



19.3.2020

Dear Parents/Carers,

As you're probably aware, the government's guidance on the coronavirus has changed so that schools will be closed from Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> of March. We're writing this letter to let you know what we're doing in light of this, and our expectations, to help make sure the children can continue to learn. We'd like to reassure you that at St Mary's School we're taking all of the necessary steps to protect our community, ensure there are resources and ways of communicating with the school and are continuing to follow official guidance from the Government, St Thomas Aquinas Multi-Academy Trust, Leicestershire County Council and Public Health.

**What's the current situation?**

- The **school remains closed until further notice** – this is the current official guidance we've been given from the DFE.
- We'll keep you up to date with any changes to the current situation on the school website.

**What we need you to do**

- If you've recently changed your contact details, please inform the school office **as soon as possible** via the school telephone number. Please let the school office know if you cannot access the school jotter app or have no internet connection at home.
- Talk to your children about the coronavirus. It's a scary time and we should make sure children feel supported. [BBC Newsround](#) has regular updates for younger children and [YoungMinds](#) has practical steps older children can take to help with anxiety.
  - Work will be uploaded frequently on the class pages on the school website. Check that your child has access to the school website from home, and let us know if there are any issues (so we can make sure we're well prepared for remote learning.) If you do not have any internet access at home, work can be prepared and left in the school office to be collected on a Monday. Please let the class teacher know if that is the case.

**During the School Closure we'll:**

- Alert parents to closure, via the School Jotter app, a post on the school website or a letter home.

We will let parents know when the school will be reopened via the same method above.

- The school has set work for pupils during closure. With consideration that many parents have to work and also find child care, we have advised on minimum daily amounts. An exercise book and pencils have been sent home. Also ensure that your child does have some exercise/ fresh air.

How much work should my child do?

Reception/ Foundation class: St Leo's	Support your children in writing letters and some sentences each day. Children could practice ordering their numbers or double/ halve simple numbers using objects. Don't forget phonics: Lots of You-tube videos on phonics and the phonics video on the school website. Share stories.
KS1: Year One and Two	Short activities and reading: at least two 20-30 minute blocks of learning per day but you might want to consider more. One on English and one on Mathematics. Practice phonics sounds- especially Year One. Reading to an adult in addition to this.

KS2: Year Three, Four, Five and Six.	1 hour of English and 1 hour of Mathematics. A reading session should be in addition to this. Other subject advice is on the class website for children to do work on. Verbal feedback will be given when the children bring their work back to school. There are lots of multiplication games, that children can play- especially Year 4. Please look at the curriculum information given on each class page, individual letters from teachers for their classes as to what they can learn.
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Being out of school for an indeterminate length of time, with reduced access to outdoor play facilities and social spaces is likely to be difficult for many children. For families living in overcrowded conditions this will add to the stresses of daily life considerably. Families living in close proximity for extended periods are likely to find this to be stressful.

Adults will need to be aware of their stress responses, and also able to recognise how children and young people are exhibiting signs of stress. Signs of stress will vary for every child. Some children may verbalise their worries, others may withdraw into themselves, others may engage in challenging behaviours.

Some children and young people, particularly those who are older, may be able to self-manage their stress, but this is more difficult for younger children. Adults will need to help younger children to understand and label their emotions, and help them to do things that will reduce their stress level. Exercise, art, drama, music and other creative activities are good choices to supplement the Mathematics and English activities. Don't try to replicate a full school timetable – It won't be possible to replicate a full school timetable for a variety of reasons. Giving yourself and your children permission to accept this can be a big weight lifted.

**Help children stay connected to their friends** – Friendships are a key resiliency factor for children and young people. Most children see their friends nearly every day of the week and so not being in contact with them for some time might be upsetting. Is it possible for children to talk to their friends on the phone? Perhaps establish a group Skype or WhatsApp call? Perhaps they could write letters to each other.

**Have a routine and structure** – Having a plan and a predictable routine for the day can be very reassuring. As adults we like to know what is going to happen, and children like this too.

A consistent routine lets everyone be secure about the plans for the day. It is often useful to involve children in creating this routine, so that they feel part of the plan, rather than the plan being imposed on them. You could display the routine using a timeline, or maybe pictures and visuals. Encourage children to develop independence by referring to their own routine/plan themselves.

**Avoid putting too much pressure on academic work** – Most parents and carers aren't teachers and so it's okay not to be doing 'school work' for six hours a day. It might be more important to be spending time together, building relationships, enjoying shared activities and reassuring children, as opposed to replicating the school timetable.

- **Try to keep work in one place** – If children are doing school work or project work at home, try to keep it all in one place so that it doesn't spread out over the house. This can help to maintain a work/home boundary. We know that people live in different circumstances that might mean this isn't always possible, so perhaps there might be other ways to 'signal' the end of working e.g. putting away the work and then enjoying a favourite song or shared dance!

- **Reduce access to rolling news** – It is important to keep up to date with new developments and announcements, but it can be hard to switch off from the constant stream of news from media outlets and social media. Reduce the time spent hearing, reading or watching news – at the moment it might be overwhelming for adults and children. Try to protect children from distressing media coverage.

- **Supervise children with screens** – It is likely that children and young people will be using screens more often over the coming weeks e.g. phones, tablets, gaming consoles and the internet. If this is the case make sure they are supervised. Ensure appropriate content filters are active – the UK Safer Internet Centre offers [guidance on setting up parental control](#). Try to ensure all children have a balanced range of activities each day. Involve children and young people in these discussions so that they feel part of the plan.

**Provide reassurance about exams being cancelled** – Young people may now be concerned about the announcement that exams later this year will not be going ahead as planned. They may feel like all their hard work has been for nothing. Reassure young people that the Prime Minister has said that all children and young people will get the qualification they worked towards,

but acknowledge that the plan is a bit uncertain right now. Reassure young people that the government and Department for Education are working on a plan.

• **Play** – Play is fundamental to children's wellbeing and development – children of all ages! It's also a great way to reduce stress in adults.

For any questions about work, particularly for the Junior age children- the school has set up a general email account, for parents to access. [homework@stmarys-rc.leics.sch.uk](mailto:homework@stmarys-rc.leics.sch.uk)

**These resources are free to parents:** Free access to [My Maths](#) till Sept 2020

Free access for [School and Home](#) – wealth of free content on Owl for Home, including our full eBook library, activity sheets, and support videos, which will help parents whilst children are away from the classroom. Math's rock stars to practise multiplication facts may also be offered free to parents.

### **If you have any questions**

Please consult the:

- School office, if you have any questions about our response to this issue. Staff will be in school.
- [NHS](#), if you want to know more about the symptoms of coronavirus. If you think you or your child may have the symptoms, use [NHS 111 online](#) if at all possible before calling 111.
- Department for Education's coronavirus helpline: 0800 046 8687, if you have any questions about the government's response to coronavirus in relation to schools
- Government's [travel advice](#), if you want to know whether any upcoming trip or holiday you're taking abroad should go ahead. We would strongly advice not to take holidays in the term time, as it cannot be authorised.

It is a difficult time and we know you're worried about the impact this might have on our community. It's important we keep each other safe and talk about these events to help with any anxiety.

Thank you for your continued support.

Miss P Jordan

Headteacher

St Mary's Catholic Primary School