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**Head Teacher: Mr Derek Retson**  
**Director of Children's Services: Mr Steven Quinn**



5 February 2021

Dear parent/carer,

First and foremost – thank you. Here at St James' we fully appreciate how challenging this time is in lots of different ways, and we are grateful for your continued support in encouraging your child to engage with home learning.

Since our last FAQ letter, there has been a common thread of questions being asked which we aim to answer below:

#### **I am having difficulty coping with the pressures of Home Learning**

We recognise this is a problem across the country at this time. However, we feel it is important to be clear that the term "home schooling" is very unhelpful. Our expectation is not that you "home school" your child, as this by definition requires you to spend vast amounts of time teaching. Your child is taught and supported by skilled, professional teachers. During this or any subsequent period of lockdown, it is these teachers who will provide home learning for all children. Please do not feel pressured to teach your child – this is our job, and staff are available online for the duration of the school day should any child need their support with work.

#### **My child is struggling with work set by the teacher – what do I do?**

Firstly, we know and fully appreciate how challenging this time is. Based on Government guidance, we are trying to replicate the school day as much as possible and it is therefore essential that we try to adopt normal routines as far as we can. If your child requires support with their learning, please encourage them to contact the teacher themselves. This is an approach we are trying to establish throughout all classes as a means of taking pressure off parents and families. As in a normal school day, if your child requires support, they seek it from their class teacher rather than you. Whilst working from home it may seem convenient for your child to seek your support instead, but we recognise that you may have your own pressures and workload. As always, we appreciate all family support and engagement but please do not feel pressured to adopt the role of "teacher" – this is an added pressure that many families cannot facilitate and nor would we expect you to.

#### **How will my child seek support?**

Seesaw has multiple functions for communication. Children can type a message to their teacher, or use the "voice note" function to record over a piece of work or leave a comment under a piece of work. Once the teacher sees this, they can then respond in the same way. Alternatively, children can upload a video of themselves asking for support on to their individual journal. To clarify, journals can only be seen the child, class teacher and family members connected through Seesaw Family and will not be seen by the whole class.

#### **When are teachers available for my child?**

There has been a slight change to the information we gave out a few weeks ago, based on our constant evaluation of what is working and how we can do better. As such, class teachers will now be available to support your child between 9am and 3pm Monday to Thursday, and 9am to 11.45am on a Friday. This is to allow the teachers to take their allocated Non-Class Contact (NCC) time on a Friday afternoon which allows them to plan, prepare and record lessons for the following week. Whilst the class teachers have their NCC time, Miss McPherson or Senior Management will be available to support the children across all stages.

### **Why is my child's teacher only commenting on some of my child's work?**

Within a regular school week, teachers manage their feedback to ensure each child receives a balance of detailed oral/written comments, less detailed feedback like simple "ticks" and methods like self-assessment which the teacher will then verify with a "tick" or sticker. Whilst remote learning, teachers are faced with hundreds of Seesaw tasks being submitted each day, so it is unrealistic to expect high quality written feedback to be provided for all of these. Teachers may concentrate on, for example, one group per day whilst others self-assess, and this will be communicated to children who are very used to this method of working. Please rest assured that our teachers are working extremely hard to make the remote learning experience as close to a normal school day experience as much as they can. We understand that for some families – particularly those who have children in the younger stages – that finding the time to complete and submit work can't always be done between 9-3, Monday to Friday. If work is completed outside of these hours due to your family circumstances, please do not expect work to be approved and assessed immediately the next day. However, teachers will aim to provide feedback at the earliest opportunity.

### **Why is my child not getting instant feedback from their teacher?**

We appreciate that this can be frustrating, but we would ask that you take into consideration the pressures on teaching staff to provide remote learning. Ordinarily, teachers are contracted to work 35 hours per week – 22.5 hours of this is spent engaging with children in class. The remaining 12.5 hours, for the most part, is for teachers to plan, prepare, assess and provide feedback. During periods of remote learning, we would ask that you take in to account the requirement for teachers to spend considerable time on tasks such as recording teaching input, as well as uploaded videos. These are very time-consuming tasks which teachers are not used to doing and will, therefore, impact on teacher workload and their availability. Similar to the message we give children in that they should not be tied to a screen all day; this message is also true for adults as the health and wellbeing of all must be taken into consideration. Please be assured that all our teachers aim to communicate in as timely a manner as is possible.

### **Do I correct the mistakes my child makes on their work?**

No! Making mistakes is a vital part of the learning cycle. When children make mistakes, the teacher is able to use this to inform future teaching input and the children can use their mistakes to unpick where they went wrong so that it doesn't happen in the future. If all work submitted to the teacher is "correct", then the teacher will be unaware of any supports required for individual children. Making mistakes also serves a huge purpose in building resilience, so please – although it may go against instincts – do not correct any mistakes that have been made and allow your child to enjoy their natural learning journey, mistakes and all.

### **Why is work set at different times instead of all in the morning?**

The Scottish Government has instructed schools to "replicate the school day" as much possible. This includes trying to structure the day using the routines and timetables the children are used to in class, so tasks will be uploaded at various points throughout each day. Using this format should also help train the children in to taking structured time away from their screens, which is vitally important to their health and wellbeing. The additional benefit of replicating the structure of the school day is that it provides the children with the ongoing motivation to engage throughout the day instead of being faced with multiple tasks in the morning and nothing thereafter. We've had extremely positive reports about this and are pleased to say it is working for the majority of our children. We do however appreciate that this can present challenges for some families so tasks will remain available on Seesaw until the following Monday and archived thereafter so that children are facing each week afresh.

### **What is a "live" lesson?**

"Live interactions/engagement" can take many forms, including – but not limited to -

- Real time health and wellbeing check ins through Google Meet
- Pre-recorded learning input by school staff
- Pre-recorded learning input by outside agencies (eg. BBC Bitesize)
- 1:1 or small group real time check in/input through Google Meet

- Real time phone calls by school staff to the individual child

Children can expect a reasonable amount of face to face engagement throughout the course of each week, but this may look different at each stage depending on what suits learner's needs most.

### **Attendance – how is this recorded?**

Teachers are taking a daily register of who is and isn't engaging with remote learning, and colour coding as follows:

- Logged in and completed most tasks
- Logged in but completed few/no tasks
- No attendance on-line at all

This is then transferred on to an Authority wide spreadsheet which tracks levels of engagement. If your child does not log on to Seesaw and complete tasks, they are marked as "absent from home learning" which will in turn affect their overall attendance percentage. There is a Scottish Government requirement for schools to report on attendance and engagement, and therefore we urge all parents to ensure their children engage with their teacher through Seesaw daily. If there are barriers such as lack of access to devices, please contact the school to discuss how we can support you. Please note that there is a very different Government expectation during this period of remote learning, and the message from last year that was "do what you can, when you can" is no longer valid. The message now is very clear – replicate the school day, providing new and ongoing learning, which all children must engage in. If your child does not engage in the learning tasks, they will fall behind in their learning.

At the time of writing, it is possible that P1-3 children may return to school from Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> February. However, for other stages we are still unsure how long this period of home learning will continue for and so we hope the information we have provided helps to answer some of our most commonly asked questions. Whilst you are at home, please continue to stay safe – we look forward to seeing you all as soon as is safe to do so.

Yours sincerely,



Derek Retson  
Head Teacher