



Ox Close Federation Newsletter

June 12th 2020



Wider Re-opening

As we are opening more widely next week, I thought that it was only right that we produced a newsletter this week. We have robust measures and plans in place and we have made a plan which adheres to the safety guidance in the best interests of the children, staff and the community and which reflects the context of Ox Close. This context is one which year groups total approximately 45 and where classrooms have a capacity of a maximum of 10 while adhering to current safety guidance and available adults. Our planning is very much on a school level and Durham County Council have advised that Public Health concerns have eased at this time. For now, we are ready and we are looking forward to the challenges which lie ahead. It will be very different to normal but we will ensure that we offer every reassurance and possible opportunity to the children from Nursery, Reception, Year 1 and Year 6.

Future Plans

This week the Government realised that it was impossible to accommodate children from all year groups in school simultaneously under current guidance. It is highly likely that the 2m rule will be side-lined and we have already modelled how many children could be accommodated at any one time with 1m and 1.5 metre distances. Of course, in terms of staffing, we also have to follow workplace safety and provide spaces where staff can safely socially distance and this is more of a challenge for Ox Close than others due to the numbers of staff. We will continue to plan ahead and communicate with parents to keep you up to speed. I have also asked the Local Authority about whether they have any plans to increase the size of their estate through the use of demountable buildings or other public buildings across the County. Creative thinking will be necessary in order to allow for maximum learning opportunities while keeping children safe.

Online Interaction

Regular readers will know that I have been keen to further improve our learning offer via digital interaction for months. Context is needed and it should be noted that our online offer is significant and I would argue that it is far more substantial than that offered by the vast majority of other Primary Schools. Our Parent Survey results gave evidence that parents agree with my views. However, my philosophy has always been to 'Be the best that you can be' and it always will be while I remain as Executive Headteacher of this Federation. Learning is about far more than content, excellent as ours is. Children need and thrive upon social interaction with the teacher and each other. Achieving this digitally is incredibly complex, especially for Primary Schools who do not possess their own IT departments. We are, though, making big strides. This will include the use of Zoom and Microsoft Teams on a regular basis if, as likely, the children are not in school full time in September. Next week we will hopefully offer all Key Stage 1 the opportunity to take part in a Zoom call, while we also have plans for Reception and Nursery soon and using Zoom with Key Stage for some events with Key Stage 2 before the end of the year.

Microsoft Teams

This week we have trialled Teams with more children in Year 5, some in Year 4 and provided training for several staff, as well as sent out user names and passwords to all Year 5 children. The maximum number on the screen at any one time was 4 and now it has been increased to 9. I would like to thank all of the staff for taking this on board and the children and parents who have helped in the trials. Every time we run a trial, we learn something new and this will help us in our ambition to successfully engage with all Key Stage 2 pupils digitally before the end of the academic year. Mr Crowther deserves particular credit as he has been leading a lot of training in this field.

Zoom

We are going to be starting a Zoom meeting for children in Year 1 / 2 classes next week. The meetings will take place every Wednesday at 10am for year 1 children and 1:30pm for year 2 children. Children will be able to join with call with two teachers from the Year 1 / 2 team and other children from their class. The purpose of this is to give them a platform to make contact with staff and children on a weekly basis. For the first meeting, on Wednesday 17th June, children will be asked to show or tell us about something they have done over the last few weeks that they are proud of. This could be a piece of work, something they have been working on at home or an exciting piece of news e.g.; they have learnt to ride their bike. At the end of each meeting, children will be given something to think about ready for the next meeting. A text message will be sent to

parents with a link to the Zoom meeting. The link will allow them to download the app, prior to the meeting, and they will also receive a code to sign into the meeting with at the given time. We hope that this will be something that the children will look forward to taking part in. We will all look forward to seeing them. A text message will be sent to parents, with the link, on Monday.

Further information on Zoom for Reception and Nursery will follow.

Farewell Miss Lanagan

Miss Lanagan has been successful in applying for a position which is close to where she lives and so will leave us at the end of this term. She joined us as we looked to reduce class sizes across Years 5 and 6 in the run up to the SATs. Nobody could have guessed how this year would turn out! Miss Lanagan is a very dedicated and enthusiastic teacher and I would like to take this opportunity to thank her for her contribution to Ox Close and to wish her well for the future.

Farewell Mr Shannon

Mr Shannon is also moving on to pursue new challenges as he has left his Sedgefield School Sports Partnership course. He has been part of our team for almost 2 years and I know that he has enjoyed working with the children. I will miss our chats about Football and I am even prepared to congratulate Mr Shannon upon the impending Premier League triumph of his beloved Liverpool. Good luck Mr Shannon!

Y6 Leavers and Nursery Graduation

The end of every academic year is an extremely significant event for all pupils and I am making plans as to what we can do to mark this in a digital manner. This is especially important for our Nursery and Year 6 children, who are due to move on to new settings in September. I have some ideas and I will be discussing these with other school leaders and staff soon. It is really important that we give the Nursery and Year 6 children with a suitable leaving event, even though it will have to be a virtual one. Year 6 children will have their hoodies plus Leavers Books are available to order.

End of Year Reports

These are well underway and will be sent to all parents, irrespective of whether your child is attending school.

Sports Day/Week

Sports Days are something which children from across the Federation thoroughly enjoy. We won't be able to host them in our normal manner but we will be attempting to host a Virtual Sports Day at some point before the end of the year. Recently, we tried an Activity Week, which some of you will have seen on Facebook. My plan is to offer a range of similar challenges, which will be differentiated by age and ask for children and parents to take part in these and to post them on a given day/week.

Thank you Miss Bowden

These past months have been the most difficult that I have experienced as a Headteacher and I can say that, even though I have always worked long hours, I have never been so busy and both Miss Bowden and I are regularly working around the clock 7 days per week. I am very fortunate to have Miss Bowden alongside me and I am sure that everyone would agree that she does a fantastic job, both under normal circumstances and during this crisis (not to mention the Tik Tok). We have been bombarded from all sides and the level of social care responsibility, constant Government updates Local Authority information, virtual visits, virtual meetings, planning, staff organisation and risk assessment has been phenomenal, not to mention our aim to maintain community and learning. Miss Bowden's dedication and skills are a fantastic asset to Ox Close and she has helped us to navigate this unprecedented period. It is fair to say that, having worked through all holidays and Bank Holidays, we are both looking forward to some recuperation in the summer!

Ox Close Podcast

Mrs Abley has been a terrific partner on recent podcasts. Our latest episode went online on Tuesday. We are now planning to air the podcast every fortnight in order to maximise interest.

Hall of Fame

If your child wins an award on the podcast then we have a Hall of Fame section on both Facebook pages and please do post pictures of the children with their certificates and or awards, if you can. It is great to celebrate and to spread the good word.

Stay Safe

Our next scheduled newsletter is due out on June 19th 2020. Until then, stay safe and take care.

D Harrison

Mr D Harrison
Executive Headteacher