

Durham County Council

Our Lady & St. Thomas R.C. Primary School

Tel: 01388 746336 Fax: 01388 748229

E-mail: OurLadyStThomas@durhamlearning.net

Website: olst.org.uk

Head Teacher
Mrs. R.M. Veitch



Cumberland Terrace
Willington
Crook
Co Durham
DL15 0PB

13th May, 2020

Dear Parents,

I do hope you are all keeping safe and well. We are all missing the children. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you all for everything you are doing at home with your children in these unprecedented times and the kind messages and wishes sent to us all at OLST. Keeping your child feeling safe, happy and loved is the most important task for you as parents. I would like to assure you that we are fully aware that the children will return having completed differing amounts of their home learning. I also wish to reassure you that our staff will continue to work tirelessly to support each individual child no matter where you are as a family.

Government Announcement

It has been a very difficult few days digesting the Government announcement regarding the new 'Stay Alert – Control the Virus – Save Lives' and the easing of lockdown in England, extending the furlough and of course, the re-opening of Primary Schools for our youngest and oldest pupils.

I wanted to communicate with you as to our initial thoughts regarding the June 1st announcement and also to request the views of our families to support the Governors and my team to plan. I would appreciate you all taking the time to fill in our parental survey and to advise us whether you intend to send your child back to school on June 1st.

I believe you should have the full picture of how this will look and provide some reassurance about how OLST will keep your child safe. I want no one to be under the misapprehension of a return to 'normal'. You will then be able to make a more informed decision for your family and individual circumstances. OLST has made some provisional plans in order to ensure the safety of your child which I will outline below.

DFE Guidance

The latest guidance from the DFE outlines tasks we must undertake to prepare for June 1st 2020. In a nutshell - class groups of no more than 15 keeping the same adults but not necessarily their class teacher, staggered drops offs and pickups, emptying tissue bins regularly, taping corridors in half, monitoring toilet access, split playtimes/lunchtimes, wiping equipment and surfaces regularly etc. This list is by no means exhaustive and we are completing risk assessments on every aspect of the school day to ensure the maximum safety precautions are taken and to provide reassurance to parents and carers.

We will continue to work with the DFE guidance as it is released and Durham Local Authority which continues to support schools in our planning. The ambition of the Government is to have all children back to school before the summer holidays and therefore, it is imperative to gain parental views to ascertain numbers and plan.

I wish to make it clear from the outset that all schools are different and comparisons between how different schools approach and manage this challenge within County Durham will be vastly different in some cases. There is to be no 'one size fits all' plan but at the individual discretion of the Governing Body of OLST. Schools are all unique with the physical capacity of their buildings, their levels of staffing who are not classed as 'vulnerable or shielding' and the cohort numbers and makeup. Social distancing within schools is the biggest challenge especially with our youngest pupils. The reality is that children are used to



mixing with their friends and the social aspect of school will look very different because children will not be able to physically interact with each other.

OLST Provision – June 2020

OLST operates five classrooms and has a roll of 120 pupils with one school hall, one yard and a school field. Our cohorts range from 15 – 20 pupils and our largest class is 28. Leaders envisage more of a system which involves a mixture of home learning and part-time onsite schooling in order to keep our pupil numbers as low as possible. I am only too aware how problematic this will be for families, especially where siblings are involved. We also must continue to support our key workers' children who range in age and will be in school daily as required by their parents. We are looking to split a cohort in half and have the same adults with your child when they are scheduled to be in school.

Phase 1 Return to school	Cohort size	Group A – Monday and Tuesday	Staff Members	Group B – Thursday and Friday	Staff Members
Reception	18	9	Mrs Brown Mrs Bailey	9	Mrs Brown Mr Stamp
Year 1	19	10	Mrs Pearson Mrs Hauxwell	9	Mrs Graham Mrs Hauxwell
Year 6	15	7	Mrs Fulton Mrs Arrowsmith	8	Mrs Fulton Mrs Arrowsmith
Key worker pupils	5	Daily – when needed			Mrs Pearson or Mrs Graham

We aim to use the cross over day (Wednesday) for deep cleaning purposes and to ensure the environment is ready for the rest of the cohort the following day. We also aim to use this time for staff to plan for onsite and home learning for the following week. Key worker children will continue to have provision daily.

Your child will have face to face contact with the same members of staff and will operate in a 'social bubble' with those adults for breaks and lunch.

The Government has announced that no parents will be fined for non-attendance and wish to encourage you to come back to school. OLST school respects all our families' decisions at this difficult time. Our home learning package therefore can still be accessed at home or at school. All children will receive the same weekly plan and support.

Curriculum Focus

Year 6 are entering the last phase of their Primary school experience and are looking ahead to bright futures. We are working with the secondary feeder schools about what they can also offer as our pupils will undoubtedly want to see their friends but will not be able to socially mix in these circumstances. We will not be able to give them their usual leaver's Mass or sadly enjoy the usual Year 6 celebrations, social gatherings, discos, residential trip etc. The class will have to be seated 2m apart for the majority of their day. We will aim to incorporate as much outdoor learning as possible and create tasks that are engaging



but inevitably the main focus will be on transition and supporting well-being and emotions as they leave this stage of their education. We will focus on reassurance and support preparing them for their next steps.

The youngest pupils will receive a focus on re-addressing basic skills – Phonics, Number etc. as well as reintegrating them into school and supporting their social and emotional needs. The outdoors and physical activity will also be important to utilise.

Health and Safety

The youngest age group love to play and will struggle to understand why they are not all together and coming back to what they knew and were used to. We will keep them safe by using tape, spots, mats etc. to give them a socially distanced space from their classmates and provide tasks that they are able to do in this way. The sharing of toys, equipment etc. will not be permitted and there will need to be specific rules about how we manage the day. Early Years teaching as we know it will not be possible under these circumstances and we will need to prepare children for these significant changes to their school.

We are potentially looking at approximately half the school returning initially and lunch and playtimes will need to be staggered again following social distancing. Drop off and pickups will also be planned carefully to avoid any parental gatherings. Further details of practicalities will be shared next week once we have completed comprehensive risk assessments to keep everyone as safe as possible.

Moving forward

How the rest of our pupils will return will be a matter we address as we come to it. I am sure you can see that planning for the initial phased return is taking a great deal of thought and time at present. Staffing levels and how Covid 19 progresses will determine all of this.

I do hope you understand my need to be transparent with you all, as keeping your child safe is and always will be, the highest priority and as we know, this pandemic does not discriminate or follow rules so even the best plan will never be risk free. All we can do as a school, is to manage the risk level to the best of our ability.

Once you have read this letter, I would appreciate it if you could complete the schools **Co-Vid 19 Parent Survey** as a matter of urgency and no later than the end of the week – Friday 15th May, in order for us to collate your responses.

The link to this survey will be sent to you separately by a text message using the Teachers2Parents messaging system. Thank you in advance for your support.

Please continue to take care and stay safe.

Yours sincerely,

R Veitch

Mrs. Ruth Veitch

Head teacher

Ratified by:

Mrs A. Aisbill

Chair of Governors

