



St. Columbas Catholic Primary School

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"I have come that they may have life and have it to the full" (John 10: 10)



October 2020

Dear Parents,

As we approach half term I would like to thank you for your support over the last few months.

This half term has been one of the most challenging I have ever experienced. It was wonderful to welcome all the children back to school; they have been and continue to be truly amazing. They have brought light in a dark COVID world! In relation to COVID there have been so many questions, fears and unknowns.

We have had 2 'bubbles' close and with these closures there has been much stress and anxiety for families, teaching staff and children. Fortunately, our children have demonstrated resilience and have taken everything in their stride.

I know parents are struggling; I know some of you have found it impossible to help your children to study at home due to work commitments, some of you have no childcare, some families are worried about older relatives and some people are terrified about catching the virus. We understand all of these anxieties.

In school we too have the same concerns and each day we sit waiting for something to happen. Life is certainly not easy; the first bubble closing took 9 staff with it and the second bubble another 6. The reality in school is that we have been extremely short staffed and are trying to support children to 'catch up' with limited people in the building. Staff are having to be dinner ladies and are struggling to get time to eat lunch and go to the toilet.

The reality is there is nothing we can do about any of this and we need to find the best ways to cope.

Assessment

Over the last few weeks our teachers have been assessing children mentally and academically. The good news is that mentally the children are in a good place and they are grateful to be back in school. Lesley our school nurse sees lots of children and parents but no more than usual which suggests the emotional impact of 'Lockdown' is not significant. This is fantastic news.

Children have also been assessed in reading, writing and maths and the academic impact of 'Lockdown' can be clearly seen in all classes. Many children are a whole year behind where they should be. Younger children have been worst hit in reading as they have missed the phonics teaching and constant practise they would have had in school. Writing levels are clearly behind and children are going over the previous year in maths. Around 70% of each class are behind where they should be. This cannot be helped and no one is to blame, all schools in the country will be in a similar position. Together we can sort this out but there is work to be done.

In school we have been putting provision in place to address the needs of each child and each class so that this can be sorted and the children can 'catch up'. The frustrating thing is that at any point children could be isolating and being off school for weeks at a time.

Bubble Burst and Working at Home

When a bubble bursts and the children are sent home teachers immediately begin to put work online. This is the law as of 22nd of October and the staff are well prepared. There will also be work put online for those children who are isolating at home with their family.

The problem arises if children are **not working at home for whatever reason** as they will obviously fall further behind. Teachers will provide all the lessons and input online and on 'Google Classroom', 'Tapestry' and 'Dojo' but we obviously cannot support you with childcare during this time. Parents who are working will need to balance life as and when this happens. I am aware of how difficult this is; I am a full time working mum and will have no choice but to work from home with a 3-year-old when his bubble bursts. At this point I will have to decide how I will manage supporting my child whilst having to work. I am aware it is a nightmare but this is going to continue for some time so we all need to have some kind of plan or acceptance surrounding this. There are feelings of frustration and guilt out there and I feel them too but there is little any of us can do. You need to do what is best for you and your family and only you know how this may look.

Behaviour Issues

Other parents are struggling with behaviour and quality of work at home. We can help with this and have put together a reward system to support you with these challenges. (Pls see attached below)

Parent Feedback

I am aware parents will be desperate to know how children are doing and how best you can help.

So the plan is:

- After half term you will receive your child's interim report
- We will have parent's evening phone calls (week beginning Nov 9th) to discuss your child's report targets and progress
- You will find out how you can best support your child at home

Holy Communion

Well done to all our children who made their Holy Communion at the weekend. We were very proud of the way you behaved and the respect you showed in Church. You all looked beautiful! Well done.

Christmas

I'm sure you'll appreciate that sadly, due to current restrictions, our normal Christmas plans will not look the same this year. We want to reassure you that the importance of this special season will still be at the heart of our school term. We will let you know further details about possible Christmas celebrations as soon as we have finalised them.

Finally, just to say there are so many challenges facing us all at the moment and we need to remember that we are all in this together. Let us try to look at the positives and be thankful that our children have returned to school so happy and so well.

Hope everyone manages to do something nice over the half term break.

Thank you as always,

Mrs O'Donnell