

Western Primary School
Cold Bath Road
Harrogate
North Yorkshire
HG2 0NA
T: 01423 502737
E: admin@western.n-yorks.sch.uk
W: www.western.n-yorks.sch.uk

25th June 2020

Re - iPads in Keystages 1 and 2

Dear Parents and Carers,

The subject of my letter is our iPad scheme which has served us so well over the past ten months and which we would now like to extend into Keystage 1. The content of my letter is extremely important and I would urge all parents to bear with it until the end!

Most of you will be aware that we launched the 1-2-1 iPad scheme in Keystage 2 in September 2019. This has been a huge success and pupils' access to their iPads at home during the period of school closure has been invaluable in terms of their continued education. We plan to extend the 1-2-1 scheme into Keystage 1 in September this year.

Parents of pupils in current Reception, Y1 and Y2 will be receiving a detailed letter on Monday 29th June, explaining how this will work and what action they need to take. This will include an FAQ document.

A recent survey has shown that only 5% of schools nationally have been able to offer live lessons during the recent school closures. This shows that Western really is at the cutting edge of development in terms of our use of technology. Nothing about this initiative has been done on a whim. We firmly believe that this is the way education is going; we have seen first hand the excitement, engagement, curiosity and creativity which the use of the iPads as a learning tool has generated in our children and, in many ways, we have still only scratched the surface of their potential.

Clearly however, there is a significant cost attached to providing pupils with an iPad. I believe that, eventually, access to this technology will be funded for all pupils by the government. This has already happened in some countries such as Singapore and parts of Scotland. However, we don't want to wait for this to happen; we want our pupils to have access to this now, but **we simply can't fund it ourselves** at this point.

For this reason, we ask all parents to donate to the scheme by setting up a direct debit to the value of £10.00 per month. This request will continue as **it is the only way we can afford the initiative**. When the iPad rollout took place in Keystage 2 last year, we made it clear that all children would have access to an iPad in school each day. **However, we also said that children could only take their iPad home with them if their parents were paying the monthly direct debit of £10.00.**

Having had time to reflect, **I feel that it was wrong of us to do that**. I can only imagine some of the difficult conversations parents must have had with their children on this subject and I apologise that we put you in that position. At the same time however, I understand our motives. Our concern was that, without this leverage, fewer parents would sign up to the scheme and the school would be left struggling with a huge hole in our finances.

This, however, is a risk we need to take, **so from September, all pupils will be able to take their iPads home, whether their parents have signed up to the direct debit scheme or not**. The iPads can be a powerful tool to use as part of our homework strategy and we want all pupils to be able to benefit from this.



To a large extent then, I feel that we are throwing ourselves at the mercy of our parents and I would like to make the following points which may be of interest to many of you.

This is the question for everyone to consider: **Was the school's decision to launch the 1-2-1 iPad scheme sensible and do I want to financially support it for the benefit of my child and the school as a whole?**

When school closed in March, we relaxed the 'ruling' about iPads not being allowed home if parents hadn't signed up to the direct debit. This was the ethical thing to do since we didn't want any of our pupils to be disadvantaged. I hope that all parents have seen how crucial the iPads were, and continue to be, during this time and appreciate what a timely, educational investment the school made with this initiative. I would also hope that some parents might now reconsider their decision regarding their donation in order to take some of the financial load off the school. Was it a sensible decision? Putting aside the enormous benefits we have seen in the classroom, the educational value of the iPads during school closure cannot be overstated. Without them, our provision for home learning would have been no where near as effective as it has been, not just academically but also from a wellbeing stance, as children have been able to virtually meet their teacher and classmates on a daily basis.

Was it a sensible decision?

'The iPad project continues and two classes were observed using them. The quality of learning is remarkable.'
(Mike Smit. Education Consultant, School Improvement Adviser and Ofsted Inspector – April 2019)

'Given my experience as Headteacher of a school that has had a one to one iPad policy for several years, the progress being made with this initiative is very impressive and there is real thought being put into how it develops learning.' (Dr Andrew Cummings. RKL School Improvement Director and Ofsted Inspector - Feb 2020)

In addition to these endorsements, I can add from personal experience that the use of the iPads has greatly reduced teacher workload, particularly around marking with the use of verbal comments.

For all of us at school, we know that it was the right decision for a school like Western which always tries to be innovative and to push the boundaries. We hope that before long, an individual tablet for all pupils will be seen as an essential right which will be fully funded by the government. In the meantime, **we do rely on support from our parents to enable this to happen.**

I would like to finish by offering two reassurances. Firstly, Western will continue to promote traditional skills and practices across the curriculum but particularly in reading and writing. There is still a place for pens and paper! Secondly, we understand that some parents – and particularly in the current climate – may struggle to make a donation. We are more than happy to discuss this with parents and reach an agreement on a case by case basis. On the other hand, we have had a number of parents over the years who have made additional donations towards school trips, for example, to compensate for this and we have been very grateful for such generous gestures.

In writing this letter, I feel that I am taking a significant risk which could backfire financially on the school if I have misjudged the situation. Irrespective of this however, I *have* written this letter as I believe it is the right thing to do. **I am appealing to all parents to support this initiative through the direct debit scheme. The iPad initiative is the right thing to be doing for our children but we can't fund it without your generous support.**

Thank you for staying with me this far and I hope parents will recognise and appreciate the open and honest spirit in which this letter is written.

Kind regards,

Tim Broad
Acting Headteacher

