



GLOBAL YOUTH & NEWS MEDIA PRIZE

**The Journalism Award
Pandemic News for Children**



**ENTRY – JOURNALISM – UK
FIRST GROUP ENTERPRISES LTD
“ENLIGHTENING CHILDREN”**



ABOUT *FirstNews*

Who we are

- First News is the UK's only newspaper for children, with a readership of more than 2.6 million, subscribed to by nearly a half of all schools.
- We have an educational video platform with films freely available to enhance learning in all schools, called first.news/EducationTV
- We create many pages of educational resources every week, customised for different ages, to bring the real world into the classroom.
- We have an interactive digital edition and a digital iHub to extend learning.
- We have launched an international edition – the world's only global newspaper for children.



PROJECT NAME: ENLIGHTENING CHILDREN

The global pandemic was a new experience for everyone, dealing with an invisible enemy. The Covid-19 story, knowledge and advice was changing continually, causing fear and alarm as everyone battled to discern the difference between information that could be trusted and the inevitable misinformation circulating.

We were aware that children were anxious and, although reports said they were the least likely to get seriously ill from Covid-19, their lives were turned on their heads. They couldn't see grandparents, and other family members and friends. Many missed school and had to learn at home. They couldn't take part in their normal activities with friends. While everything was not normal, we made it our mission to normalise everything as much as we could, with continuous updates week after week to enlighten them, and on which they could rely. We used reports in the paper, online videos and we supplied resources to be used in the classroom. Of course, our responsibility was to impart the truth, as scientists discovered more about the virus, to tell our young readers what was fact and what was fake, but also to reassure them about some of the sensationalist reporting that was going on in the adult media. We also decided to launch a campaign seeking out positive stories about the pandemic which involved our readers, asking them to nominate "Local Heroes" doing amazing things in their communities to help other people through the pandemic. Our other emphasis was to make sure children knew how to stay safe and to keep more vulnerable people around them protected. We wanted to hold the Government to account over their responsibility (in line with Article 17 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child) to make sure "children had access to news and information that affects them". So, we advised and worked with the Government to create simple, clear and direct pages of communications for children, including contextualized information about the virus, the restrictions and how to stay safe.

In summary we:

- Empowered children by giving them continually updated knowledge about the virus, so they could discern the difference between fact and scaremongering
- Delivered information to them through printed reports in the paper, with online videos on our website and educational resources
- Launched a positive campaign asking children to nominate "Local Heroes" doing amazing things in communities during the pandemic
- Created a series of comms with the British Government so they could understand the latest Covid-19 developments and advice
- Made our content available to schools and children at home for free for a period of time during the height of the pandemic
- Supported teachers and parents with home learning



WHAT WE DID

- We created great news coverage as the pandemic evolved which both informed and reassured. The challenge was to express the seriousness of the virus which was leading to all the measures and restrictions that were affecting our readers' lives. But, we needed to balance that with reassurance that children were the least likely people to be seriously ill. Everything about their lives was changing alarmingly but we needed to let them know that they would come out the other side at some point. But they also had a responsibility to help keep other people safe by following the guidance and new rules that were now defining everyone's lives.
- Regular front pages, special reports and news articles were produced as the virus progressed on its journey around the world. We also knew that children watch an average of 15 hours of online video content a week so we worked with a production partner to create "explainer" videos, putting Covid-19 in context with other pandemics in human history. Educational resources and worksheets were also produced to reinforce the learning and understanding.
- We placed a great emphasis on highlighting stories from other children around the world dealing with the pandemic – in Italy, Brazil, Croatia, Greece, the USA (and more) – involving them all in a global conversation where they could share experiences and see that they were not alone.
- Our "Local Heroes" campaign involved readers still further, inviting readers to nominate people in their communities who were making a positive contribution to the lives of others during the pandemic.
- In the UK edition our series of pages created in consultation with the British Government ensured children were updated on the latest Coronavirus developments, guidance and advice.



- From July 2020 we launched an International edition of First News.
- We made all our incredible content available worldwide to children and teachers free of charge and supported teachers in teaching through global news both in schools and through remote learning.

HOW WE DID IT

We knew it was important to reach children with news about coronavirus in every way we could – through print, digital and video. We had regular front pages and coronavirus updates every week throughout the pandemic, disseminating the fact from the fiction, so that children could be reliably informed about the virus and the developments around it. Accompanying the printed reports, we worked with our production partner on films to enlighten young people during the pandemic. Here is a link to our Coronavirus explainer video which was available for children to watch on our website within a couple of weeks of everyone becoming aware of the virus. It included the voices of children from countries across the world, talking about their experiences:

- <https://schools.firstnews.co.uk/fn-education-tv/fyi-investigates/coronavirus/>

The next one explained how coronavirus could be prevented, looking at learning from previous pandemics and vaccines:

- <https://schools.firstnews.co.uk/fn-education-tv/idgi/coronavirus-can-it-be-prevented/>

This video gave children the chance to put their questions to Dr Grace Li, from the Oxford Vaccine Group, about why there was a vaccine trial beginning for children:

- <https://schools.firstnews.co.uk/fn-education-tv/fyi-investigates/vaccine-trials-begin-for-children/>

All the videos were accompanied by reports in the newspaper itself, and by educational resources to take the learning further.

Seeing the importance of digital news access grow, we launched a new digital edition of First News in January 2021 which has improved user experience and now offers great functionality for using as a teaching tool.

For more information watch our video: <https://schools.firstnews.co.uk/products/newspaper-digital/>

Free access to children and teachers worldwide

Together with the print edition published every week we created a digital PDF edition. We invited parents and teachers (firstly with UK focus) to register for free access every week (available Mar-Jul and Jan-Apr)

As schools started closing, we opened up our premium online news literacy platform (the First News iHub) to teachers worldwide for free. The iHub offers weekly literacy activities at varying levels all based on the week's news stories. It is designed to develop core skills through the exploration of global news. With a reporting dashboard and control panel to enable teachers to set tasks, monitor individual pupil's progress, reward achievement and provide personalized feedback this is an ideal product to help teachers transcend the barrier of schools and remote learning. For more information on the First News iHub: <https://schools.firstnews.co.uk/products/ihub/>



WHY WE DID IT

- Key was to ensure that all children had ready access to truthful news about the coronavirus as the pandemic evolved.
- We knew we could only do this by distributing our content in print through the newspaper, with a free digital edition for ALL children, through online videos and educational resources to extend learning and understanding.
- We knew it was important to highlight shared experiences with children around the world in order to dispel anxiety and to show them that they were not alone.
- We wanted to raise the spirits of young people by focusing also on positive news around the virus – such as reduced pollution and through our Local Heroes campaign celebrating those doing great things in local communities to help others during the pandemic.
- We wanted to hold the Government to account in their responsibility (in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child) to make sure children had access to news and information that affects them. So, we advised and worked with the Government to ensure clear, contextualized information about the virus, rules and how to stay safe was communicated to children, (as well as only through their normal channels to adults).
- We wanted ALL children to have access to this (not just those who could afford to subscribe or those who went to schools which subscribed) so we made our content available for free.



HOW YOU KNOW IT WORKED

- There were over 25,000 registrations for home access to the free weekly digital edition of First News.
- Over 4,000 schools registered for free access (digital edition, iHub access or both)
- We received fabulous feedback from grateful readers!
(both paid subscribers taking the print edition and free access subscribers taking the digital edition)

"My daughters love this newspaper. With everything that's been happening in the world, it's nice they've been able to keep informed but with child friendly language and positive stories!"

– KateRose1202

"The boys have instantly warmed to it and loved it. I've just noticed that they seem to be a lot more aware of current affairs and what's going on in the world."

– Tom Irvine, Year 4 Teacher, Dulwich Prep School

"This is my daughter (Mina Tweedie, age 10) reading a copy of the First News. It is hands down the best newspaper ever. I love reading it too and we enjoy the crosswords, sudokus and other puzzles. It has been amazing through the whole of lockdown. Extremely well written and thought out. Well done, First News!"

– Tanya, mother of First News reader Mina

"What I like about First News is the way that they put major news events into accessible bitesize pieces for children. They take the key points and make sure that children can get the information they need without bias. It helps them to make sense of things that can be sometimes scary and it helps me, as their teacher, to put things into perspective. Throughout the lockdown, their pieces on the pandemic, what was happening and how it affected children's lives were an especially helpful tool for discussions and conversations."

Deputy Head, Tara Harmer, Heron Way Primary School.

"Thank you too for the First News resources, they are always enlightening but are proving to be invaluable in this age of distant learning."

– Mrs Holder, Edgeborough School

"We are absolutely loving it - the students are really engaged and the English department gave it a huge thumbs up."

– Ms McGauley, Senior Librarian, Jumeirah English Speaking School, Dubai

WHAT SHOULD HAPPEN NEXT

- **Wider access internationally:** In July 2020 we launched the international edition of First News and in January 2021 we launched an improved version of our digital edition (UK and International). We will continue to grow our readership internationally helping ensure that all children have ready access to truthful news and highlighting shared experiences with children around the world. As readership grows we will create more regional editions.



- **Encouraging greater participation from children to write their own news:** First News is already making progress here with the launch of the school newspaper awards and development of supporting materials to help schools with their newspaper clubs.
<https://schools.firstnews.co.uk/blog/journalistic-writing/>
- **Further enhancement of the digital edition:** We will soon be adding a text to speech audio function to improve accessibility. In addition we will be including lots of interactive puzzles each week (a popular request from our readers). The digital edition is undergoing continual improvement in line with feedback from our users and developments in technology.
- **Further roll out of the digital literacy platform (the First News iHub)** to support home schooling and the education catch-up programme.
- **Increased use of video content** to add value to our digital proposition. We are extending our partnership with our video content producers to be able to integrate more digital content in our digital edition and on our website. There is a strong International focus through all this content.



USEFUL SUPPORTING INFORMATION



To read our latest First News (UK edition), either:

1. Go to www.firstnews.co.uk/login-uk-edition. Use login code **FNUK0415** or
2. Download the **First News** app from the App Store or Google Play. Use login code **FNUK0415**

To read our latest edition of First News International, either:

1. Go to www.firstnews.co.uk/login-Int-edition. Use login code **FNINT0514** or
2. Download the **First News International** app from the App Store or Google Play. Use login code **FNINT0514**

For more about how schools are using First News go to

<https://schools.firstnews.co.uk/about/>