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The FORT Federation

“Living, loving and learning forever; becoming the best as we journey together.”

Executive Headteacher: Mrs Penny Hammett

22nd January 2021

Dear Parents,

I hope you are keeping safe. I wanted to write with an update on the launch of the new learning platform Google Classroom.

As with anything new there is always going to be a few teething problems and it would be fair to say the feedback from Google classroom is like marmite. You either love it or hate it. Either way it's here to stay and it is a platform promoted and paid for by the DfE and it is readily accepted by Ofsted and external advisors.

We are still at the very early stages of understanding it and using it effectively. Teachers have had only a few days more than you to get to grips with the learning platform so I would like to apologise if you feel we haven't given clear direction and support. It has been suggested we send a survey out but it is far too early to seek opinions while we are still learning to use the online learning platform. We are working through the technical issues as quickly as possible. Therefore, I would ask again for some patience, as we are managing a pandemic while trying to roll out a new system. Many schools having been using this platform for many months and we are currently only four days in.

I am confident we will all get used to it in time and in turn appreciate its capacity to support children's learning.

Teachers are definitively appreciating the ability to see who is accessing the work and being able to return work back in the same place. We are still working on understanding it fully and staff had another training session last night to answer some of the issues that have arisen.

Just to confirm there is no intention of live learning lessons. We are meeting our DfE requirements in regards to remote learning and I have assurance from the majority of other Head teachers in the Ottery and Honiton learning community that they are also not doing live learning.

Whilst I appreciate many secondary schools such as Colyton, Honiton and Kings are offering live lessons, the guidance states '*We expect schools to consider these expectations in relation to the **pupils' age, stage of development or special educational needs...***' Parents must remember that we cannot compare the concentration of secondary pupils with that of primary pupils. However, I spent some time yesterday checking with the other primary schools in our Local Learning Community (Tipton, Feniton, Ottery and West Hill) and none of them are doing live teaching lessons. Like us, some of them are offering a recorded story, a Google Meet session or a short teaching input/link to an online video.

When Feniton Primary had a year group bubble self-isolating at home, they tried to do 3 Zoom sessions daily (max 15-20 mins) This was not teaching but more about motivation, trying to set the scene of what to do and a little feedback. They found they were quickly losing children's attention after just a few minutes! The DfE guidance clearly recognises using Oak Academy and White Rose lessons as 'live lessons'. All Ottery and Honiton learning community schools are using Oak Academy materials supplemented by lots of additional online materials.

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One aspect of the platform that needs to be emphasised is the private messaging/email section between pupils and teacher. The google classroom is for the children and teacher to communicate, it is not a private messaging opportunity between parents and teachers. Messages from parents to teachers should still be directed through the normal channels, via the administrator. Private messaging to teachers is not acceptable and will not be answered.

The reason for this is to manage my teachers work load, welfare and work life balance. Direct messaging through the day time is not always possible because they are managing everything else and then evening messages can become overwhelming.

The admin email box is managed during working hours but teachers have been receiving direct emails/private messages as late as 11pm. They are working through the evening to manage the messages and I will not let this continue. While I appreciate parents often have to send emails when they finally get a few free minutes in the busy day but sending to the admin account ensures emails and messages are addressed within the school day.

The Google Meet is also not the place for parents to air concerns or try to engage the teacher in a dialogue about personal issues. This is not the correct forum in front of other children and this behaviour is considered unacceptable. These sessions are purely for dialogue between pupil and teacher. Any unplanned engagement of adults within a Google Meet will result in immediate removal from the Meeting.

A Google Meet code of conduct will be placed on Google Classroom next week for all to read and follow. I thought I would also confirm that the school will begin lateral flow testing for all staff members from next week. Hopefully this will help us reduce possible transmission through asymptomatic adults in school. I hope you find this update useful. I am sorry if you are feeling overwhelmed and stressed with all the additional responsibilities of trying to support your child during lockdown. I can assure you we all just want the children to come back to school as long as it is deemed safe. We miss the children and never imagined having to ever teach in this way. It would be fair to say we are all struggling to manage this situation. Please be patient with us as this pandemic is testing us all to our limits.

I spend every day thinking of two words: Hope and Courage. I think about the future and all the hopes of positive things to come and I ask myself to stay strong and not to give up. Reminding myself we all need courage while being faced with so many difficult challenges.

I wish you all a lovely weekend,

With regards,
Mrs Hammett