



BLACKMINSTER MIDDLE SCHOOL

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Dear Parents/Carers,

Writing at the start of the year, on behalf of the governing body I want to give our best wishes and hopes that 2021 is a better experience for everybody. We know that some of our families and staff have personally been affected by the pandemic and send our thoughts and condolences.

Since the pandemic arrived, the governing body has adopted a considered and cautious approach to the challenges we have faced, that puts the needs of our pupils and the health and wellbeing of all members of our community first. We believe that this is a sensible approach for our federation of two small community schools where individual pupils, staff and families are all important.

The leadership and staff of the schools have adapted to changing demands and continued to be passionate about supporting our pupils. As governors we have continued to maintain daily contact with the schools and although we have been restricted in visiting the school sites we have continued to meet online, to challenge and support the schools to provide the best possible learning experience for the pupils. The governors continue to be ambitious and enthusiastic about the future for our schools and to explore any opportunities for improving provision for our pupils.

As governors, we appreciate that the pandemic and the closure of schools to many pupils has been a difficult time for parents. All schools are doing their best to support their families during this challenging time and as a federation we want to support our community as much as possible. Remote learning is no replacement for face-to-face learning, with highly skilled teachers with a detailed knowledge of the curriculum, and expertise in engaging and motivating learners, to challenge them to achieve their full potential. It has also been appreciated; the important role that schools have in looking after the well-being and supporting the socialisation of young people. Social interaction is more challenging with online learning, and with social distancing and other restrictions on site.

There has been a focus this week in the media and on social media about the provision of remote learning by schools. As an educational consultant, I have personally been involved in discussions at a national level about how teachers time can be used effectively in online learning and about practical and safeguarding issues, such as whether microphones and cameras should be switched on or off. Ofsted have made some visits to schools this term and school are starting to receive some help and guidance from them sharing their experiences. This includes:



- Keep it simple and align the curriculum as closely as possible with the curriculum delivered in the classroom.
- It may be more effective sometimes to deliver remote learning through worksheets or textbooks.
- Beware of learners not being expected to spend too much time on screen.
- As in the classroom learning needs to be carefully sequenced to ensure that learners acquire the building blocks to move onto the next steps.
- It is important to provide learners with an overview of how a specific lesson sits within a sequence of lessons.
- Recorded lessons provide an opportunity to ensure that there is a clarity of explanations, which is important as teachers cannot correct misunderstandings as easily as in the classroom.
- Learners find it harder to concentrate during online learning, so it is good to divide learning into small chunks and to choose the language used carefully.
- It is more difficult to teach some subjects online so focus on the basics and the most important knowledge and concepts.
- Feedback and assessment are important, but this can be harder to deliver online and requires careful thought and consideration to ensure that it supports learning.
- Peer interactions are more difficult online but can provide motivation and improve learning outcomes and social skills.
- It is important for learners to stay in regular contact with teachers and schools need to consider how this can be managed effectively.
- Pupils are more engaged in online learning on a laptop or desk top computer than on other devices. Schools need to consider non digital approaches to remote learning for pupils who do not have good access to online learning.
- The internet can be a distraction for learning as well as supporting learning.
- Live lessons are not always the best learning experience. Using lessons produced externally can allow you to draw upon high quality recorded learning provision.
- Different approaches to remote learning suit different types of content and pupils.
- It is harder to engage and motivate pupils remotely than when they are in the classroom. There are more distractions and as a teacher you are not physically present to manage the situation.
- Communication and working with parents, without putting an unreasonable burden on them can help to support home learning.
- Engagement in learning increases when pupils feel part of the school community even when remotely learning.

This guidance shows that teachers, governors, and parents have a lot to consider when thinking about how they can do our best for the pupils in the schools. support the learning of pupils in these challenging circumstances. Schools are having to quickly think about how they can adapt approaches to teaching and learning and develop new skills in their staff. The Executive Headteacher and staff are working hard at both schools to use available resources to find the best approach to online learning, to teach vulnerable pupils and the children of key workers on site and to implement the latest guidance to keep everybody safe. The messages of support and donations from parents have been appreciated by the staff. It is also appreciated how parents have taken time to share their experience of home learning so we can improve the provision for the benefit of our pupils. We are all learning each day and



determined to provide pupils with a challenging and engaging learning experience despite the difficulties and challenges that we all face. Please contact the schools to make any suggestions or to give feedback on your experience. Positive comments are especially welcome as they help to provide the motivation needed on the more challenging days during this pandemic.

Thank you for your continued support for the schools and for sharing our determination to support all pupils through this difficult period and enable them to achieve their full potential from their education.

All my best wishes,

Phil

Philip Jones

Chair of Governors

The Federation of Pebworth First School and Blackminster Middle School

