

Wellsway Multi Academy Trust Parents and Carers Newsletter

14 January 2021



Message from the Chief Executive

Dear Parent/Carer,

Happy New Year!

2021 has started in a way we are becoming accustomed to with a spectacular last minute change to the planned re-opening of schools. We learned of this at the same time as everybody else, whilst listening to the Prime Minister's speech on Monday night. You can imagine the flurry of activity this caused and I take my hat off to our school leaders and central Trust team who immediately sprang into action to organise and communicate the closure of our primary schools for the following morning. We are very grateful to parents and carers for your understanding, forbearance and support with this last minute change. I know we all understand the reason for this change and the importance of reducing our close contacts whilst the rate of transmission remains high.

All of our schools are focused on developing further their remote learning offer to provide a high quality learning experience. [Ofsted published a helpful guide](#) this week that helps to explain what this might look like. It also helps to de-bunk the myth that the best remote learning is always 'live learning'. Clearly this has its place, but alongside a suite of approaches that make for a rich and varied experience. Just like in the classroom, learning on-line requires a variety of teaching and learning methods to make sure it is effective and we appreciate your support as we continue to develop our remote learning offer.

Continuing on the theme of Ofsted, I was really heartened this week to read that parents around the country have written to Ofsted to let them know how well their child's school is responding to the current set of circumstances, prompted by the Secretary of State for Education encouraging them to complain! I know that a number of our parents have sent Ofsted positive comments about a WMAT school and it is much appreciated. Please do continue to give feedback to your child's school. All feedback is welcomed - positive feedback is such a morale booster and constructive critical feedback helps us to improve.

As in the first lockdown, we are very proud to be able to support the national effort through providing in-school learning for the children of critical workers. The definition of critical worker has broadened however, which is placing pressure on schools nationally. In our Trust, we are currently able to meet the demand for critical worker places but going forward it will depend on our ability to staff this provision. If any of our schools is in a position of having to reduce the number of places it can provide, we will apply the following criteria to prioritise:



'Our schools are focused on developing further their remote learning offer to provide a high quality learning experience'

WMAT Critical Worker Prioritisation Criteria

Priority A – equal first priority	Priority B – prioritised in order. Headings taken from GOV.UK	Priority C – prioritised in order. Headings taken from GOV.UK
Vulnerable children and young people	Children of single parent families where the parent is a Critical Worker and children from families where both parents are Critical Workers	Children from families where one parent is a Critical Worker
Pupils with a child in need plan, a child protection plan or who are a looked-after child	1 Children of workers from health and social care	Children of workers from health and social care
Pupils who have an education, health and care (EHC) plan and (at the school and LA's discretion) pupils who are in receipt of Top Up Funding to support their learning	2 Children of workers from education and childcare	Children of workers from education and childcare
Pupils who are on threshold of children's services or social case intervention or who are at risk of becoming NEET.	3 All other key worker categories (subject to verification by the school that the employment satisfies the government's definitions of critical work).	All other key worker categories
Adopted children, children on a special guardianship order and care leavers		
Others at the provider and local authority's discretion including pupils and students who need to attend to receive support or manage risks to their mental health		
Those who are young carers		
Disadvantaged pupils identified by the school as not being able to access remote education through lack of IT equipment.		

With transmission rates remaining high our message to parents is to keep their children at home if they can and to only use the critical worker provision if it means they would otherwise not be able to go to work.

In our secondary schools, we are setting up testing stations to enable us to roll out the government's mass testing programme to staff and pupils. Testing will be done using rapid lateral flow devices (LFD) that give a result in 20 – 30 minutes. Positive cases will be followed up by a PCR test and it is hoped that this will help to pick up asymptomatic cases and reduce transmission. Parents/carers with a child in a WMAT secondary school have been asked to complete a consent form and the intention is to begin the testing of those staff and pupils in school by Monday 18th January. The logistics of setting this up are not easy but we believe it is important for us to take part in something which, alongside the mass vaccination programme, has the potential to be a game changer. We are certainly encouraging everyone to take part.

A second major change last week, was the announcement from the DfE that statutory tests and examinations will not take place this year. This applies to GCSE and A level and to all primary school testing, including reading tests. We do not yet know how GCSE and A level grades will be awarded but coursework and teacher assessment grades will clearly be very important. This makes it even more important for students in Years 11 and 13 to continue to work hard and to make sure their on-going assessments reflect their ability.

The New Year did start in a very positive way however with the news that our colleague, Margaret Simmons-Bird, had received a MBE in the New Year's Honours List. Margaret, who is our Executive Lead for School Improvement, has received this honour in recognition of her services to education, having dedicated her working life to the profession. Margaret has had a fantastic career working in schools and local authorities. Prior to joining WMAT she was Head of Educational Transformation for B&NES Council and previously worked in a school improvement role for South Gloucestershire Council. We are delighted for Margaret who is so deserving of this honour.

We send our good wishes to all our pupils and students and urge them to continue to try their best. Hopefully it won't be too long before we can welcome them all back to school but, in the meantime, we hope they take care, work hard and stay safe.

With best wishes,

Andrea Arlidge, Chief Executive

Free School Meals for children not attending school

Since the start of this term the Trust has been providing supermarket vouchers for families eligible to benefits-related free school meals. This scheme will continue until 12th February at which point it will be reviewed in light of the situation at that time.

Words of thanks

Thank you to the many parents who have contacted schools in the last week with comments about remote learning. It is heartening that, almost exclusively, these were positive messages about the quality of remote learning being prepared by our schools and the hard work of our colleagues in putting a high quality programme together at such short notice.

The topic of remote education has been discussed widely in schools and the media in recent days. The subject of 'live lessons' seems to be a particular area of discussion. It is unhelpful that, in this discussion, there is a wide and varied understanding of what a 'live lesson' actually consists of. Different establishments use the term 'live lesson' when they refer to a camera at the back of a classroom streaming and recording the pupils' normal teacher delivering a lesson; other use the term to refer to a teacher being available to chat online whilst a pre-recorded lesson is taking place.

Ofsted have entered this debate this week, giving their view of the value of live lessons:

"Some think that a live lesson is the 'gold standard' of remote education. This isn't necessarily the case. Live lessons have a lot of advantages. They can make curriculum alignment easier, and can keep pupils' attention, not least as the teacher has more control over the learning environment. But live lessons can lack flexibility and interaction, and it may be better to use an approach where new content is taught through a recorded lesson before pupils put this into practice and receive tutoring and feedback."



WMAT secondaries are already engaged in the delivery of live lessons to some year groups, to be rolled out to all years in the next week. Our primaries have begun to trial this too, with a focus on teacher and peer interactions and feedback to improve learning. In both primaries and secondaries, we will be taking account of the evidence on the best practice, using a range of activities; recorded lessons; recall and practice activities; assessments; live peer and teacher interaction; live feedback sessions. This will ensure that, shortly, we have a programme of remote activity that promotes learning, engages pupils and is mindful of wellbeing.

Gary Schlick, Director of Education

These are just some of the messages we have received

I'd like to say a big thank you to everyone working at The Meadows this week. It must have been very challenging changing the school plans at short notice.

My children were in on Wednesday and Friday & they loved it. They are so lucky to be in their usual school and even in the same classroom.

Keep up the good work and thank you again.

A huge thanks to you and everyone in the school working so hard to pull all this together at such short notice.

It's a real relief that the schoolwork will be sent the night before to enable us to get our heads around it and properly prepare for the following day. Thank you!

You all did an amazing job getting the school up and running with such short notice of them closing, so thank you!

I wanted to say a huge thank you to you all. Our son has loved coming in, feels cared for and valued during these difficult times. I was totally impressed how quickly you responded to Boris's announcement and provided work which is suitable and which he has enjoyed doing so far.

Hi. Just a quick message to say thank you for doing the live lessons today, my son really enjoyed it and said it was much better doing home schooling that way, he seemed much more 'engaged' in learning and I really think it helped. I've been really worried about his lack of enthusiasm for home schooling, but this made a positive difference so I just wanted to say thank you to everyone involved (and especially to the teachers) we think it's excellent!

Just wanted to send a quick message to pass on our thanks and appreciation to Joy and the whole team for everything you are all doing in these incredibly challenging times. Mrs Campbell has also been brilliant at communicating with us and the rest of the EYFS teachers and support staff have been so supportive. Considering how late you got notified of the requirement to close, everything you have done has been amazing with the children's education and wellbeing at the heart of it all.

We are very appreciative of the many parents who help keep our spirits up as we face the latest lockdown restrictions together. Before Christmas we were overwhelmed with cards and messages of support from families and the messages have kept coming into this new year:

"I wanted to thank you and the rest of the Saltford School teaching and support team for all your hard work, ensuring we had a seamless transition to online learning.

Thank you... for everything you are all doing to ensure we still feel part of the Saltford School community during these challenging times."

"I just wanted to thank you and all of the wonderful teachers, TA's and everyone who is working tirelessly in these difficult times. With very little time you have provided a happy and safe environment for those who still need to attend school.

I hope you all know how truly amazing you are and we are proud to have our boys in Saltford school."

Concentrated learning

Reception children at Chandag Infants were tasked with making bird feeders for the school garden. This activity was also enjoyed by some of the children who are home schooling.

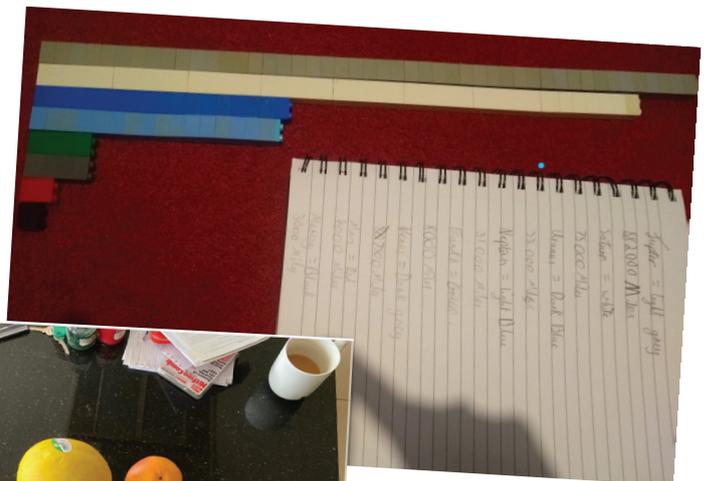
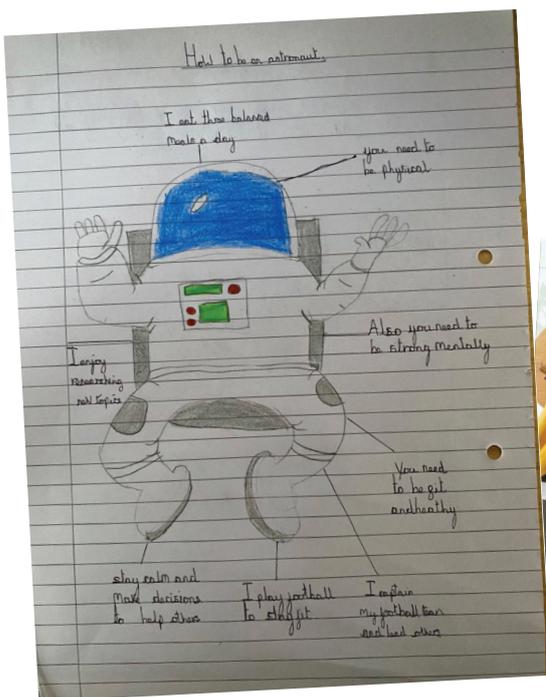
Some children wanted to try sewing new clothes for the babies in the home corner. Concentration levels were very high!

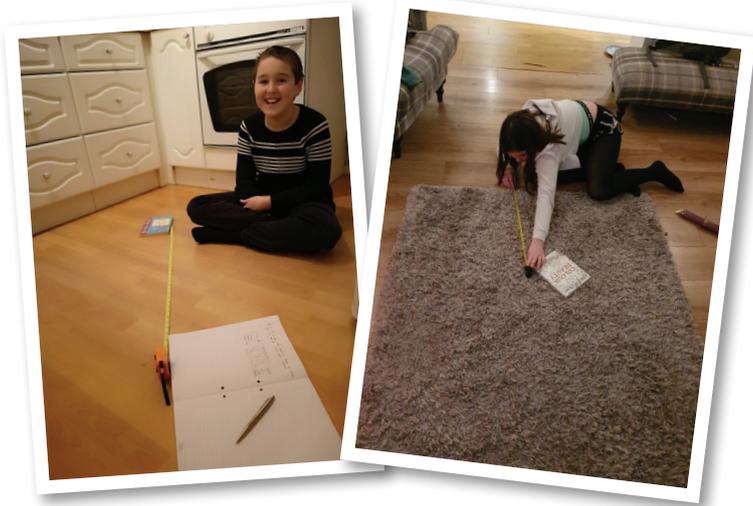
The children have been writing about the *Whatever Next* story and uploading their work to Tapestry.



Chandag Juniors are reaching for the stars!

One of the pupils explained the reasons why he would make a good astronaut, another created a model of the solar system using fruit, and another created a bar chart out of Lego to show the diameters of the planets in the solar system. What inventive ways to learn about space travel and our solar system!





Science at home

The Year 7 students at Wellsway School have been doing practical experiments at home to investigate the effect of friction on different surfaces.

We shall go to the ball!

At Saltford Primary we have a strong tradition of going to the pantomime at the Theatre Royal. It brightens our January as children and staff alike go in full fancy dress and throw themselves into the spirit of it.

Undeterred by this year's restrictions, we were able to treat all children to a unique pantomime performance of 'Cinderella' directly in their own homes. Mums and Dads could even come along too this time. Costumes on, popcorn at the ready, it's time to have fun!

This was an interactive, livestreamed performance that allowed live reaction to the show. Children had been given lots of panto related activities to get them started and during the show there was the opportunity for live chat, prizes and sing-a-longs.

Everyone who was in school joined in at the same time, giving a shared experience for us all.

We all immensely enjoyed the fun and laughter and congratulate the children on their enthusiastic responses and for dressing up for the occasion. Thanks to our super PTA who funded this opportunity and to Mrs Brook and Mr Bowkett for their organisation.



Could you make a difference?

The growth of our Trust means we need more inspirational and professional people to join our dedicated and passionate staff team. If you are planning your next career move, and think you could help make a difference for our students, please take a look at the [vacancies across the WMAT](#).