learning does not require access to a



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device for prolonged periods. This is one of the reasons why we are not providing any live on-line lessons currently. We are, however, looking to schedule an online wellbeing / meet experience for all children. As there are 15 bubble in operation, this would need to be scheduled at a different time for each bubble in order that those sharing devices are not disadvantaged. This is quite a complex scheduling task and when we are ready to launch this, I will let you know ... watch this space!

Developments on site

Although our focus has been on creating effective systems for online learning and ensuring the safety of all site users, other projects still develop at a pace in school. It has been exciting this week to see the construction of our new teaching space on the edge of the KS1 playground. This will be completed before half term.



This week we have also received two new laptop trollies and eagerly await the arrival of 32 Chrome books. This is the first stage of a major re-investment into digital technologies which will transform the way that ICT is integrated into learning throughout the school. This has been partly funded through our PSA Go Fund Me page – thank you for your donations!

As we prepare for a new week ahead, we join in prayer that in the days ahead hope will overcome anxiety:

Keep us, good Lord,
under the shadow of your mercy,
in this time of uncertainty and distress.
Sustain and support the anxious and fearful,
and lift up all who are brought low;
that we may rejoice in your comfort
knowing that nothing can separate us from
your love
in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jon White'.

Mr Jon White
Headteacher



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