



School Book Clubs Gone Virtual

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Rebecca Butler has advice

Having given us the [basics for setting up a book club](#) [3] in our March issue, **Dr Rebecca Butler** explains how you can move it online.

As regular readers of **Books for Keeps** may know, when schools are functioning normally, I teach two book clubs to year six pupils and one club to year five pupils in Saint Richard Reynolds primary school in Twickenham. Since the beginning of the Covid lockdown and the closure of schools to most pupils of course holding such meetings physically has come to an end.

Transferring this activity to an online service is not a simple matter. It involves agreeing arrangements with the school authorities, the parents, required to provide written consent for their child to participate, the children, the teachers who have responsibility for the classes as well as the teacher who will conduct the online procedure. One example of the criteria that need to be met is concerned with the safeguarding of pupils. The protocol observed at Richard Reynolds is that during any online contact with pupils, at least two responsible adults must take part. If anything unplanned occurs, a second responsible person is on hand to help resolve any issues.

The aim of the team making these arrangements was simple. The pupils should have a learning experience that was as close to normal as was possible in these extraordinary circumstances. That goal had to be kept constantly in mind. Much to the credit of all concerned parties, at Richard Reynolds these complexities were sorted out in just three weeks.

The distribution of books also needs to be planned. With the first book that the clubs addressed, one of the teachers drove round the homes of all the pupils delivering the books. This was too arduous a task to remain a permanent arrangement. Some of the children are now back in school. They can collect their own books. The parents of some pupils who are not yet back in school are requested to visit the school and pick up a book from reception. The copies are wiped. The parents are requested to come gloved or hand sanitised and masked. Sometimes the parents of a child who is in school will hand deliver a copy to the doorstep of the home of a nearby pupil still doing remote learning.

We use Zoom. Inevitably with any remote system that broadcasts from inside private homes, security issues arise. We have addressed these as best we can. The parents of the children help them to log on so that no child participates without the parent being aware. The children must be in a communal area of the house such as a sitting room rather than a child's bedroom. My experience is that Zoom is a technically reliable system. When difficulties arise they are more likely to arise from the WIFI setup in the pupil's home. It is a rarity for the provision of service to be interrupted by any technical glitch.

If remote teaching is to be effective the engagement of pupils is essential. If a pupil fails to sign on, someone will send a text reminder. Class teachers have the responsibility to encourage any pupils who miss sessions to rejoin as soon as they can. In my experience this works well.

There is one ingredient which is inevitably missing from remote learning. Children love books, if teachers choose well and they are offered appealing texts. They can be helped to love reading over a virtual connection. But they also love

mixing with their friends. The book clubs we have organised provide some connection with their friends and their teachers, as well as with great authors. But is it the same? Of course not. But it is far and away better than simply giving in to adversity.

This report is compiled with sincere gratitude towards and appreciation of the staff of **Saint Richard Reynolds Catholic College** primary school, its pupils and their parents.

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