



10 September 2020

Dear parents and carers,

It has been wonderful to meet our pupils these last couple of weeks and to start to get to know them. I am very much looking forward to seeing them flourish and to getting to know their families too. They have all settled well into school and quickly adapted to new routines and expectations. They should be commended for their positive approach to the return to school and for being resilient despite all the challenges that the current circumstances bring. Thank you to you all for your support over the summer and for preparing your children so well for their return.

Our schools have implemented the actions outlined in our reopening plan and all staff have been working hard to ensure that the children can all arrive and leave at the same time. We want to do all we can to make the start and the end of the day convenient for families and we are very grateful to you for following our one way routes and for arriving and leaving promptly. Please also maintain strict social distancing when you are on the school site.

We know that some children have found the return to school less easy and Lily is working with them to support them through their worries. We also are working with Heads Up Ltd CIC and they will be working with a small group of children over four weeks to help them build confidence and resilience during this challenging time. Further excellent advice about helping your children return to school is available at the Every Mind Matters website: <https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters> . Dr Barnado's have also set up a 'See, Hear, Respond' service programme and self-referrals can be made here: [self-referral webpage](#) or Freephone 0800 151 7015. Each class now also has well-being ambassadors and these children have been elected to support their rest of their class to access help and advise when they are feeling worried.

I expect that there will be further changes we need to make in the future and we will respond to all government guidance. Current government information for parents can be found at [https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/what-parents-and-carers-need-to-know-about-early-years-providers-schools-and-colleges-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak?utm\\_source=2%20September%202020%20C19&utm\\_medium=Daily%20Email%20C19&utm\\_campaign=DfE%20C19](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/what-parents-and-carers-need-to-know-about-early-years-providers-schools-and-colleges-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak?utm_source=2%20September%202020%20C19&utm_medium=Daily%20Email%20C19&utm_campaign=DfE%20C19) We will notify you of any necessary changes at the earliest opportunity.

Our school offices are currently closed to visitors and teachers are unfortunately unable to have a chat at the start and end of the school day. If you would like to speak to a member of staff please email school to arrange an appointment. We will be unable to run our "Meet the Teacher" sessions or parents' evenings but we will arrange telephone calls later in the term so that we can keep in touch. Please continue to follow our Twitter accounts, (@STMBelmont and @StJGilesgate,) and view our websites, (<http://www.stthomasmorebelmont.durham.sch.uk/> and <http://www.stjosephsgilesgate.durham.sch.uk/> ) for school updates.

During lockdown your home circumstances may have changed and The Parish of the Durham Martyrs has established a hardship fund which is available to any family who has



The Federation of  
St Joseph's, Gilesgate and St Thomas More  
Primary Schools



found themselves in financial difficulties. The fund will make payments of up to £300 to support any family in need and the payments do not need to be paid back. If you would like further information please contact school to arrange a time to speak to me confidentially.

If you know someone who would like to apply for a place at either of our schools, bookings for tours of the schools can be made by emailing the school office. Tours are available at St Thomas More School on Monday evenings between 4pm and 6pm and at St Joseph's School on Thursday evenings between 4pm and 6pm.

The children have been completing some wonderful work based on the book ***Here We Are: Notes for living on planet earth*** by Oliver Jeffers. Pupils have explored how wonderful our earth is and how much we have to enjoy and be thankful for. On Friday 18 September the children are invited to wear bright coloured clothes for school, to reflect the beauty of creation.

I am delighted that elections have taken place for our school councils and house captains. Well done to the many children who offered themselves for the roles and to the successful children. Our new house captains and vice captains in St Thomas More School are Jessica, Leon, Alexa, Scarlett, Isla, Abigail, Chloe, Matthew and Finley, and at St Joseph's School, William, Ameera, Amelia, Curtis, Oliver, Levi, Zara and Ava. Congratulations to you all! We look forward to sharing our new school council members very soon.

School activities and routines have been adapted widely and we are now enjoying our collective worship online. Sadly the IT sometimes lets us down, but it is lovely to gather as a Federation to worship all together.

Yours sincerely,

BA Reilly-O'Donnell  
Interim Executive Head Teacher