

8th January 2021

Dear Parents/ Carers,

This has been a week unlike any other within education. As I reflected with all our Headteachers this morning I was astounded with all that has taken place within the last seven days. Last Friday was New Years Day and since then our school leaders and staff have worked tirelessly to facilitate everything that has been asked of them.

The challenges have been significant for all of us. There was the uncertainty around us opening on Sunday. We heard about a national lockdown at the same time as the rest of the nation on Monday, and then over the next 24 hours or so arranged places in school for eligible children, sorted remote learning, ensured pupils had work packs if required, helped secure technology for pupils, arranged free school meals, and so many other tasks. I sit here with total pride and admiration for all members of our school communities and the achievements of this week.

We would also like to thank you for taking the time to feedback your thanks and support. Our schools have reported the wonderful feedback from yourselves as parents and carers regarding what they have undertaken this week. Your positive thoughts and comments on the correspondence you and your child have had with their teacher, the quality of lessons provided and the effective organisation of everything makes a huge difference. Thank you.

I am also aware that there has been much in the media in recent days regarding remote learning and the provision within school and would like to share some of this from a Trust perspective.

We are passionate about the education of each and every child within Epworth Education Trust and endeavour to provide the very best for them. We agree that our preference would be for all pupils to be in school and look forward to the day when we can be back together as a school family, but we continually weigh this up against ensuring the safety of our whole school community – staff and children alike. The government have stated on numerous occasions that schools are no less safe for young people, but we recognise that with the increased transmission rate of the new variant that schools have become less safe for staff. We have a legal requirement as a Trust to ensure that we have a risk assessment in place to mitigate the risk and the decision we have made is to have a set capacity in each school to the number of pupils we can cater for.

For the vast majority of children, we have been able to meet all the requests for school spaces. Sadly, there are a small number of you we haven't been able to support in the same way. Whilst this has been tremendously difficult, I'm am sure you'll agree that it is essential for us to safeguard all members of our school community. Headteachers will constantly review this capacity, taking into consideration the rate of infection within their area, availability of staff alongside demand for places.

This week I have had some opportunity to review the remote learning offer that has been provided by our schools and have been impressed by the quality of offer and the range of provision provided. The government have set a minimum expectation of daily provision a teacher should offer and our schools are working within this. Following the government guidance, they are using a range of mediums to provide this including videos (some pre-recorded, some live), printed activities and tasks. The government recognise that it's not good to be in front of the screen all day so this range of ways of working support this effectively. Staff have reported that the children enjoy the pre-recorded videos as they can go back and listen again if they need to check something.

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We cannot do this alone, and we would like to thank you all for the support you are providing your children at home and know that every family has its own challenges to consider. I know from my own household, for example, the pressures of having multiple children all needing attention. I have been heartened by how staff are trying to adapt to manage the delivery of these lessons at a time that suits your family best. I'm sure that the schools will continue to review and refine this provision as the time passes so please continue to provide the feedback that will help to shape this.

Against the backdrop of so much uncertainty, stress and understandable concern, and I have seen school leaders and staff doing a brilliant job. I'm sure you'll want to join me in thanking them for going the extra mile to ensure they continue to provide high quality education to your child. If there is something you are particularly impressed with in your school, I would love you to share it with me via the email address below.

I would just like to close by thanking each of you for the support you have given to your schools this week.

Best Wishes and Stay Safe

Julie-Ann Hewitt