

St Matthew Academy

St Joseph's Vale, Blackheath, London SE3 0XX

Headteacher: Ms Miranda Baldwin

Head of Primary: Ms Joanna Chick



23 June 2020

Dear Parents and Carers,

I am writing to you at the start of the 11th week since we closed the school to all pupils except the children of Critical Workers and vulnerable children. This period during the coronavirus pandemic has been challenging for everyone however with the government announcement last week that all pupils will return to school in September we are beginning to see light at the end of the tunnel. We do have to wait a little longer for the guidance from the government about the protective measures that must be put in place to ensure the safety of staff and pupils while on site and once we have had an opportunity to put our plans in to place we will let you know the arrangements for the new academic year. In the meantime it has been fantastic to have pupils from Reception, Year 1, Year 6 and Year 10 on site and I will explain later in this letter how we will ensure that by the end of term every SMA pupil has had an opportunity to spend some time in school and had a face to face session with a teacher they know well.

However firstly I would like to address the other reason why the last few weeks have been so challenging for our SMA community. We were all shocked and appalled by the atrocious incident in America, that resulted in the tragic murder of George Floyd on Monday 25th May 2020. Our pupils, their families and staff have watched the global response to these acts of injustice, and we know that many pupils have questions about what they are seeing and hearing on the news and social media. If we were at school, we would be able to address the issues of racial inequality and systemic racism together and ensure our pupils voices are heard but of course this has been more difficult because of lockdown. Nevertheless, as an academy we have been so proud of how our pupils have responded to the resources and activities that have been shared with them via PHSCE lessons, tutor time and our weekly online assembly programme. Pupils have shared petitions; written reflections; sent entries for a school display and offered much needed support to one another virtually. For those of you that would like resources to share with your own children at home I attach with this letter a short booklet titled 'A Parent's Guide to Black Lives Matter'. Staff at SMA highly recommend this booklet for all families and you can also find a range of other resources for parents and pupils on our Equality and Diversity webpage [here](#)

I would like to express my commitment and the commitment of the Senior Leadership Team, Governors and all staff at St Matthew Academy to ensuring that we will do everything we can to stamp out any form of discrimination particularly racism in modern day society and further embed a culture of anti-racism within SMA. Last week the first meeting of the Equality and Diversity Working Group took place to discuss actions we intend to take. We will now put together an action plan that will cover a range of aspects, but this work begins with a pupil and a staff survey to find out more about the challenges being faced on a daily basis by our BAME community. In our school where three quarters of our pupils and almost 30% of our staff are from the black community – Black Lives Matter at SMA today and always.

It has been great to welcome back year 5 pupils today to join the other year groups identified by the government for a return to school earlier this term. We were able to do this because the government gave all schools that had capacity the go ahead and we were able to prioritise year 5, based on our knowledge of our children and our community. All children in primary are now working well in bubbles as are our year 10 pupils and everyone has adjusted to the protective measures in place incredibly well. We know that some parents are still feeling anxious about the return to school for their own children but I would urge you to reconsider because we know how important it is for their mental wellbeing to have face to face social interactions with their peers and teachers.

 : 0208 853 6250  : info@stmatthewacademy.co.uk  : www.stmatthewacademy.co.uk  : [@stmattacad](https://twitter.com/stmattacad)

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As I stated earlier in my letter it is now our intention to ensure every SMA pupil spends some time in school this term. In the secondary phase we are planning on delivering some teacher led lessons to year 10 pupils. This means every year 10 pupil will have two days a week in school for the last 3 weeks of term. Pupils will be taught in larger groups and in larger spaces and will remain in these spaces for most of the day to minimise movement. This model will free up staff and classrooms to enable us to invite pupils from all other secondary year groups to attend school for part of a day. All pupils will have the opportunity for an extended one to one session with a teacher to discuss wellbeing, progress made with home learning, barriers to learning and targets to work on before September. Full personalised details will be sent to families regarding these arrangements in the coming days and weeks and I would encourage all parents and carers to ensure their child attends their identified session. Year 10 attendance last week was close to 90% - we were really pleased with the strong turn out and expect all other year groups to meet or exceed this figure.

Unfortunately, with the current government restrictions regarding bubble size in the primary phase in place we will not be able to welcome back year 2, year 3 and year 4 pupils for full time learning before September. However, now that we have been given the go ahead by the government we are determined that we will ensure every one of these pupils will have a short session in school when they will be able to check in with their classmates and teachers, share stories and experiences and meet the teacher who will be taking them next academic year. Again, please look out for the letter regarding detailed arrangements for these sessions.

Before I end my letter, I am delighted to announce that as part of our Careers offer and starting with Year 10 pupils, SMA has launched the 'Be Ready' Careers online platform which you and your children can access from the RM portal. You just need to simply click on the 'Be Ready' tile to access a vast range of employability and Post 16 resources that we hope everyone will find particularly useful. The benefits to our pupils include: an opportunity to develop key employability and well-being skills; being able to learn from industry experts; access to up to date labour market insights; the chance to test abilities regularly; CPD qualifications; being able to search for open days nationwide and the opportunity to apply for apprenticeships if this is an appropriate choice to make. We will soon be rolling this platform out for pupils in Years 5 to 9 as well, so watch this space! Please, encourage your children to use the platform and by all means take a look yourself. I would like to thank Mr Gunningham for his great work on this important aspect of our Personal Development curriculum offer at SMA.

If you have any concerns or you need any other support from the school, please let us know by contacting your child's class teacher or form tutor or using the email address info@stmatthewacademy.co.uk which is monitored daily.

We are extremely grateful for all the support we have received so far from the school community.

Yours faithfully



Ms M Baldwin
Headteacher