

SCHOOL - HOME COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

Since Monday evening, we have been unable to use SMS text messaging. The reason is frustratingly simple - increased use of the system for Covid-related messaging over the past nine months means that we have exceeded our available message credits. Those old enough to remember when SMS messaging was limited on their mobile phone contracts will understand our frustration with this!

We are negotiating a capacity increase with our provider to restore functionality, but the situation has also prompted us to reflect on the system itself and we have determined that SMS messaging is no longer fit for purpose – it is a 30-year old technology and better alternatives are now available.

It is also very expensive in comparison to app-based messaging: a 3-part Covid SMS alert delivered to all parents and staff costs approximately £23 whilst a weekly reminder to just one class to remember their correct PE kit is around £50 per year – if we limit delivery to one parent! Again, this may be a familiar problem to those of you who had phone contracts in the late 1990's and early 2000's.

To manage communication costs, even after adding further credits we intend to stop using the SMS system for large group messaging and 'reminders'. Going forward, we will limit SMS communication to emergency communications (e.g school closures) and important small group or individual messages.

In their place, we will use the existing **School Jotter** app for all routine school-home communication. Newsletters are published in the app **and** on the website.



Like the SMS system, this is **one-way** communication only and cannot be directed to specific groups – messages intended for specific audiences will be labelled in the heading to assist with this. However, it does not have costs associated with individual messages and they can be more than 160 characters long!

I know that many of you are already using the School Jotter app. If you are not, we advise that at least one parent installs the app on their phone or tablet to ensure that messages and information from the school can be received.

It can be found on the relevant app stores and is called 'School Jotter' and published by *Webanywhere Ltd*. Setup is simply a case of installing and then adding Fir Ends school.

If you are unable to access the app on at least one device at home, please advise the office so that we can arrange suitable alternatives (i.e email, phone calls or paper copies) instead.

*We are costing the addition of a web-based, **two-way** communication app that will work on android and apple devices to our existing data management system but this will take a little while to set up. This new app will allow parents to receive and reply to messages, update pupil data, give permission for trips and visits and access attendance data for your child(ren).*

We hope to get that up and running over the course of the coming weeks and will update parents on how to access the new app when we have done so.

We appreciate your patience whilst we overcome this unanticipated and unwelcome Covid-related challenge!

COVID UPDATE

As you are probably aware, the change in isolation arrangements is widely expected to lead to cases in schools being a more common occurrence this term and these may reach 'outbreak' levels as a result. A summary of our outbreak management procedure was published in the Jotter app yesterday.

At present we are in the 'single or isolated cases' phase of this. We are aware of three positive cases directly linked to our school, two of which have involved close contact with other pupils. These affect Early Years and Upper KS2 pupils.

If/when we reach 5 connected cases or 10% levels of infection within a group we will reintroduce familiar restrictions in school and may even have to return to the bubble arrangements for short periods of time.

All parents are asked to be vigilant for any signs that children are unwell in any way – the three recognised symptoms (cough, temperature, senses) seem to be absent in most child cases so other complaints such as sore throats, stomach upsets and headaches should also be monitored closely.

Children who become ill while at school will be sent home.

CONTACT TRACING is now handled by NHS Track & Trace – although we expect that we will still be involved in contacting parents on their behalf. Close contacts are **not** required to isolate, but **are** advised to take a PCR test shortly after contact. A period of 48-72 hours seems the most sensible gap to leave.

TRAFFIC!

The removal of staggered starts has inevitably led to more congestion at the start of the school day.

As noted in the Week 0 newsletter, if older child(ren) can come to the school gate without a parent this significantly reduces the number of stationary & empty cars on the roadside at any time.

If you can try to time your arrival within the same five-minute slot each day, this will also help to reduce overall congestion.

Please also be considerate of our neighbours on Skitby Road!

Our arrival times often coincide with them departing for work and getting their cars out of the driveway when the exit is blocked by vehicles and/or pedestrians can be understandably frustrating!

WHAT TO DO IF YOUR CHILD IS UNWELL

The Cumbria Public Health view on home testing for children is that it is not to be recommended. Despite this, in one of our current cases, precautionary testing by parents **has** limited close contact with a positive case.

This shows that home testing **can** be a useful tool but it is also important that parents recognise that the home test kits are less accurate and require a significant viral load to be present.

If children are feeling unwell but **don't** have the classic covid symptoms:

1. It's better if they are kept off school for observation at home to avoid passing whatever it is on
2. If you have home test kits, use them if you wish – but don't rely on them to give a definitive all-clear
3. If unsure, just book a PCR test.

PARENT PAY – SCHOOL MEALS

All parents, new and old, should now be able to access their ParentPay accounts to pre-order school meals. Please do this by Thursday evening to assist the kitchen in planning for the following week.

Children do have the option to 'change their mind' if they wish – and, in turn, you are welcome to let us know if you'd prefer they didn't!

A reminder that weekly menus, including allergen information, are available on our school website.

Upcoming fundraisers

Our playtrail was installed over ten years ago and the surface beneath it requires significant repairs to bring it back into use.

To raise funds towards this we will be holding a sponsored mile(s) event and a Readathon this term. More to follow.