

Our Ref: BSN/KON

December 2016

ALL PARENTS/CARERS

Dear Parent/Carer

Once again, we have come to the end of another very busy term for the school. Time has flown since September and I am sure that like the pupils and staff you are looking forward to a break over the coming weeks. Certainly in school my impression is that the children and adults have really earned a good rest.

As you will now no doubt have heard, the school was inspected by OFSTED in the last month. It was a very tough process (as it should be) but we are pleased with the final outcome.

Dormston is now rated as a 'Good' School. This is a far cry from the position that we were in three years ago and I believe accurately reflects where we are at the moment. For me, we are a Good and still improving school. I explained to the Inspectors that I did not believe we were Outstanding yet but that the progress we have made is excellent. If we can keep up the pace the highest grade will be in our grasp within the next few years. The actual report will be available on the OFSTED website in the next few days and on the school website when we return from the Christmas break.

We are, however, not fooling ourselves, there is more work to do. Indeed, being rated as Outstanding is not really our aim. We want more for each child who attends our school than that. We want them to leave Dormston with their life chances significantly higher than when they joined us so that they can lead happy and successful lives. You have my word that this will be the guiding principle as we move forward. Accolades are nice and all very well, but the only things that really matter are the young people who come to Dormston and the work that we do together to help them achieve their dreams.

There are some very specific additional areas that we will be working on in order to improve even further when we return. The first being attendance. Despite having seen attendance improve dramatically over the past three years we need to see another big jump. The Government is very concerned with the levels of attendance of Free School Meal pupils. This is logical because all the research that has been conducted suggests that it is this group which achieves least well and has typically the worst attendance. The link is obvious and if we believe that education is the most important driver in creating social mobility (and I do) it stands to reason that we need these children to have the best, not the worst, attendance.

Now at this point, I have to put my cards on the table and tell you I have a problem with labelling any child because of their background. I was brought up in a household with my mum and brother and we received Free School Meals, but crucially I had a mother who was desperate for my brother and I to do well (and accepted no excuses from us if we didn't). We went to a school which did not see a child's background but only a bundle of potential and ability within each individual. As a school, we will be the latter, I would urge every parent to adopt the same approach as my mother because this is

what will make the difference. Every child should be aiming for 100% attendance at the start of the new term and every parent/carer should be under no illusion about the significance of achieving it.

A child's attitude to learning is another area that we can do even better with in some cases. One of the hardest lessons that we all have to learn is that we are on our own in the Exam Hall and that the more we put in the more we get out. Effort really is the key to everything. It is very noticeable in school how much harder the vast majority of pupils now work but this is something that we believe we could do better and that if staff, parents and pupils buy into it, it will have a significantly beneficial effect.

Homework will be a real focus for us in 2017. In the New Year I will be writing to you explaining how we are going to improve what we do and explaining how you can help. As a Head Teacher I am happy to say that I believe in homework. When it is well set and completed it can re-inforce and deepen learning. To be clear, this is not necessarily about setting more homework but rather about getting more value out of what we do give.

Excitingly, this is the time of the year when we start to think about how we will improve our site over the summer. If our plans work out as we would like them to we will shortly be submitting a Planning Application for a new Teaching Block that will help us to create more social space for the pupils. This is a big and ambitious project and is something that we desperately need. I will keep you updated as we move forward. Following on from our new House Councils I have also had a list of ideas and improvements that pupils have suggested. We will look to complete as many of them as we can.

Overall, it has been a great year. The school has again moved on and can afford to look forward with some confidence. However, all the hard work that has been put in could quickly disappear if we do not continue to get the basics right. Ultimately, the bread and butter issues of high quality teaching and excellent behaviour will continue to dominate the school's agenda in 2017 because they are things that have the biggest impact on changing and developing our pupils' lives.

I hope that you and your families enjoy a happy and restful Christmas and have a great New Year.

As always thank you for your continuing support.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'B A Stitchman', written in a cursive style.

Mr B A Stitchman
Head Teacher