



St Joseph's Catholic Primary School  
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EX8 1TA

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Dear Parents and Carers,

It has been an incredibly busy and different week at St Joseph's.

We are down to only about 35% of staff available and so are only taking children of critical workers when absolutely necessary. The children who are coming in are being provided with childcare provision as requested by the government, it is nothing like their usual education. Trying to socially distance them is proving tricky but we continue to keep washing hands and cleaning frequently throughout the day.

### Home learning

We have had lots of emails about home learning. Please do not feel you need to replicate school – you can't, school is much more than a set of worksheets and internet sites.

The main focus at the minute is your child's happiness and wellbeing. However you achieve this is fine and believe me you're doing fine.

Some home learning is great: read, practise your tables but make sure this is balanced with play, fun, baking, making and building.

If I could say one thing for home learning, keep reading. The single most important predictor of attainment in school is how much children read. For all children, having stories read to them is also important. Many authors are doing online reads of their books.

Please be mindful that many of our staff are now off in self-isolation either for themselves or their own children. The ones who aren't self-isolating are looking after the children in school and/or trying to home school their own children. Everyone is scared and anxious. We are happy for parents to email if necessary but we have received over 80 emails this week from parents asking about logins, extra work or marking which then becomes unmanageable. Especially as at the moment I am in the office on my own!

We are doing the absolute best we can but I will not be asking teachers to feedback or mark work that is being done at home every day. That would be an impossible task. Children do need feedback but they need to be able to talk it through with you if they are home learning.

Some parents were worried about having to print the home learning out. Please don't feel you have to do this. Much of it can be copied out onto paper instead of printing. The same goes for if you don't have internet access please don't worry. If you are able to do the other work provided that is great but it is more important you and your child do not get anxious about it. Potentially you could have weeks of being indoors with your child, getting cross and worked up about home learning will not help any of you!

## Critical Workers

Wherever possible children should remain at home. The more children we have in school, the greater the risk to your child, your family and your community. In the case where critical workers are not working from home and have no other arrangements, school is open to this small number of children. This is a childcare facility and is not based around learning. Please be aware that TA's for SEND children are not provided and that each day different staff are working. Some younger children have found this very difficult.

Due to staff shortages, we may not be able to provide childcare, in which case Devon County Council can assist you in finding a place at another school. <https://www.devon.gov.uk/document/schools-and-families/>

## Free School Meals for those who are on Free School Meals (not Universal Meals for year R- Yr 2)

Food parcels were provided for this week as requested, but we may look at distributing Food Vouchers via email. After the Easter holidays, if you require a Free School Meal, please email us to request lunches by 8am each day. The kitchen will be closed over the Easter holidays and so if you are a critical worker and your child is in school during this period, you will need to provide a packed lunch for them. We will inform you if we move to vouchers.

Many of the children are scared and anxious at the moment, as we are as adults. It is our role as adults to shield them as best we can from the worry. My hope is that whilst we may remember this as a dreadful time, that children remember it as a time where they spent lots of quality time doing fun activities with their parents. Below are a few links which may help if your child is feeling particularly anxious about Coronavirus.

Many thanks to all our wonderful staff who are coming in despite the risks and for all those working from home completing the mountains of forms, policies etc that are now required.

We will send out more home learning after the Easter holidays but please remember these are only suggestions. At the moment I have just attached a few fun online things that celebrities are putting on each day which may be of interest to you.

I hope you are all keeping safe and well and, as best you can, you have an enjoyable Easter break.

Take care  
Best wishes  
Nicky Taylor-Bashford

## Resources around talking to children about Coronavirus.

NSPCC Learning (which is primarily aimed at people who work with children) has updated "How to have difficult conversations with children" content to include references to Coronavirus: <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/safeguarding-child-protection/how-to-have-difficult-conversations-with-children/>

One of the things highlighted in this content is Childline's new page on the virus, which has lots of helpful information for children: <https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/your-feelings/anxiety-stress-panic/worries-about-the-world/coronavirus/>

There is also a page on the main NSPCC website (which is aimed principally at parents) around talking about difficult topics. It doesn't reference Coronavirus specifically (yet), but still has lots of helpful advice: <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/support-for-parents/talking-about-difficult-topics/>

You might also be interested in the news story we've published on NSPCC Learning about undertaking remote teaching safely. I imagine you may be getting some enquiries about that too: <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/news/2020/march/undertaking-remote-teaching-safely/>