

Dear Parents and Carers,

Well, I feel like I'm writing a newsletter for a *nearly* normal school week!! It's continued to be a whirlwind adventure as we've opened our doors to more and more children and I have to say that, although it's been a logistical nightmare, it's been an atmospheric dream! How wonderful to hear the sound of chatter and laughter around the place once more. It's been like the gradual awakening of a sleeping giant (a friendly one, of course!!).

Our Reception children came back a couple of weeks ago and, as predicted, there were tears and clingy hugs, struggles to separate and fear behind the eyes but that was *just* the parents and a firm word with them was all it took to get them to release their little charges, wipe their tears and leave the school grounds! You think I'm kidding but I'm not! Our 4 and 5 year olds were resilient little troopers who were more than happy to run straight into class and take stock of the new set-up!

And they are soooo virus-savvy! They can *all* tell you the importance of social distancing (even if they can't actually *do* it with any great degree of success!) and they know to wash their hands regularly and not to share equipment. Poor Daria (R2) was distraught on Thursday when she lost the yellow felt-tip pen from her personal colouring pot and she desperately needed to colour her fish in yellow. Feryal (R2), always a kind and considerate member of the class, said with great compassion in her voice, "I'd love to give you *my* yellow pen but I'm not allowed to because of Corona virus!" Apparently, Feryal is also the self-designated '2-metre rule police', constantly man-handling poor Levi (R2) into the correct position – the irony of her tactile actions is completely lost on her but, on the plus side, we can see the emergence of a natural leader! Head-girl here we come!!!!

Once our new flexibilities kicked in, we were able to invite a few more children back into school and the bubbles have grown and grown as you're all beginning to feel a little bit more at ease sending your children back to school. We can't fit everyone in, unfortunately, and teaching and learning is looking very different at the moment but at least we're finding our way back.... slowly but surely.

Today, I had the great pleasure of being a millionaire for half an hour. It was part of a Y6 Design and Technology lesson in which the children were asked to design social distancing equipment to be manufactured and sold to the general public. I had no idea of my upcoming role in the lesson other than being asked to take part in the presentation of ideas. So, when I approached the classes (outdoors, of course, for extra safety) to hear Mrs Bracken announce, "Oh look, here comes the dragon!", I wasn't sure whether to be offended or to look behind me for Ms Browne! (She knows I'm just teasing!!) All became a little clearer, however, as I was instructed that my purpose in the lesson was to adopt a role-playing part in the guise of Deborah Meaden and to evaluate the students' designs in terms of their practicality and commercial viability. Well, you should all be very proud of your children who bravely entered the dragon's den and pitched their ideas to me in the hope of securing a substantial investment in their inventions. I use the word 'substantial' rather loosely since the largest investment I was asked for was £20! I have to say that Olivia (6B), James (6B) and Joshua (6C) pitched like 'pros' and could give any of those pitchers in the den a run for their money! I was so impressed with the prototypes that were presented to me and the business plans that accompanied them (except for Ashton (6B) whose excellent design cost a million pounds to make but he wanted to give it away for free - A very philanthropic but slightly flawed business plan there and one which, sadly I wouldn't be investing in!) After a wonderful round of pitches, there was really only one stand-out winner who gained my investment (I was instructed that I could only choose 1!) Congratulations to Jimmy-Dean (6B) whose design was a pair of glasses (which could be worn over one's own glasses most comfortably if necessary) which housed a covert movement and heat sensor on each arm of the spectacles, alerting the wearer by vibration should another human being come within 2 metres of them! Genius! Well done Jimmy-Dean – your investment prize is waiting for you back at school! But well done to *all* the children

– they had clearly worked really hard on their designs and it's a scary business going up against a dragon but they did it with aplomb!!

In other news, we now have a beautiful Music Room, courtesy of Miss Batt who has spent hours and hours setting up the room for music lessons, covering the walls with instructional posters of music genres and instruments and Miss K, our talented in-house artist, who has made a selection of 3D music players showing the changing systems throughout history. And I'm throwing down a gauntlet here to any child to try to identify the short piece of music written on one of the walls – you'll all know it but can you *read* it, **that's** the question? 10 points for the correct rendition (yes, you'll have to sing it to me)!!

Now, never let it be said that we teachers can't turn our hands to any job assigned to us – over the last few weeks, if they haven't been needed for teaching, teachers have been asked to do a myriad of duties, many completely out of their comfort zones. When I asked Ms Howard to paint the History & Geography Resources cupboard, her immediate reaction was one of fear and concern since she'd never painted a room in her life. I tried to reassure her that it was only a cupboard and didn't need to be an artistic masterpiece but I could still feel anxiety in the air as she went home with head hung low. But, early the next morning, she rocked up to my office wearing dungarees and old trainers and asked, with a confident glint in her eye, "So, do you want me to make good the walls first and do you want me to 'cut in'?" (for the uninitiated, those are professional decorating terms)! Well, you could have knocked me down with a feather! That's the mark of a dedicated teacher – if you're asked to do something you're not confident about, go home and google it to death and come back to work as an expert. And, I have to say, that cupboard looks good as new! We'll address the flooring at a later date, Ms Haynes!!

Mr Charlee has also been a star doing his own fair share of painting, albeit with altogether *different* concerns – mainly with regard to keeping his pristine clothes paint-free!! He's undercoated the whole of Mrs Lawson's old classroom and Mrs Lawson is helping Mr Welch paint the top coat. That's another job done – Mrs Lawson's old classroom (the one with the leaks) has finally been rebuilt and looks amazing – now everyone's jealous of her shiny new cupboards and they all want new classrooms!!

Mr Charlee's also become an expert jet-washer, making the area outside the Pavilion a place fit for a royal visit! Well done, Mr Charlee – just the Football Boot Cleaner to refurbish now!

Mrs Sterling and Mrs Waddington have single-handedly built a new Junior Library for us and set up an Art room to house all our Art resources. It's certainly been a hive of activity here but there's still more to do and, if any of you strong parents have time to volunteer, we'd love some help clearing a small area of brush-land and laying some paving slabs for a shed Mr Charlee needs to house his line-marker and lawn-mower! I can offer you a social-distancing hat, shoe or belt to ensure others keep their distance from you while working but they're only prototypes so I can't vouch for their quality!!!

So, it feels like we're gradually returning to normal practice and, if the Government are to be believed and if everyone continues to take the necessary cautionary steps with regard to social distancing, it looks like normal service will return in September and I, for one, can't wait!!

So, I wish you all a wonderful weekend (full of sun-cream and umbrellas, I believe) and, in light of the many challenges our staff have stepped up to recently, I leave you with this thought,

"Always do something you're a little not ready to do. I think that's how you grow. When there's that moment of, 'Wow, I'm not really sure I can do this,' and you push through those moments, that's when you have a breakthrough."

– Marissa Mayer

Never stop challenging yourself. The day you do, you're falling behind.

With kind regards and best wishes,

Mrs Searle