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Dear parent/carer,

From the morning text messages we have sent out this week, you are probably very aware of the issues we have had surrounding the internet, particularly when trying to log on to the virtual register in the morning. Before half term, we thought that the problems were as a result of Outreach completing work in the locality, but on returning to school the issue continues to raise its head.

After communicating with the local authority IT team, it has become apparent that other schools across Warrington have been experiencing the same problems.

As a result of COVID and the subsequent requirement to work remotely, there has been an unprecedented and rise in the demand for internet bandwidth in schools and homes across the locality. Our IT support have informed us that many schools have been attempting to use a lot more bandwidth than available to them and in some cases they have seen spikes of up to 2000% utilisation. They explained that this causes a bottleneck, which slows down the whole network and everything that runs through it.

Today, we received details of what uses up the bandwidth:
- Obviously, all devices connected to the school – so we have 14 laptops on the go plus the office computers
- Streaming also uses a lot of bandwidth including using apps and sites such as YouTube
- Remote working – surprisingly, even for staff and pupils working from home, if they are using a connection to access the school's network, it will use some of the school's bandwidth
- Our SIMS system which takes the register
- Scheduled backups during the school day

Therefore, although running live lessons through Google Classroom is our preferred method for remote learning, they consume a lot of network both when used in school or at home via remote connection.

The advice from the IT team has been:
- To stagger the delivery of live lessons across the school
- To limit the use of video
- To consider alternatives that could reduce the burden on the network

Now that we have some clarity as to the possible cause of the issues we are having in the morning, we will be looking tonight at how we can ease the burden on the network and enable us to provide our remote learning offer more effectively. This may impact on the structure and timings of the day that you are used to so please keep an eye on the timetable for any changes. We are aiming to provide the current number of live sessions but understandably, this may be difficult. We will do our best!

The Department for Education does not stipulate that schools must deliver live sessions and there are many schools that have not. We felt that some form of live streaming was essential and the amount provided was linked to our capacity to do so whilst also teaching face to face and also took into consideration the age of the children.

Knowing that you have children waiting for you and you could be letting them down is an awful feeling. You can probably imagine the frenzy of panic that ripples through the school when the link doesn't work, or the heavy sigh of relief when it does and you can crack on with the live session.

Thank you to the majority of parents who have shown understanding and patience over the last few days whilst we have tried to get to the root of the problem; recognising that this is not our fault and we do not wish for the children's learning to be disrupted in any way or to cause high anxiety to any parents waiting to connect. We need to remember that this is new for all of us and technology, as great as it can be sometimes, is not infallible.

Please keep your fingers crossed for tomorrow that the internet works better and hopefully, now you have clarification you will know we are doing our utmost to resolve any problems we have.

Kind regards,

Mrs Jayne Narraway

Head Teacher