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Dear Parents and Families,

I hope you (and the children!) are settling back into the routine of school. It has been lovely to hear the school 'alive' again and to see so many smiling faces coming down the corridor each morning. Everybody seems to have settled well into Maple Class and it feels like the children were never away (almost!). As we are not able to host our usual meet the teacher event, I hope this letter and the presentation answer some of the questions you may have and explain some of the things the children may have told you – don't believe everything they say! This letter includes some of the information I sent to you and the children before we closed for the summer but there is also information in it just for you.

As you know already, my name is Mr Gray and this is the start of my third year in Newlands Primary School. Prior to joining you all in Newlands, I worked in Dogmersfield Primary School near Fleet for six years having been a full-time music teacher for the Hampshire Music Service for three years before that. During my teaching career, I have taught in over forty primary schools and I have taught every year group from reception up to year 13 at college. Juniors (year 3-6) is definitely my favourite age to teach! Last year, I worked with year 4 each week in the first term and then taught them every morning until the lockdown. In Dogmersfield, I taught a year 4/5 class for four years so am very familiar with the curriculum I need to cover this year. I am also in the fortunate position of having taught your children before when I worked with them in year 3 as part of Mr Redhead's NQT year. This is definitely the first year I have known every name before day one and I already have a good understanding of the children's personalities which has certainly helped the class to hit the ground running.

Please try not to worry about the amount of time the children were not in school last year. Mr Redhead and I have had an excellent handover and continue to talk everyday about the class (as I do with Mrs Harris and Mrs Richardson for the year 5s). This helps me to ensure I have the pitch correct and that the children will not miss anything. As I discussed with the children, the first few weeks allow me to find out what the class has remembered, forgotten or got jumbled and then I will build on this baseline and get them as ready as I can for year 5. We will then repeat the handover and constant dialogue again next year to ensure your child gets the very best education they can. Mrs Donegan's lessons on Fridays are closely linked to mine and we have already started to pass on successes, areas to improve and things to follow up on; we are definitely singing (metaphorically of course!) from the same song sheet.

The main aim of the term is to secure the children's calculation methods in maths and to rebuild their stamina for writing whilst securing spelling patterns, reminding them of grammatical rules and of course, moving their learning forwards in English. Whilst it may be tempting, please do not show them a method for maths you were taught in school unless they have shown you it first. There is more information about this approach, as well as examples of the methods we will be using, on the website from my maths workshops last year. If you click on the parent tab and then follow the link to 'how to help your child', everything you need is there. Where you can really support your child is with their times tables recall. By the end of year 4, they need to have near instant recall of every multiplication fact up to 12x12 (and the associated divisions). Without this knowledge being secure, the children will really struggle with most areas of the maths curriculum in year 5 and beyond. In my experience, the quickest and most reliable way to help the children develop their recall is through verbal games and questioning, practice worksheets or tests and very short, regular (daily if possible!) practice. Electronic devices are great fun and do have a place, but most of my data indicates that a child who works alone on a device makes slower progress. Every child is different of course, so do anything that feels right for your child. Ultimately, everything helps. Telling the time (using analogue, digital and 24-hour clocks) is another area many

*Delivering a nurturing and inclusive environment to encourage growth of the individual*

children struggle with and any help you can give at home with this is always appreciated. You are also able to help your child with the homework by simply checking they have completed it, have used the best presentation they can and by being very 'picky' about capital letters and full stops. The curriculum is very blunt. If the basics, like capitals and punctuation are not in place, they will still be graded as 'working towards' for writing and grammar even if they have written content that is to the standard of a professional author, better than Shakespeare or have moved you to tears by creating such a powerful, emotional response. Habits are very easy to form but very hard to break and it is evident already in class that copying accurately and using capital letters is something we are going to have to work on. I have no doubt we will get there but if you do look at the homework, please do make your child correct, re-do or edit their work. The homework I will set will nearly always build on something I have taught them already in class and I will use these tasks to check their understanding out of the context of the class. Occasionally I will write on the task that they are not allowed help from home. This might be because I want to see what they already know or if they can apply a skill to another area of our learning. If at any point your child can't do what I have set, please encourage them to come and talk to me (before Thursday) and I will help them in school. If they have made many mistakes that is fine. This will allow me to see what they are thinking and where their misconception might be. Please don't correct it all for them or with them. Let me see what they have done and I will plan how to address the next step in their learning. I talk about making mistakes a lot in class and how brilliant they are as they really show what our brains are doing and help us to master what we are trying to learn.

Reading with your child is another way you can help. For the homework, I will ask the children to record the number of minutes they have read to an adult and alone. You do not need to write a comment each time they read unless you think I need to know something. Like the writing, please be picky. If they miss the punctuation, miss out words or just make it up, make them go back and have another go. You can read to them and include this in the minutes. As long as there is a book and some discussion about it that is fine. I shall stick some ideas of questions you could ask into the homework book. Because of Covid-19 we cannot let each class visit the library each week. We have devised a 3-week rota that will help to keep the children (and you at home!) safe. Until our first session, please feel free to continue reading any books you have at home or have chosen from the local library.

I realise that so far, it sounds like all the children will be doing is maths and English. This simply isn't the case. As a school, we have decided to continue with our broad and balance curriculum this year (some schools are removing some subjects to 'catch up' in others but we don't feel this is the right approach for the children) but due to Covid-19, we have made some changes to how we timetable some subjects. For example, we need to 'block' some subjects into week-long units to keep the children safe by minimizing the sharing of resources. For this reason, we will teach computing once a half term for a full week. Other subjects like history, geography, art and DT will link to our class rich texts and you will soon have to find somewhere to store the Viking shield and helmets we will be making (many apologies in advance!). Not all subjects link to our books. The children are looking at electricity in science, enjoying tag rugby in PE and will be looking at how they communicate their feelings in PSHE. As you can see, it is a busy and varied term and I am sure there is something in there for everybody to enjoy.

In terms of general admin and routines, please send a full PE kit every day (tracksuit, spare socks, hat and gloves are wise in the winter) as our day does change depending on school events and the weather. Earrings must be removed for PE (after the initial 6-weeks) and the children cannot be helped to do this. Homework is set Monday-Monday and never over a holiday and snacks need to be 'raw' fruit or vegetables. There are already sugary snacks and fruit-like sweets creeping in. My final other 'schooly' comment is regards to chatting and following instructions! The children are obviously excited to be back and to see their friends but are struggling to remember when it is and isn't appropriate to chat and some seem to think instructions are more like guidelines or are simply optional! If you could weave a conversation in about this sort of thing at home, I would be very grateful. I am sure that between us, we'll get them firing on all cylinders in no time.

As I said in my letter before the summer, my goals for the year are to get everybody settled back into school as quickly as possible (and that does include the adults too) and to get the children working at 'Mr Gray speed'. I would also like every child to 'love learning' and to relish the challenges I will set. If you have any concerns, questions, problems or just don't understand what they are doing in the homework, I am only a phone call or email away so please do get in touch if you need to and I will do what I can. I am really looking forward to working with you and your children this year and I hope it is a year everybody looks back on fondly.

With best wishes to you all,  
Mr Gray