 **Headteacher’s Newsletter to Parents**

**15th June 2020**

Dear Parents, Families and Carers,

I do hope that you and your families are well and keeping safe at this difficult time. I am writing to update you on what is happening currently at the school. I know as I begin to type that this is going to be a long newsletter, with a lot of information.

Key things in this newsletter are:

* Year 6 Leavers
* Black Lives Matter & The Mirror Challenge
* Home Learning
* Additional Help

 I know that everyone’s circumstances are different: many of you have decided to keep your children at home because you feel that is the safest place at the moment. Some of you are keen for your children to return as soon as possible. There are a very few children who are here full-time at the moment and a larger group who are here on a part-time basis. I am very keen that as many children as possible are able to return to school before the end of the school year. However, I am sure you will appreciate what a complex task this is. I have to be confident that the school environment is as safe as possible for both pupils and staff.

Over the past few weeks there has been a lot of confusing, sometimes conflicting information and guidance from the government on expectations for primary aged children returning to school. That guidance is different for those children who attend a special school. As special school heads we are able to decide which children return to school and when, in mainstream primaries the focus is on children in reception and years 1 and 6. Because of their individual needs, our children to not understand about social-distancing, neither are they able to do so.As a school it would be quite wrong, and impossible, for us to try maintain distance between individuals. This means that we have to plan carefully to ensure that everyone is as safe as they can be. We are therefore having to limit the number of children who come into school each day, to keep class sizes very small and to separate groups of children into ‘zones’ so that the number of people they have contact with is reduced. Those members of staff who are able to come to school are working on a rota – this is another way of limiting the number of people who are in the building each day and the number of social contacts.

We are very much looking forward to having our community back together and only wish we knew when that will be.

Kindest regards

Fiona Veitch - Headteacher

**Contact with families**: we are trying to keep regular contact with all of you and you should be receiving phone calls from either your child’s class teacher or a member of the leadership team. Please do not hesitate to call the school or email me at headteacher@watergate.lewisham.sch.uk at any time if there is something you would like to discuss or if you feel that we have not been calling you regularly enough. I am sure you will understand what a busy time this is, we are doing our very best to keep in contact.

**Children returning to school**: as I have already mentioned, we are keen to welcome back as many children as possible, as soon as we can, but only when it is safe to do so. We have a list of families who wish for their child to come back and as soon as we have the staff and the space we will be in contact to make arrangements. We will only be able to offer part-time places.

**Year 6 Leavers:** please be assured that your children are constantly in our thoughts. Although arrangements for moving to their new school will be very different this year we are talking with their new teachers, passing on information and making plans about how we can help them in September.

I want your child (and you) to have the opportunity to have a proper ending to their time at Watergate – we are looking at ways in which this might be able to happen and will be in touch as soon as we have a plan.

**Additional Help**: many of you will be experiencing difficulty and hardship at the moment – we will do anything we can to help you, so please contact the school if there is anything we can do.

Those children who are entitled to Free School Meals (FSM) are receiving weekly £15 shopping vouchers online. We know that the vouchers can be a bit tricky to access, let us know if you are having difficulty.

If your family circumstances have changed and you think you may now be entitled to FSM please contact Carly Kennedy c.kennedy@watergate.lewisham.sch.uk and she will give you information about what you need to do.

**Fare Share** – each week the Brent Knoll Watergate Trust receives a food delivery from the Fare Share charity which is distributed to our families. If you would like one of these please contact Carly.

**Food Bank** – we can organise emergency food parcel deliveries, contact the school for further information.

**Home Learning**: just a reminder that there are home learning activities in the STUDENT ZONE on our website [www.watergate.lewisham.sch.uk/student-zone/](http://www.watergate.lewisham.sch.uk/student-zone/). Each class has a page which is updated by your child’s teacher at the beginning of the week. While you’re there, have a look at the resources in the other classes’ pages, too. There are many videos, website recommendations, activities, and things that may be of interest to your child on there. Well done to Natalie Carrol (DHT) for coordinating the Student Zone, and to all teachers/staff involved in making this area so enticing, vibrant and accessible for our pupils.

You can also follow our Twitter accounts: @SchoolWatergate , @MOVEWatergate and @CreativeWaterg1. There is a Twitter feed on the homepage of our website if, like me, you are not a ‘Twitter person’! You will find lots of videos and ideas and your child will be able to see familiar members of staff singing songs and telling stories they know. Should you require any other help or support with home learning activities for your child please call the school or email me and we will do our best to provide what you need.

We love to hear about what you have been doing with your child at home and any progress they have made. Please send any updates, with photos, if you are willing to Natalie n.carroll-ward@watergate.lewisham.sch.uk or to me and we will put them on the website. I am keen to hear so we can start to award **Star of the Week** certificates again.

**Resources:** last week, with the help of Lewisham Passenger Services, we were fortunate to be able to send out some activity packs to a group of children. We are preparing some more packs, containing sensory equipment to go out very soon. Again, if your child is at home all the time at the moment, if there is something your child would really benefit from having please let us know and we will do everything we can to help.

**Staffing Update**: As I have already mentioned many staff have been working hard in school on a rota basis, supporting a small, but growing, number of children. Other staff, who are shielding (for themselves or a family member), have been working hard at home. Teachers have been completing all of their usual paperwork tasks – including EHCP review reports, and there are many annual review meetings now being carried out via Zoom or telephone – currently 10 meetings per week! Thank you to those of you who have learnt to use Zoom, or have patiently navigated three-way phone calls, to make these important meetings happen. We would obviously prefer to see families in real life, but are all making the best of the technology available to us in these unprecedented times.  Teachers are also currently writing pupils’ end of year curriculum reports, which you will receive soon.

Staff in all roles across the school have been making the most of training opportunities, from home, to get them up to speed with a wide range of very important topics. Many midday meal supervisors have taken and passed food safety and hygiene courses – to ensure best practice in school at lunch times. Many teachers, teaching assistants, higher level teaching assistants and senior nursery nurses have carried out a wide range of online training, including - updating their safeguarding understanding, completing epilepsy training, learning more Makaton sign language, studying Understanding Autism with the University of Kent or Open University, exploring emotional regulation to support children in remaining calm and ready to learn, with Studio III, and a small group will soon carry out First Aid training. Staff have also learnt lots of different things relating to teaching and learning and making this fun and effective for the children at Watergate school. When we get back to school properly all these skills will be put to very good use!​

**Black Lives Matter in Lewisham**

**A message from Pinaki Ghoshal, Lewisham’s Executive Director for Children and Young People and Angela Scattergood, Director of Education.**

**The Mayor of Lewisham, Damien Egan has published a statement on behalf of Lewisham Council in response to the killing of George Floyd in the United States. You can read the full statement here:**[**https://lewisham.gov.uk/articles/news/black-lives-matter-in-lewisham**](https://lewisham.gov.uk/articles/news/black-lives-matter-in-lewisham)

**“We believe that our schools and settings are key to tackling racism and other forms of discrimination. We will support all Lewisham schools and settings in their commitment to standing against racism and injustice, alongside and in solidarity with the local and global Black community.”**

**As the events of the past few weeks have unfolded in the news and all around us, we would like to take this opportunity to share our feelings at this pivotal moment in time.**

**At Watergate School we strive to ensure that every child has access to the best possible education, opportunities to be an active and valued part of the local and wider community and true equality of opportunity.  We are committed to protecting and advocating for the rights of each and every child here and for those of our families and our staff.**

**As a school with a wonderfully diverse and multi-cultural pupil and staff population. 76% of our pupils are from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds, it is vital now that we make our voices heard - on behalf of our school, ourselves, our pupils and their families.**

**In response to the unlawful murder of George Floyd, an innocent black man, in Minneapolis, we stand together in condemnation.**

**As Lewisham Leaders, we stand united in our commitment to tackle and challenge racism, address inequality and call out discrimination.**

[**Black people are 40 times more likely to be stopped and searched in the UK**](https://www.theguardian.com/law/2019/may/04/stop-and-search-new-row-racial-bias)**.**[**Young black people are nine times more likely**](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/sep/01/young-black-people-jailed-moj-report-david-lammy)**to be locked up in England and Wales than their white counterparts, while**[**BAME offenders are far more likely than others to be jailed for drug offences**](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/jan/15/bame-offenders-most-likely-to-be-jailed-for-drug-offences-research-reveals)**.**

**The murder of George Floyd must prompt careful reflection about racism in Britain today, and the extent to which it shapes our values, politics and economic life.  As a staff, we have already begun the process of reflection and re-education for ourselves to ensure that we are all aware of how deep-rooted and institutionalised racism really is in our society, both in the UK and across the world.**

**Our children, like their counterparts the world over, will be seeing and hearing the recent events on the television – from George Floyd’s death to the protests happening on our streets – and may be experiencing the upset, anger and anxiety within their own households too.  We are working together as a school, and will be working too with families, to plan how we can help our pupils to best understand and manage the anxiety that this may bring about. Like many Lewisham schools we are inviting you and your child to take part in the The Mirror Challenge to develop self-esteem and self -love – see next section for details.**

**The Mirror Challenge**

**Every child can be supported to build on their self-belief and self-love and, whilst the majority of our pupils remain at home, we ask you to help us to continue to develop these with your children.**

**We encourage each child, along with their families at home, to complete The Mirror Challenge every day throughout June.  This is a daily exercise of self-appreciation, which the children should do in front of a mirror or looking at themselves on a screen (smart tablet/phone).**

**With your child:**

**Stand in front of a mirror and say their name: “I am …”**

**List the things that they love about themselves or are proud of: “I love that I am kind”, “I love my curly hair” or things that you (or a sibling) love about them “I love that you make me smile when you...” or “I love that you are a fantastic little brother.”**

**Finish by saying “I love you!” to your child or encouraging them to say it to themselves...we also tell each and every child that they are amazing every week in our celebrations of learning - try that too.**

**Take it all in by taking a deep breath, and smile as you breathe out.**

**We would love you to share your self-love statements and/or photographs via twitter @SchoolWatergate or email into****headteacher@watergate.lewisham.sch.uk**