

Learning delivered with

Text Linked Curriculum



Hillcrest Primary School

TLC

Hillcrest Primary School

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8th January 2021

Dear Parent/Carer,

SCHOOL CLOSURE 2021 UPDATE 2

School Closure

You may have seen that the government recently extended the period over which the current restrictions would run until 31st March. I would like to emphasise that, at this point in time, it does not mean schools will definitely be closed up to that point. The most we have been told so far is that there is an ambition to reopen schools after February half-term. However, the government appear to have wanted to give themselves the breathing space to extend beyond the half-term break if they need to, although any extension wouldn't necessarily be all the way up to 31st March.

The driving factors determining whether schools reopen after February half-term appear to be the success of the vaccine rollout and getting control over the number of new cases emerging.

Improvements to Remote Learning

Although it is still early stages, hopefully parents and pupils are starting to get to grips, once again, with Google Classroom.

A huge thank you to the vast majority of the pupils who have logged on and are regularly sending in work. The teachers have received many extremely positive comments from parents welcoming the significant changes that we have made since the first lockdown to improve the offer.

Remote Learning will never be an adequate replacement for face-to-face teaching and the children being in school. However, after the first lockdown, the staff got together and the results of a parental survey were also reviewed by the team, before deciding upon how, in the event that the school was forced to close again, we would improve the system.

These improvements were made by 30th September at which point a new **Remote Learning Policy** was completed. The first result of the agreed changes was for staff to update a

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Virtual Timetable weekly for those children who were forced to self-isolate because they either displayed symptoms or they had come into contact with someone who had tested positive for Covid.

It was the Virtual Timetable that had already been completed for the first week back in January that all pupils have been using this week. This enabled us to get off the ground quickly at a time when we were not even anticipating being closed because of the last minute decision-making by government.

Hopefully parents have found that the Virtual Timetable has given the children far more structure than the loose arrangement of activities that were posted during the first lockdown. It hopefully gives parents some confidence with directing their children's day whilst learning from home. It provides in excess of the 3 hours minimum activity that the Department for Education ask Primary Schools to provide.

The Virtual Timetable will be further enhanced next week when all **teachers start to post 3 recorded English lessons and 3 recorded Maths lessons each week**. The children will finally be able to see their teacher's faces which is thought to help to reduce the anxiety that children may have experienced during the first lockdown.

There are further improvements to come including the introduction of **Reading Stars Reading Planet** which is an online resource that all children will be given access to, providing them with high quality texts. This will enable the teachers to set reading tasks with books aimed at each individual child's level. Look out for more information about this in due course.

NO to 'Live' Teaching

Primarily something that Secondary Schools have adopted, although there are also some Primary Schools doing the same, Hillcrest will not be moving towards providing 'live' teaching for a variety of reasons.

Safeguarding

The best way to teach is to see your children. You can gauge their level of understanding, or lack of, by viewing facial expressions, directing the speed at which you move on to new aspects of the lesson without leaving some behind. Therefore, in order to make the best

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'live' teaching it needs to be a situation where the teacher can see the children on camera as well as the children see the teacher.

However, that opens the school, and families, up to safeguarding issues. We cannot control what is shown live on others cameras and the children themselves cannot always control what may be going on around them, especially involving siblings. Therefore, images that some may deem inappropriate could be viewed live by the whole class with little ability to quickly close the stream down before the damage has been done.

Moving on too fast

If you don't have all of the children's cameras on for safeguarding reasons, then to a large degree the teacher is in the dark in regards to how well they are pitching the lesson. The inability to read the faces and gauge the level of understanding could lead to teachers moving on at a pace that loses some of the pupils. It isn't easy to differentiate the input when teaching live online.

By viewing the recorded lessons that our staff will be uploading to Google Classroom next week, the children will have the ability to pause the lesson and continue it when they are sure they have understood the previous piece. Most of these recorded lessons will also end with differentiated 'challenges' for the children to tackle.

Juggling live teaching with marking and feedback

Teachers mark children's work in two ways. They will mark a complete set of books in an evening, at the weekend or during a lunch break; or they will mark as they move around the classroom. This form of marking is extremely purposeful as it allows the children to understand their mistakes at the time they have made them and can immediately address the issues.

Staff are doing far more 'in the moment' marking through Google Classroom, or by email, as the questions from the children are constantly coming through and the staff are responding throughout the course of the day, as well as marking some submitted work outside of normal school hours.

Live teaching would drastically reduce the ability for staff to keep on top of marking and provide the children with that 'in the moment' support that they need even more of because of the current situation. It is impossible to respond with the same speed and ease through return of message on Google Classrooms as it is to look over someone's shoulder in

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the classroom. Responding to online messages during the course of a live lesson is also challenging and would result in the teacher losing their train of thought.

Juggling laptops in the home

Live teaching is even more difficult for those parents with more than one child at home and not enough laptops or iPads for each to log on to a 'live' lesson at the same time. At least with recorded lessons, households with fewer devices than children can arrange for the device to be shared. Children can then take it in turns to access the recorded lesson for their class.

Emergency Childcare Provision for Key Workers

A huge thank you to those parents who, despite qualifying for a space as a Key Worker, are making the choice to keep your children at home wherever possible and not use that space every day.

The service is only intended to be for those with no other responsible adult at home who can look after their child, and not a service that should be utilised just because it is available.

Like the rest of the country we are working hard to minimise numbers at school as the aim of the lockdown is to prevent people gathering and therefore to prevent the further spread of the new Covid-variant.

This week we have just about been able to manage the numbers that we have at school with approximately 10% of pupils attending because of their Key Worker or Vulnerable Pupil status.

However, we came close on Tuesday to exceeding the number of places that we had available based on the staffing numbers in school.

Therefore, as we go forwards it may be necessary to further ration places and to introduce a new set of criteria by which pupils are awarded places, meaning that Key Worker status alone may not be enough to secure a place on the Emergency Childcare Provision.

It is vitally important that those parents on the Key Worker list email office@hillcrest.norfolk.sch.uk by 10am on the Friday of each week to inform us about which days the following week they would want to send their children to school. If we don't

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hear by that time and our numbers exceed the places available, then your child will have to return home with you.

We would also urge parents to be as accurate as possible and not to put their child down for a day unless they are certain they need it as this takes the space away from someone who may require it.

Our Key Worker register is hopefully now complete and we have far more children on that list than places available in school. Therefore, we will only be adding further names to that list if BOTH parents qualify as Key Workers as we cannot overwhelm the numbers in school at this time.

How to use Google Classroom on Xbox One & Xbox Series X/S

The Xbox consoles each have access to Microsoft Edge – the web browser that comes preinstalled as part of the Xbox user experience. This can be used to access Google Classroom in the event that you are short of other devices in the home.

- 1) Plug a wired keyboard into your Xbox One, Xbox Series X or Xbox Series S via one of the USB ports on the front or back;
- 2) Press the Xbox button (top-centre of the game controller) and head to 'My games & apps' in the side menu;
- 3) Click on 'See all,' scroll down to 'Apps' and you will see Microsoft Edge in the icons on the right-hand side. Open it.
- 4) Type 'classroom.google.com' into the URL bar at the top and log in as you would on a PC using your school passwords;
- 5) You can either use an Xbox controller to move the cursor or a separate USB mouse plugged into one of the other ports

How to Use Google Classroom on PS4 & PS5

The Playstation has its own web browser that is easy to find on the PS4 (in the content menu as an icon with WWW written on it). However, its currently a bit trickier on PS5, as there is no simple way to open the browser.

Instead, you can open the System Settings, then the User Guide. This will open up an online user manual inside a web browser page so you only have to change the URL at the top. Otherwise, the rest of the steps are the same.

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- 1) Plug a wired keyboard and/or mouse into the USB ports on the PS4 or PS5 – each console should recognise them;
- 2) In the URL bar of the browser, type 'classroom.google.com' and then log in using your child's school password;
- 3) You can now access Google Classroom.

In some cases you may not be able to do everything you can on a laptop or PC, but you can, at the very least, access Google Classroom and see what work your teacher has assigned to you.

What Keyboards Can You Use for the Gaming Consoles?

You don't need a fancy gaming keyboard or anything expensive to plug into a console. You just need something that works. While some may have an old USB keyboard lying around, the Xbox appears to work with the cheapest USB keyboard currently available on Amazon.

Free School Meals

We are yet to receive confirmation that the Food Voucher system is up and running although the government are expected to relaunch that service in due course.

Until the vouchers become available, parents of children in receipt of Free School Meals will be able to continue to collect a packed lunch from the Main Hall of the school. We may move from daily packages to weekly packages. However, the parents of those in receipt of Free School Meals will receive a separate email about this in the near future.

Applying for Free School Meals

In the event that your employment status or financial circumstances have changed as a result of the new lockdown, you may find that you are eligible to receive Free School Meals.

Your child may be able to get free school meals if you claim any of the following:

- Income Support
- income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- income-related Employment and Support Allowance

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- support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- the guaranteed element of Pension Credit
- Child Tax Credit (provided you're not also entitled to Working Tax Credit and have an annual gross income of no more than £16,190)
- Working Tax Credit run-on - paid for 4 weeks after you stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit
- Universal Credit - if you apply on or after 1 April 2018 your household income must be less than £7,400 a year (after tax and not including any benefits you get)

Therefore, we would encourage those parents who think that they may qualify for Free School Meals to register with Norfolk County Council via the following website...

www.norfolk.gov.uk/neo

Please note that children in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 will NOT automatically be entitled to receive the Free School Meal National Vouchers if, as expected, they return in due course, even though they receive Universal Infant Free School Meals.

Parents of children in Reception, Year 1 or Year 2 who think that they would qualify for Free School Meals after looking at the qualifying list above, should still register through the www.norfolk.gov.uk/neo website as you may continue to be able to get that support as and when the Food Voucher system come back online. Similarly, parents of children in Key Stage 2 should also register if their employment circumstances have changed.

ALL ADULTS TO WEAR FACE MASKS ON THE SCHOOL SITE WHILST DROPPING CHILDREN OFF AND COLLECTING THEM FROM 4TH JANUARY

This will also apply to those parents dropping their children off for the Emergency Childcare Provision throughout the lockdown.

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DO NOT SEND YOUR CHILD TO THE KEY WORKER PROVISION IF...

- *...they display a temperature of 37.6 degrees or higher;*
- *...they have a persistent cough (regardless of whether you believe this to be caused by something else);*
- *---they complain of a sudden and extreme loss of taste or smell.*

In the event that they are displaying these symptoms, you MUST get your child tested as they will NOT be accepted back into school until a NEGATIVE Covid-19 test has been received and their symptoms have subsided.

If your child develops any of these symptoms whilst at school, we will isolate them and then ask you to come and collect them.

And Finally...

The staff at Hillcrest would like to thank all those parents who have sent their good wishes to us all over the course of the Christmas break and since returning.

I am incredibly proud of the job that the staff are doing to keep learning going and teaching in this way is not easy, it's not ideal and it is not something that any teacher would choose to do.

I would also like to thank the parents who continue to support their children through another incredibly challenging period with no definite end point. Hopefully though the end will come sooner than some are predicting and that the successful roll out of the vaccine will help to cut this period of lockdown as short as possible.

We look forward to seeing the children back in school soon and throughout this lockdown period, we will keep you regularly updated with the latest news and methods of support.

Yours sincerely,

Mr Try