

22 April 2020

Dear Parents/Carers,

Summer Term Newsletter 1

Firstly, I hope you and your families are safe and well in these tragic times.

It has been a very unusual start to the Summer Term – though these are clearly strange times for everyone, wherever they are. Despite a month going by, coming to school to find it largely empty in the morning has not become any less strange or upsetting. In fact, many of us are missing the children who aren't in school more and more as time goes on. 61% of schools across the country have remained open over the last month and we are proud that Orchard has been one of them, supporting key workers and those children who really need us. I'm grateful to staff who have worked through what should have been their holiday whilst putting themselves at risk to ensure we could stay open and 'do our bit.'

Questions about returning to school

There have been a few news articles recently which have said there are plans to re-open schools to more pupils in three weeks. I know this has concerned some of you, particularly given that so many people continue to be tragically taken from us each day by this dreadful virus. The Government has not indicated when they will begin to allow more pupils back into schools, but in response to the news articles the Department for Education said on Saturday:

"No decision has been made on a timetable for re-opening schools. Schools remain closed until further notice, except for children of critical workers and the most vulnerable children. Schools will only re-open when the scientific advice indicates it is the right time to do so."

Safeguarding children, families and staff is every school's top priority. At the minute, it would be hard to imagine how we could guarantee everyone's safety if a large number of people were here. Some parents have asked really good questions about what will happen when we do all return to school. Will there be a 'phased return' with different year groups in school on different days? Will staff and pupils be expected to wear personal protection equipment (PPE) such as masks? Unfortunately, we simply do not know the answers to such questions at this stage. The Government last week set out [5 tests for ending the current 'lockdown.'](#) Test 5 was needing to be confident that any adjustment to the current measures will not risk a 'second peak' of infections and overwhelm the NHS. It seems almost certain that this test alone will not be met within the next three weeks, therefore it is highly unlikely schools will begin to fully reopen in that time. Beyond this is impossible to predict at this stage. Rest assured, as soon as I have any further information on this matter, I will write to you again.

Home Learning

I'd like to give a huge thank you to those who took part in our survey on home learning! This has been really helpful for planning our 'next-steps.' There were some lovely comments and messages of thanks too – I know colleagues very much appreciate your support.

84% of you said that you were satisfied with the amount of work we were putting online – two thirds of these people said they were 'very satisfied.' 12% of people said they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, and 4% said they were dissatisfied.

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Orchard and Shepherdswell
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I have read every one of your comments from this survey and I met with school leaders on Monday to discuss what we will offer going forward. These comments were very useful and I also appreciated the honesty shown. Please know that many of you said similar things! A lot of you, like parents up and down the country, are struggling with the notion of schooling your children. On Sunday, the Government published [guidance for supporting your children at home](#) and [guidance for keeping them safe online](#), but I will continue to offer my own personal advice too!

You can only do your best.

Most of you are not teachers and in my previous letters I have tried to reassure you that you cannot be expected to give your child the same level of education they would receive at school normally. Becoming a teacher takes years of training and study – you have had no time at all, have a lot of other things going on and can only do what you can for your children. I know they won't mind me telling you that even some of our fantastic teachers have struggled home-schooling their own children!

Be realistic and appreciate that the most important thing at this time is that your family stays safe. As I have said previously, try to come up with a manageable routine each day. Don't expect too much from yourself or children. They are not going to be able to sit still and learn for hours on end and you are not going to be able to teach them for that long as it would be too stressful for everyone!

According to our survey, most of you are doing between one to two hours of learning per day and many of you are doing up to four. **This is fine** and far better than trying to do too much! Some said that they had not done any at all. I would encourage you to make an effort, no matter how small, to support your children. We are here to help with that.

To try to support you, we are going to be offering a 'Daily Task' sheet on our [school website](#) from today. This will feature a maths task and an English task, along with a link to tell us when you are finished! Answers will be revealed on the following day's sheet where appropriate. This is meant to be a good starting point for your home learning and of course staff in each year group are continuing the great job they've been doing of updating their pages with various activities to choose from. **Aim to do the Daily Tasks as a minimum** and then select a few additional home learning activities as a bonus. We have made it so the Daily Task is openable on almost all smartphones / tablets and there is no need to do any printing – you'll just need a scrap piece of paper and a pen / pencil each day. You may have seen in the news that a range of home learning services have begun to launch now such as BBC Bitesize daily lessons and the Oak National Academy. We will be linking to some of the activities on these sites through our own website, so start with us and head over to the others through our links. Remember, learning can be fun! Reading is very important and story-time definitely counts as learning time!

We have started making phone calls to every family to find out if they need any advice / support. It will obviously take time to get through all 355 children so please be patient, but we hope to speak to every one of you in the next few weeks. People have been getting in touch via ParentSupport@orchard.emat.uk to ask for work to be printed and this is absolutely fine. Please get in touch if you need our help.

Lastly on home learning, thank you to everyone who has been sending pictures of your fantastic work you've been doing at home! Please keep this up as we love seeing what you've done. Get in touch either through the ParentSupport email address above, or through Facebook (search @OrchardAcademyMK).

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Family Support

I'm really proud that, thanks to our incredibly dedicated staff across Orchard and Shepherds Well, supported by our Trust ([EMAT](#)) we were able to continue to offer free school meals to families who are entitled to them over the Easter holidays. Last week we gave out just over 80 packages and even delivered some to families who are unable to collect them. The packages came with a week's supply of lunches:

Item	Individual Count
Fruit - Apple or Oranges	4
Veg - Carrots	3
Veg - Onions	2
Veg - Tomato	2
Jacket Potatoes	4
Apple Juice 1ltr	1
12oz pasta pot	1
Biscuits (Pack)	1
Bags (Double Bag)	12
12oz cereal pot	1
12oz rice pot	1
Butter Portions	5
Jam Portions	5
Flavoured milk	2
Tin of Tuna 185g	2
Bread Rolls	5
Flapjack or Muffin	1

For now, we are continuing to offer this service instead of the national food voucher scheme you may have seen on the news. This is because many, many parents across the country have [reported problems](#) with being able to access the vouchers due to the system being overwhelmed. We understand this is a very difficult time for families and therefore if you are worried about your supplies of food please get in touch with either myself or Mrs. James by telephoning school. On a wider note, Milton Keynes Council have published comprehensive information on support they are offering to families at this time. You can find this by clicking [here](#).

I wanted to finish by speaking directly to our pupils. We are missing you lots – **all** of you! We cannot wait to have you back at school when it is safe for everyone and to be able to get together again as one big family. I know you probably don't usually look forward to my boring assemblies but I cannot tell you how much I'm looking forward to the first one we have all together, whenever that may be. Stay safe, help each other at home and try to do at least a bit of school work every day!

Thank you for your continued support and my very best wishes go to you all.

Mr. C. Brown
Headteacher
Orchard Academy

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