20th May 2020

Dear Parents and Families,

I am writing to introduce myself. My name is Liz Thompson and I am Director of Early Years here at West Jesmond. As well as being part of the teaching team, my role is to oversee the whole year group and to support all of the children and families throughout their Reception year. A huge part of that role is of course the transition from Nursery to Reception, and I wanted to write to you to let you know how we will approach this in the current difficult circumstances.

The country at the moment is in turmoil and uncertainty, particularly linked to schools and education. Please be assured that despite these current circumstances, we understand the importance of this transition for you and your child and we will do everything in our power to support and guide you through the next few months.

Alongside this letter there are a number of forms included for you to fill in and return to school as soon as possible. These forms are regarding things like school mail, photograph permission, Tapestry Learning Journal and food allergies. There is also a general information sheet which should give you clearer details on school uniform, school milk, and out of school care.

The majority of children joining us in September will have missed a significant amount of pre-school due to Covid-19. You may be concerned that they are “falling behind” and that they will struggle when they start school. Let me reassure you that we will take all of this into account when we plan our first term for September. We will very much mirror the nursery environment they have missed, making sure children have lots of time to play, explore and get to know their new friends and setting. The most important thing will be to make sure the children are safe, happy and feel secure. Then we will build upon their knowledge and skills from there.

On our school website there is now a new link to ‘New Reception Starters 2020’. This section of the website is dedicated to your children and you with lots of helpful information. There is a Welcome information booklet all about our life in EYFS. There are also videos touring the school building, and showing ‘A day in Reception’ which you can share with your child to help them become more familiar with our school (and hopefully get them feeling excited about coming!). You will also find copies of all letters and guidance we have sent out in the post in case you need them to refer to in the future.

I have also included some guidance on things you can be supporting your child with over the coming months to help them prepare for starting school. These are mainly based around everyday independent skills your child can be working on to help them with daily life in school. However, I would like to reassure you that this is by no means a check list for things they must achieve by September– all children learn and develop at different rates, and if your child will need further support with these in September, we will of course be happy to help them.

Over the next few weeks, I will be contacting nurseries (where possible) to begin to build up a picture of each of the children and what they will need from us in September. I will also be phoning each of you individually to chat about your child, answer any of your questions and to discuss and concerns you might have.

By the end of June, you will receive another letter from school letting you know which class your child will be in. In Reception, we have 3 classes of 30 children each, although we do spend a lot of our time working across the classes and the children will see lots of children from across the year group each day. Once your child knows which class they are in, we will send a link to a welcome video from their new teacher and classroom assistant so they can begin to become more familiar with their key adults and their new classroom.

Our normal transition in June and July would of course include organising visits to school for your child, and welcome meetings for you as parents. Unfortunately, we do not feel that we will be able to facilitate this safely under current Government Guidance and allowing additional children and adults into our school building is simply not in line with new guidelines at present. So for now, we will have to assume that the first time we meet the children will be in September. This is of course not ideal for anybody, but our priority has to be keeping children, families and staff safe. We will of course be in touch if we feel later in July that we could possibly offer some visits.

At this point, it seems to be assumed that school will be open as ‘normal’ in September for the start of the new school year. If this is the case, we will have a period of part-time school for the Reception children, which I believe this year will be more important than ever. The details of this have not yet been finalised, as they will depend heavily on what happens over the next two months as schools begin to open their doors to more children. Until we see how this works, and have more guidance from the Government on how to keep safe, we will not be finalising any details. We appreciate this is difficult, but we kindly ask for your patience in this uncertain time. We will of course let you know the agreed details as soon as we can.

I hope that although this letter cannot answer all questions about the exact details of your child’s entry to school, it lets you know exactly what you can expect from us over the next few months. I want to apologise that I cannot do more or give any clearer information at this time, but please know that you can contact us at any time and we will be happy to discuss any concerns or queries. Please refer to the information on the website – it has a lot of details and helpful information which may answer a lot of your questions and I hope it is helpful to you and your child as we begin your journey of transition into our school.

I very much look forward to chatting with you all over the next few weeks and getting to know you all a little better. Until then, take care and stay safe.

Yours Sincerely

*Liz Thompson*

Director of Early Years