

Coffee and Conversation

Wednesday 27th January 2021 8:15am

Thank you to all who submitted great questions and constructive feedback for today's meeting, as well as to those who were able to attend. It was helpful to be able to discuss parent feedback and to explain the situation on the ground. Thank you for engaging with this process so enthusiastically. A summary of what was discussed is contained below:

1) Pupil Premium Policy

This can be found on the school website <https://www.cardinal-newman.surrey.sch.uk/site/data/files/DE01958431BC2C13E5CC28772B469772.pdf>

and sets out what Cardinal Newman school does to remove barriers to achievement and support the best outcomes for all in our community. An annual report is published on the website and this includes how the money is spent. In typical years, this funding goes towards school trips and clubs for children, as well as funding individual interventions or specific support such as school uniform, after-school club or ELSA provision. During this academic year, the funding has been used to adapt school laptops for use at home with remote learning and for telephone interventions, as well as staff time to deliver Food Bank parcels or additional support. Ideas are always welcome as to the best use of this funding to support children and families who are eligible.

Pupil Premium children are those who qualify for free school meals (FSM) on a means-tested basis (usually through Universal Credit / Jobseekers Allowance etc), as well as those who have been on FSM at any time in the last 6 years. Children who are / have been in local authority care (LAC) qualify for a higher level of funding, while those who have at least one parent in the armed services qualify for a lower tier of funding. All funding comes to the school to be spent centrally on the children in school. At Cardinal Newman we have 17 children who qualify for the main Pupil Premium, then 1 formerly LAC and 3 services children who qualify.

Parents are consulted on the Pupil Premium Policy periodically and there has been no radical change in the use of Pupil Premium funding at Cardinal Newman, but Governors were keen for parents to have the opportunity to comment. No comments or questions were received this time. Parents are always welcome to share their views constructively with the school, including about the Pupil Premium. Thank you for your input.

2) Remote Learning

It was explained that feedback had been sought and received from both parents and teachers during this listening exercise. Feedback had been overwhelmingly very positive and Mrs Burnham thanked parents for their constructive responses and their highly supportive approach.



The information received so far included:

- Most year groups report 100% engagement – or close to that – with calls / assignments/groups. This is unusual in most schools and Mrs Burnham congratulated parents for making a supreme effort to support their children’s learning in these difficult circumstances.
- Assignments are easy to upload on Teams and feedback from teachers is helpful
- Recorded sessions have been well-received as these can be paused, played back and watched at any time
- Sound quality on some live calls had been an issue for some parents but children were enjoying seeing each other at the beginning and end of calls. Mrs Burnham reported that KS1 were experimenting with allowing the younger children to keep cameras on during live sessions and this was positive so far.
- Some families were choosing to do work early in the morning or later on in the day to fit around parents’ work commitments. Some families were mainly engaging with the work set on paper and not choosing to access the calls.
- Specific children whose progress or attainment had been flagged during Pupil Progress meetings last term are now accessing small group / individual interventions which would have been running for them in school. These are well attended and have positive impact.
- Most families say the structure of morning and afternoon calls is working well for them and that there is a good balance of screen-based and paper-based learning. Some families have said they couldn’t fit any more into the day.

Some challenges are reported commonly:

- A few are reporting difficulties motivating their children to do school work, especially Writing. *Mrs Burnham commented that this is not unusual and it is very challenging for the children to maintain the same level of focus on screen at home.*
- One or two have made requests for more live teaching
- One or two have made requests for less live teaching
- Most children (almost all) are missing social interaction with their peers (*and it was suggested that parents are also missing that social interaction!*) *In answer to a parent’s question, Mrs Burnham said it would be possible to trial a few minutes chat at the end of an afternoon call, but it may be very challenging due to the numbers of children on a call. She noted that some children have been making contact via Zoom or WhatsApp under their parents’ supervision and that this might help a little, but that virtual contact of any kind is difficult for children as they prefer to play together rather than sit around talking!*
- Some have requested clarity around what is non-negotiable to complete in the school day. *Mrs Burnham felt it was difficult to say as all families have a different context and what is possible in one context may not be possible in another. She emphasised that all families can only do the best they can in their circumstances and not to worry about putting pressure on yourselves and your children to complete everything if it isn’t feasible for your family. Do what you can and do it to the best of your ability.*

- Many families – maybe most – are finding home schooling stressful and highly challenging. *Mrs Burnham said this was the most difficult thing for schools – no-one wants to be in this situation and it is extremely difficult for everyone, for families, children and staff alike. She was grateful to our school community who are so supportive of the children and doing all we can at the present moment.*

Questions were raised as follows:

1) Can you try to stop the children unmuting themselves or muting the teacher?

Mrs Burnham thanked parents who had tried to support with “How To” guides. The issue is specifically with the school system (and other schools have had similar concerns!) – this functionality had been disabled as it goes alongside the calendar and Outlook email option which the school didn’t want children to have access to (Other schools having reported bullying concerns around this function). The IT team had been looking at it and we are hopeful there is now a workable solution.

2) Are there plans for more live sessions?

This is kept under review, but feedback currently suggests that the balance we have is good for most families. Mrs Burnham has spoken to other heads including independent school heads and the direction of travel is definitely towards a balance between live and paper-based activity, due to concerns around screen-time and the demands on parents with more than one child. Everyone agreed that there is no substitute for real lessons in classrooms and that live sessions cannot replicate that experience or engage children in the same way. Current research suggests that 2 or 3 20 minute sessions is the right balance for Primary aged children.

3) Is it possible to make the organisation of folders more consistent between year groups?

Mrs Burnham explained that the organisation of folders had grown organically at the beginning of term, organised by what made sense to each teacher within their class/year group. If the roll out of Teams had happened more steadily as anticipated, this may have been made consistent from the start!

At this stage, it wasn’t felt that it would be desirable to try to achieve consistency as parents have by now got used to where the folders are etc and what may help some (due to consistency between year groups) wouldn’t help others (who would be faced with a whole new system of folders to organise). Mrs Burnham suggested that September 2021 (new year groups and a fresh start) would be a good time to try to achieve some consistency going forward when using Teams for Homework.

4) What are you doing to support children’s wellbeing and reduce screentime?

School is conscious of this very important issue and is taking a number of steps, as follows:

Encouraging balance (so that relaxation time and schoolwork time are not all screen-based every day!)

Encouraging activity (Remote PE lessons – children encouraged to continue practising their skills) and daily time outside

Setting some paper-based and creative activities – Art / DT / Topic / paper-based activities

Promoting Children’s Mental Health Week (Collective workshop and activities) and strategies for positive mental health

Partnership with parents – sending out ideas about resources for support. Mrs Burnham acknowledged that the school is very dependent on the parents’ support to implement strategies for supporting children’s mental wellbeing at present

5) Is school going to be open for more children – for example children where both parents are critical workers?

Mrs Burnham explained that there is currently no change in the situation. Our school only has children onsite who can’t be cared for safely at home for whatever reason. She acknowledged that this is putting lots of families in very difficult situations and that the school daily hears stories of families who are finding it difficult to cope. This situation is pushing everyone to their limits and there are no easy answers. At Cardinal Newman in the summer we had around 240 children onsite and about 100 critical worker children on a waiting list. We don’t have capacity to open to all our critical worker families – this would be almost the entire school and would defeat the purpose of “lockdown 3.”

It is important that schools only take the limited number of children who can’t be cared for safely at home, to avoid the situation where schools have to close altogether. Mrs Burnham shared examples of local schools which had closed completely (including for remote learning) and of a school in the MAT which serves a local hospital and had to close, meaning doctors and nurses weren’t able to go to work because there was nowhere for their children to go.

Mrs Burnham expressed thanks to the many families who are making enormous sacrifices to support their children and keep them safe at home during these challenging times. No-one has chosen this situation and it is very difficult for everyone. Thank you for supporting each other within our whole school community.

6) What is the news “from the inside” about when schools are likely to re-open?

Mrs Burnham apologised that there is sadly no news “from the inside”! School leaders typically hear the information about schools at the same time as the general public. In her opinion, schools will not open after February half-term, but she is hopeful that Primary Schools might be open at the beginning of March – this is only opinion and not fact!

Mrs Burnham was pleased to confirm that every member of staff without exception is ready to come back to school when the school is allowed to reopen and we are looking forward to having our school community all together again!

Stop Press: At lunchtime, Boris Johnson announced that schools “might reopen” by March 8th “at the earliest”.

Mrs Burnham thanked everyone for joining her and for the enormous support of the whole school community. We are blessed to have such a strong and supportive parent body. Thank you.