

*With Christ we **Achieve, Believe and Create***

Principal: Mrs Stephanie Cottrill

Chair of Governors: Mr John Bellasis

Tel: 01865 373 674

Email: stthomasmore@dbmac.org.uk

Website: www.st-thomas-more.oxon.sch.uk

Dear Parents, Carers and Teachers,

I write to all those who contribute to the life of our school, but I would like to focus on those involved most directly with the education of all our children. Others involved can read into this as being as relevant to them because we are all involved in a most unusual situation. The children, who would normally be told to go to school, are told instead to stay home. Such a radical change must have an effect upon a young mind that might be difficult to determine. For this reason, it is so essential that the adults around try to create an illusion of normality. This is not easy when one's own mind is in turmoil.

There is no need for me to repeat all the news about the coronavirus, or COVID-19, nor prescribe to you best practice. The governing body has asked me to convey to you their support and understanding, and to re-assure you that we remain active in our role, albeit remotely. It has been very difficult to know what to do. This goes for everybody without exception. We are wading through uncharted territory with many on-going challenges that may be difficult to deal with.

It is vital that we stay healthy as best we can. It is important for the children that we remain calm. It is helpful to each of us, if we can identify with something that preserves that degree of normality that we need. For most of us, that is our Faith. Fr Prem, has done an exceptional job in keeping the Catholic community together. The last School Mass was one of the first interactive masses in the world. It has been most rewarding to see his mother join in from Sri Lanka; even my sister joined us from Queensland, and Fr Marco from Rome. These are some examples of how each one of you can feel involved, even in the isolation of lockdown.

Our new Principal has had the greatest challenge that could have been thrust upon any Head Teacher, let alone a new one! Stephanie Cottrill has managed to steer us through the school closure, the care of certain children still needing to come in, the remote learning in which you are all so intensely involved. It is a credit to you Teachers that you could switch into this mode with very little warning.

We pay particular credit to those staff that have made a sustained effort over the last few weeks to provide online learning remotely, and by coming in to school on a rota basis. As a result, we have been able to keep children motivated, and we have supported and nurtured those children who need to be in school.

People generally have been affected by the coronavirus in many different ways. Some have suffered severe distress whilst others have not been touched. The threat is real but unseen. We do not know if we have immunity or resilience. We might touch it. We might breathe it. We might not have enough vitamin D. We might run out of money. All these worries, and more, can affect our mental health if we are vulnerable. So we need to look out for each other. If you feel vulnerable, you must get in touch in any way you can with the school community. We may be able to help in some way.

In the meantime, we are all waiting to hear the latest news from the government. Just as suddenly as we went into lockdown, so we might emerge from it. Mrs Cottrill has to follow whatever guidelines are published from government. We must all pull together behind her leadership to make the return to school a joyful event. Hopefully, we will be able to reflect on all the good things that happened, such as cleaner air, brighter stars, emptier roads, quieter skies, friendlier neighbours perhaps; possibly even some special care that was given to outweigh the difficulty. The children will remember this.

Keep well, keep safe and seek ways to keep the Faith.
John Bellasis 8th May 2020

