



We are called to be the hands and face of Jesus as we learn, love and grow together

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Dear parents and carers

Congratulations to everyone – children, parents and staff - for making your way to the end of this extraordinary half term. The school has been a hive of productive learning, determined efforts and positive vibes as everyone finds their way through new routines and procedures. Thank you for your cooperation in ensuring the success of this.

Attendance in school has been maintained at a particularly high level, averaging at about 98% each day and as we have all become more accustomed to a more precise definition of a continuous cough and other symptoms, absences for Covid related reasons have been significantly reduced. As access to testing has improved, periods of isolation have also decreased in length for most families.



Individual isolation and bubble closures

Work packs remain ready for use on the class pages of the school website should the need occur for individuals to isolate and a plan is in place for remote learning to 'kick in' should the need arise for a bubble to close. To date, this has not been necessary yet; no doubt our time will come. As I write this, I am aware of an increased number of cases locally and also of potential school / bubble closures that stretch beyond half-term for some pupils in other local schools.

Should a bubble need to close, class teachers will be in daily contact in order to set work, currently using email and our Purple Mash Platform. We are aware that Purple Mash is by no means ideal but at least it is currently a platform that allows us to connect remotely and many children have enjoyed using it. We have learnt much by using it more during the Spring and Summer terms and by listening to your feedback and that of your children. Our use of it during a bubble closure may well be different to what



you have previously experienced and children will be better at using it as their teachers are reinforcing the use of its best aspects through their lessons in school. Moving through this year, our 'remote offer' is likely to change as we make progress on setting up a 'Google Classroom' platform.

Following an initial analysis of responses so far in the parental survey and pupil feedback from individual year groups, the situations of our pupils when learning at home is wide and varied and our aim is to provide parity for all, especially where devices are shared within families. As a school we need to engage with all pupils and offer the best quality of education that we can at all times.

There has been much talk in the media about 'live lessons' and there is an ongoing debate about what would be appropriate in a primary school context. Currently, despite the debate, there has been little agreement about what works best! When 'Google Classrooms' is in place, we will be in a better position to consider the use of some age appropriate live experiences to enhance learning and prompt independent task engagement as part of our remote learning package. This will be an opportunity to engage with a specific purpose but will not replicate the nuances of learning in the classroom as we know it. It will be just one part of the remote learning experience in the week's schedule. We will of course, where appropriate, direct classes to the recorded lessons available via the Oak National Academy, BBC BiteSize as well as other recorded materials (e.g. White Rose Maths). Maintaining Teacher / pupil and peer to peer relationships will be a priority that runs hand in hand with developing, building and reinforcing appropriate learning experiences during the remote experience. This is a work in progress and will not be available immediately. I will keep you updated as this develops. We will all have much to learn as we begin to engage with it.



Digital access from home – parental survey

We are currently engaging with families to get a much clearer picture of what digital access is like at home for our families. This will influence how we shape our future digital strategy and may help us to direct necessary resources to those who most need them. Over 120 parents have already responded (thank you!) Governors are keen to invest heavily in this area over the coming years and are keen to get this right – your responses will be really helpful.

Please do complete the initial survey to help us. It is available via the following link:
https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=Du_J43VUNk28kpLmsyCso3U-FgE_MdxKhcmhR9u6idFURE85R083Q0JUV0JNMEdUNzZZSjdZUEUyNi4u

If you would prefer a paper copy, please contact the school office.

You will have heard much in the media about government investment in internet enabled devices for schools. Last year we received none. We were told in July that we had been allocated eleven laptops should the school need to close or significant numbers of pupils were in isolation. This week we were informed that this allocation has now been reduced to two devices! Clearly, we need to plan our own strategy, rather than relying on this.

Developing our digital strategy will include increasing our stock of digital devices (Chromebooks, laptops and tablets). Ideally, we hope to have spare devices available to loan should the need arise in



the future. During the March lockdown we were fortunate to be able to loan a small bank of devices provided through Caritas and the local Rotary Club and a number of families found this really useful. Currently we have a very small bank of devices which we could loan should the need arise; If you have a redundant device at home that is usable, we would happily find a way to use it as a loan item.

Thank you to everyone who has donated to the PSA Just Giving Chromebook fundraiser which can be accessed via the following link:

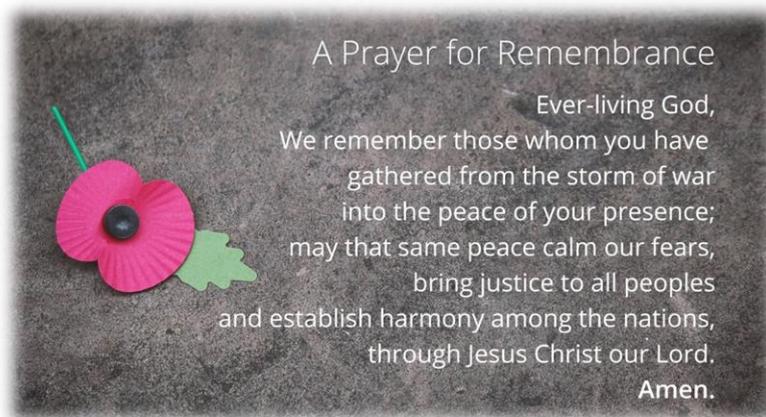
<https://www.justgiving.com/campaign/stvincentdepaulchromebooks>

This has already raised £2130 towards the purchase of devices for use in the classrooms. I look forward to putting an order in soon! We are indebted generosity – thank you!

Parent Consultations

It will be great for staff and parents to meet to discuss how your children have returned, what their targets are and how we can continue to work together to best support them. Parent consultations will be occurring when we return after half term via a digital video link using a new portal, School Cloud. Appointments are not ready to book as yet as we are still trialling the system to check its reliability. Once this is complete, we will explain how to register for appointments. In the meantime, please continue to make use of the teacher email addresses to raise any questions or concerns that you may have about learning or wellbeing during the school week.

Field of Remembrance



Returning after the half-term holidays you will notice our Field of Remembrance as we work as a school to commemorate Armistice Day. Classes will be spending time making items to decorate the tree under which it is situated, adjacent to the path as you leave the site. If you would like to join with your child to make a waterproof poppy that could be placed here, you will find some useful links below that may help. You may also have your own brilliant ideas.

Plastic bottle poppies:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ILPivqj7mQ>

Polythene bag poppies:

https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/544161567478459726/?nic_v2=1a6MxWnRs

As this may involve cutting a plastic bottle, adult support will be required. Please note that you can also paint plastic bottles using poster paint with PVA glue mixed in rather than needing access to acrylic or spray paints. If you can find a way to attach your poppy to a stem that can be used to secure your poppy to the ground that would really help too. Please help your child to place their Poppy in the Field of Remembrance before school during the first week after November. Our Field of Remembrance will be the focus for our Virtual Act of Remembrance on 11th November. The school will also be represented at the Virtual Remembrance Sunday Service organised by the Stevenage branch of The Royal British Legion (RBL) and a wreath will be laid at the War Memorial on Bowling Green by the RBL on behalf of



our community. Poppies will be on sale before and after school each day on the infant playground for a minimum donation of 20p. It is important that our children are able to feel a part of these important commemorations, thinking of those who laid down their lives for our freedom today and joined in prayer for a peaceful future. 'Lest we Forget' indeed.

Throughout November, in the usual tradition of the Catholic Church, we will also remember in our weekly prayers the names of those associated with our families who are already in heaven. If you wish a family name to be remembered in our Book of Remembrance, please email names to rsherry@stvincent.herts.sch.uk.

Thank you for your charitable acts recently:

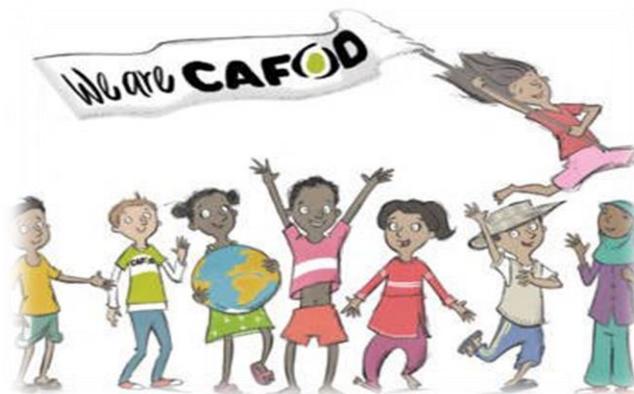
Kindness reaching beyond our community locally

Following Father Nigel's blessing of your generous harvest donations, they have been delivered this week to Haven First, Feed Up Warm Up, Stevenage Food Shed and Stevenage Food Bank. These have all been gratefully received and will support those locally who most need our support. Your donations were significant and will make a real difference



Kindness beyond our community internationally

Around £300 was raised through non-uniform donations on Friday. This will be sent to CAFOD to support overseas harvest projects. Thank you!



Kindness within our own school community

Some items from the Harvest collection have been put aside to support any of our own families who may need it. We are aware that many families' incomes have been impacted by Covid related issues and should your circumstances have changed, please do contact either Mrs Sherry or myself for support should you need it. As well as access to some of the Harvest donations, we also are able to direct families towards other practical and financial support locally.



May I thank you also for your generous donation of cleaning items - this is really helping us to keep our Covid related cleaning costs down. We have all been amazed at your donations and have had to set up a new special cleaning cupboard to store all the items - thank you!

Chatterbox conversation – an exciting new learning space

Returning after the holidays, you will notice that the Chatterbox has been removed. The ground has been prepared with the services required to house a new multi-purpose learning room which will be built during December. The area will be fenced off for your safety over the coming months but will be an exciting addition to the site once completed



Congratulations

It was wonderful to hear that Mrs Brannigan, former headteacher of St Vincent de Paul School, was awarded a British Empire Medal for services to the community in Hitchin in the recent Queen's Birthday Honours recently.



The whole community extends its congratulations to Mrs Brannigan for her well-deserved award.

Wishing you and your families a fruitful half term break. I look forward to welcoming everyone back to school on Monday 2nd November.

May God bless you and those most dear to you.

Yours sincerely,

Mr Jon White
Headteacher

