

Chetwynde Newsletter



Chetwynde
School

Wednesday, March 25, 2020

Dear Parents, Carers, and Students,

Lots of people, nation-wide, are feeling stressed, overwhelmed and under pressure by everything that's happening. This includes our school community, particularly as we all come to grips with the learning being sent home for your child. All of us - students, teachers and parents need to understand that this will be a marathon and not a sprint and to temper our expectations. We still have staff working in school supporting children of keyworkers and delivering FSM and staff at home with families of their own to manage. I wanted to give my perspective on it all as a Headteacher, and I hope this will help us all to feel less stressed and clearer about what is possible.

A few points to note first:

- 1) This situation is not home-schooling. This is an unprecedented emergency impacting on the whole world. Let's keep perspective. Home-schooling is a choice, where you *choose* to be your child's schoolteacher. This current situation is, at best, distance learning. In reality, it's a jigsaw with no picture, because none of us know what's right and wrong here. That will take *time* to figure out.
- 2) You are, and always have been, your child's primary educator. If you decide that your child isn't going to engage with anything sent home and is going to spend the entire period playing on their X box, gardening, baking, or watching TV, then that is your choice. That is your right. *There is nothing to stress or feel guilty about.*
- 3) This is new territory for schools. We had little notice; no preparation time and we were NOT told to 'continue to plan lessons as normal and just send them home' – that's NOT possible. If it were, we'd all be out of a job! We will not be able to deliver the same level of education remotely.
- 4) It is not possible to facilitate distance learning with a school aged child and work from home at the same time. The very idea is nonsense. If you're trying to do that, stop now. You can certainly provide activities where your child learns, but we understand that your focus may be on your job and keeping your family happy and healthy. Again, unprecedented. Stop trying to do it all.
- 5) Everyone's mental health needs consideration – parents, teachers and students. Be mindful of only contacting staff (and that includes sending emails) during school hours. It is not fair

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for emails to be pinging into inboxes day and night. Do not put high expectations on your children to be completing hours and hours of study, they are going to need down time. Adapt your own expectations.

So, a few FAQs:

Q: My school has sent home lots of physical work. Pages and pages, hours and hours. How am I supposed to get through it all?

A: You're not, don't try. Trying gauge what is an appropriate amount of work to set is an unknown in these circumstances. Teachers may have erred on the side of caution and set plenty. It's not a competition or a race. Let your child work at their own pace, *cherry pick* what they can do and take it steady. Remember teachers are still coming in to school to work with the children of critical workers.

Q: My school keeps sending home links and emails with more work. How do I make it stop? Arrgh!

A: See above. These are suggestions and ideas because the school wants you to have plenty of support in keeping you children occupied. Use them if they suit you, don't if they don't suit. If you're getting stressed, stop opening the emails. No one will know!

Q: Someone in my child's class has everything done, and we've barely started. Will they fall behind?

A: Even if everything were equal in terms of support, time and number of children (which it's not) all children learn at different rates. In the class there's a wide range of levels in all subjects, there's different paces and there are many children working on differentiated levels of work. It's almost impossible for teachers to differentiate at the moment, so you don't have to do it either.

Your child will not fall behind. This is all revision and reminder work. If children could all learn new concepts without specific teaching, we wouldn't need teachers. They will cover all of this again, multiple times.

Q: I'm not doing any work with my kids. All they're doing is building Lego, cooking and playing outside.

A: All of this is learning - precious learning. This kind of activity should not be dismissed. Play and creativity is nature's way of learning. We would be worried if children were not doing lots of this – whatever age they are! Give yourself and them a break and just enjoy building other life skills.

Q: How can I get three different lots of work done with three different kids of different ages?

A: You can't, stop trying. If they're old enough, try to get them to do little bits independently. Otherwise attempt to do something they can all engage with, reading a story together, some freewriting, baking etc. *Cherry pick* what works for you as a family. Promote older ones to be 'teacher'.

Q: So, what's the bare minimum you'd expect?

A: There isn't a minimum - find a balance that works for your family. *Cherry pick* what you think fits.

My ideal for the children in our school?

- A bit of reading every day (independent or to them or via audiobook etc.)
- Some free writing now and then. If they'll keep a diary or something - great! If not, would they draw a comic?
- Practical hands-on maths. Be that via cooking, cleaning, outside or some maths games, physical or digital.
- Some fine motor work for primary students. Lego, cutting, playdough, tidying up small toys.
- Physical exercise every day.
- Some art/music where possible through the week. Doesn't need to be guided.
- Stretching goals, if old enough getting them to work on a project independently is excellent for keeping brains ticking over. Get them researching in a book or online and putting together something to present to you or family.
- If younger, lots of imaginative free play, the more independent, the better.
- You are doing enough. You are loving your kids and supporting them through a difficult time. Look after yourself. Minimising stress is vital in a time like this for mental health.
- Interact with our Facebook pages to keep the kids connected to the school. Keep this space happy, light-hearted and fun.
- Don't let this be something that stresses you. Only you can control that by accepting it is in your circle of control, you are the primary educator, and this is all your call.

Time will allow us to hone how remote learning works best and learn how to navigate this new reality. It is going to be a team effort, where we all work together, to find the best fit for our community. We are here to help and support as best we can, so if you have worries or concerns, please be in touch and we will listen and adapt.

Finally, thank you to everyone - parents, carers, students and teachers and school staff for all the team spirit that you have shown over these past days. Together we will make this work.

Kind regard,

Stephen Jefferson
Head Teacher