Monday 18th October 2021

Dear Families

We are having a very busy and purposeful half term. We are most definitely in a different phase of Covid return and within school many aspects of school life have or are returning. We thank you for your continued support.

Those parents who continue to support their child’s learning in school by reading regularly and by supporting home tasks set by school are making an important contribution. We are very grateful for this.

**Parents Information Sessions IMPORTANT**

The vast majority of parents elected to have face to face meetings this week.

These meetings are a brief opportunity to check in on teachers and vice versa to ensure that all is going as well as we think for your child.

Due to the on going Covid situation :

* Try to arrange to leave children at home.
* Arrive max 5mins before your appointment time. On entering school please wear a mask. Wait in the hall. We apologise for not providing chairs / resources to support waiting – our priority is to keep you safe.
* Teachers will keep to time. If you know you have a concern that may need a longer conversation let us know and we will re arrange for a longer appointment.

**Covid Protocols for Schools**

Nationally a positive Covid within a family setting only requires the person with Covid to isolate. This is the same in school. We ask that as a result parents continue to closely monitor their child for symptoms and that you did not send a child into school who displays symptoms.

Whilst it does seem confusing then at this time where a member of the household has a positive Covid result , children and those who have had a double vaccine are not expected to isolate. Children are expected to attend school at this time to continue to support recovery.

**Harvest Food Gathering ; St Mary’s Change Making**

The Year 5 Gift Ambassadors have been encouraging us to support the foodbank collection for Harvest. What was a trickle became a stream of tins and now it is a flowing river. If you have not yet been able to support this we will continue to remind children to explain about why we are collecting and why The Axminster Foodbank needs our support.

Unfortunately due to Covid protocols we will not be able to invite parents and carers to our Harvest Celebration this Friday, 22nd October. We will record the celebration.

**Robin Class Parent Welcome Assembly – lead by Year 6**

This has been put back to next half term. It will be on Tuesday 16th November.

**Visitors in School Wednesday 20th and Thursday 21st October – School Review**

We have three adults in school this week to take part in a peer review. Mrs Mannix has been working this half term with two head teachers: one from Plymouth and another from Wool in Dorset, along with a national advisor. So far the team have been to the two other schools and will be reviewing aspects of St Mary’s school learning over those two days. This is not an inspection although it is expected that the team will identify current strengths and next steps for St Mary’s.

**Supporting individual and developing needs through the Special needs ( SEND ) Pathway**

At times in your child’s school life they may hit challenges and need additional support. At St Mary’s this ranges from simply understanding that need and gently accommodating it in a moment or over a day or two, to having a designated adult to ensure learning can progress.

We always encourage an open door culture – even with Covid this can be achieved through phone calls, e mails and where helpful through face to face meetings. As parents you have a wealth of knowledge and understanding of your child and we always appreciate this perspective. Always know that your input is valued.

Below is an outline of the developing pathway for children’s needs and how we work to understand, support and progress these as a school.

**Pupil monitoring and review**

At all times we are monitoring and assessing children’s learning and skills. As part of a typical day we will be offering some children adapted learning. This might include additional support with reading/ learning specific skills such as spellings or times tables. Where this is a time limited input we would not always share this with parents.

Inclusion does not mean treating all children in the same way. To ensure that all children learn and succeed it is necessary to treat them differently.

Half termly every child’s learning is formally reviewed. In between there are many professional conversations amongst staff. This includes a review of additional needs via Mrs Gill.

If we identify that a child is only progressing via small group or one to one support over time Mrs Gill would formally take over the review needs of that child. This monitoring may not result in any actions that are new or different to previous.

**Progressing further through the pathway**

Sometimes during reviews the needs of individual pupils will require additional assessment and support. This may include outside specialist advice. If your child is supported in this way school would inform you and ensure that you were aware of the reasons, the support and its impact.

Children who have named profiles ; such as dyslexia, autism, speech and language delays….. may not always need to have formal diagnoses. The school system nationally is more accepting that children have what we call learning ‘traits’. Accepting and supporting neuro diversity is now a very common and positive approach in recognising that all children can succeed. Where needs sit at this level, these are always discussed with the parents of an individual child. Deciding to progress to gaining a named diagnosis depends on a variety of factors and these are considered on an individual basis.

For example we can now apply for extra time in tests, for readers and scribes without any external diagnosis. Equally when pupils transfer to secondary schools locally and individuals have been supported in specific ways to help their success, secondary schools do not require evidence. They listen and record how we support pupils and support this. A diagnosis of such needs rarely changes the support a child accesses in school.

In school we have a growing number of avenues for specialist support within the staff team. Mrs Mannix has a Masters in assessing and meeting specific learning difficulties. Mrs Gill is progressing the NASENCO Award. We have in school access to a specialist one to one reading tutor and social and emotional counselling support. Staff have been trained to a high level to support speech and language, phonics and reading progressions, handwriting and spelling support as well as social and emotional needs. The success of all pupils relies on us having systems to ensure that all children can flourish.

**Higher Level Support – Diagnosis and support**

A small number of children have needs that sit outside of typical for mainstream children. To support success in mainstream we can progress children through a pathway of assessment that results in recognition of those additional needs. These children achieve an EHCP (Education Health Care Plan - formally known as a statement ). Some times this will achieve additional funding for school. These children have specific targets that are set by the local authority. These are always reviewed with parents and parents contribute to the making of these plans.

If you have any questions about the pathway of support for individual pupils please feel able to ask Mrs Mannix or email any questions to admin for the attention of Mrs Gill.

**New Netflix show concern**

You may already be aware that a Netflix show : Squid Game is being channelled into on line resources including apps for younger children.

Squid Games has graphic violence. Young children should find the content disturbing.

We are aware that some children in school have made references to the game in their own play and are therefore likely accessing this through the apps they watch. We are working to continue to listen to children and remind them that in school we encourage and develop purposeful and supportive play. We do not encourage children to reference violence and hurt in any form.

We continue to advise all parents to review the on line material their children are accessing with and for the children. The companies that are skilled at feeding material into other channels are very skilled at this. We are advised that the app associated with Squid Game has advertising links that could mean children are seeing content that you had not envisaged. Re setting and reviewing

We would not advise raising children’s curiosity and interest by asking direct questions about The Squid Game but please continue to be watchful. If your child does make reference to the game then again reminding them that some programs on Netflix are for adults is advised.

**Skills to interact well with others in post Covid times**

Children are constantly reminded in school to think about the words they use. All children are reminded of their right to be safe and their right to say **stop** and **to tell** if anyone is saying anything or doing anything that makes them feel unsafe or unhappy.

We know that for some children, they can feel that telling is creating a problem; perhaps will result in friends being in trouble. We teach that telling is a very positive and assertive action. We remind children all of the time that telling is the beginning of solving the problem. We promote the positives of telling.

Many children have very positive thoughts and actions towards others in school. Our break and lunchtimes frequently pass with only positive interactions. However, children are developing and they are learning;

Hand up parents out there who always say the right thing at every interaction……

children are developing these skills and can and do get it wrong from time to time. We believe our role is to be here with and for them to learn and develop through these times, to ensure that these skills are improving.

**On line interactions extra challenge** : What we continue to discover is that on line friendships and experiences can bring extra challenges to some children. They may say or do things that they would know not to say or do if they were face to face. This is a rapidly developing world for children. The amount of time they spend on line is vastly different to any generation of children before them. Please ensure that you continue to support and maintain close links with their on line interactions.

Thank you for your continued support

**Staff changes**

As you may know, we say a very sad goodbye to Mrs Tammy Newcombe on Thursday this week. Mrs Newcombe has been at St Mary’s for six years and over the last four years as Senior Administrator has provided a very knowledgeable and professional service. Throughout lockdown Mrs Newcombe worked full time as the sole administrator. We are very sad to say good bye because not only is Mrs Newcombe brilliant at her job, she is always, always thoughtful and supportive of everyone. We will miss her as a colleague and as a friend.

Mrs Markham continues to work on Thursday and Friday in the school office. We have appointed Miss Vanessa Moseley who has the task of following in Mrs Newcombes footsteps. We will welcome her after half term. In the interim we have an temporary member to our team Miss Lucia Wickham who will ensure that from Monday to Wednesday the office can run as efficiently as possible.

When telephoning or emailing the office it would be helpful if you give your child’s name and class to ensure that any notes are correctly directed.

**Nearly half term**

In advance we wish you a happy and successful half term and remind you that pupils return to school on **Tuesday 2nd November.**

Kind regards

Mrs Mannix