



Dear Parents and Carers

SHIRE OAK
C of E (VC) Primary School

This is a very strange letter to write, especially as this newsletter is most often used to celebrate the learning and achievements of our children. I hope to still do that later in this letter. Like you, we heard of the plan to **close UK schools** as the Prime Minister spoke at the press conference on Wednesday evening. Since then all our staff have been working incredibly hard to make sure that the children's last day in school this week is a **positive and calm** one and to ensure that plans are in place to support children whilst they are at home.

School is being asked to stay partially open to ensure that **key workers** are still able to work during this time, and to provide care for some of our more **vulnerable learners**. As I write this late on Thursday night, we have not yet had guidance on who this offer is intended for. We are, therefore, trying to apply common sense principles that preserve the intention of a school shutdown – to minimise the spread of the novel Corona virus in the school community and beyond - whilst ensuring that people who are absolutely needed for health and welfare roles (and have no other childcare at home) can get to work. If you believe you are a key worker (e.g. doctor, nurse, paramedic, delivery driver) without childcare at home and have not already spoken to us about your needs, please do so as soon as possible – on Friday ideally! Similarly, if your child has an Education Health Care Plan, social care involvement or similar please talk to us about how we can best support your child and their learning at this time. Although school will be open to this small number of children, it will not be possible to run a usual school day in separate classes. Children will be together in a 'school club' where they can work on the same tasks set for their classmates at home, play outside and do project work and other activities. It will be childcare rather than our usual educational offer. Please know that we are entirely sympathetic to other working parents or parents struggling to work at home / keep a business afloat and would help you all if we safely could. We understand that keeping numbers to below 10% of our cohort has the best chance of managing the risks associated with the limited opening of school.

School staff have been busy making **learning packs** for children to take home with books, resources, logins to relevant sites, challenges, current spellings, Maths Passport targets, a letter for their year group and other useful information. Please do take the time to look through this pack and make use of it. Although we know it is not the same as being in a class with other learners and teaching staff who can explain and give feedback in person, we are aiming to supplement this with regular, **additional tasks set by staff**. For children in Years 2 to 6, this will primarily be via Google Classroom. Years 4-6 are already confident with using this tool and Years 2 and 3 have been set up to use it, with your help. Reception will use Tapestry (and possibly their Twitter account) to communicate with you. Year 1 will use the email addresses of parents/carers to stay in touch. **Please make sure we have a current email address for someone who will be at home with the children.** (Email office@shireoak.leeds.sch.uk to let us know new email addresses. Thank you.) Although these are online tools, the intention is not to hugely increase the screen time of our pupils, but to communicate via the Internet and give tasks that can be done practically and on paper too. At school our Internet access is filtered and monitored but we know that this will not be in place in every home. Please, therefore, be vigilant when your child is accessing the Internet and restrict their browsing. We will supply direct links, wherever possible, to suitable sites. Again, however, these will not have been tested in school, as is usually the case, so please help us by making sure your settings are robust and that children work on computers or tablets in a part of the house where you can see what they are doing. Teachers will also be suggesting physical activities and other fun things to do. We will share ideas via our website, www.shireoak.org We are very aware that we cannot replicate school at home, and that many of you will be working and sharing access to laptops, etc. **Let us know asap if you do not have access to a computer or tablet at home.** Our aim is to keep children feeling connected to school, practising key skills and having a structure to the day that helps them feel safe and calm. It may be useful to set certain times aside for schoolwork and perhaps even put on a **school jumper** for those times to feel part of the class and to give the day some routine. If all else fails, read, read and read some more! (We have provided a list of online book sites to help with this.)

This will be a challenging time for families and usual coping strategies and support networks might not be in place. Please do talk to us if you are struggling! As long as staff remain well enough, we will be keeping in touch with your children through Google Classroom, phone calls and some doorstep visits to say hello, ask how children are and see if they need any help with learning, etc. Please do put your child on to speak if we get in touch! (As these calls will not all come from the school building, they may be from a withheld number – if we think you are call screening we may try to text or let you know we are trying to get in touch so that you can answer.) The school switchboard will not always be in action during this closure, so please make a note of our **emergency mobile phone number 07714157030** as well as our email address office@shireoak.leeds.sch.uk

Leeds City Council Catering Agency are working with us to provide packed lunches for children who are eligible for means-tested **Free School Meals**. They are preparing them centrally and we are collecting them for families to pick up from our school some time after 12 o'clock. (We will text to confirm.) It is not yet clear whether children attending school club who do not qualify for Free School Meals will be provided with a lunch, so for now please plan to send a packed lunch if your child is given a place.

In these last two weeks before the planned Easter holiday, we will be working things out and collaborating with our local cluster of schools to find the safest and best way of providing care for those who need it. Frontline staff without childcare over the **Easter holidays** may be able to send their child to school during this time. We hope that by then the timescales involved will be clearer and we may move into a more timetabled approach to setting work for your children at home. We do know that the SATs tests for Year 2 and Year 6, the Phonics Screening Check for Year 1 and the Multiplication Check for Year 4 will not be going ahead this year. We will keep in touch with you by text, Twitter (@shireoakce) and our website to let you know when school is due to **open** again as well as share ideas for keeping busy at home.

I would like to round off this letter by celebrating some lovely recent learning. **Year 3** enjoyed their (modified) trip this week when they collected **public transport data** and did observational **sketches** linked to the railway. It was good to have them out in the fresh air enjoying their topic, even if they couldn't travel to the museum as planned.



Year 1 managed to share a lovely **class assembly** with us this week, despite low numbers and lots of last minute stand-ins. We particularly enjoyed their writing, their weaving and their spring time paintings which are now on display in their cloakroom.

Reception Class were not able to have such a busy and public art gallery as they had intended, but were still able to 'exhibit' and sell their beautiful self portraits to parents and carers at the end of the day on Wednesday. The observational skills and detail in the paintings was of a very high standard for 4 and 5 year olds and I am sure they will be treasured by their art investors.



As this newsletter is printed, we are waiting to hear the final total from our **Cash for Kids fundraiser**. Naturally, for all schools some of the events planned were cancelled or modified, but we hope that we managed to raise a good amount towards a Scrap Shed. It would certainly be something to look forward to when school reopens!

Finally, I would like to **thank you** for your kind messages of support and encouragement in these tricky times. It is encouraging to us that you have seen the efforts made by **Shire Oak staff** to remain calm and reassuring for children and keep 'business as usual' for as long as was possible. The Corona pandemic is going to be a key memory for many of our children and we want them to feel safe by remembering that the grown-ups are in charge and will love and protect them. For primary age children this time not at school will be a significant proportion of their young lives, so we want to make sure that it is as fun and as familiar as can be. I am – as always – very proud of our children and everyone who works at Shire Oak. Take care of each other, let us know if children or families are struggling, and I very much look forward to us being back together as a school community as soon as we can.

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