

Our Ref: BSN/KON

December 2014

ALL PARENTS/CARERS

Dear Parents/Carers

As this is my last letter of the year I thought that it would be a good time to review some of the events of the past year and outline some of our plans for the next twelve months.

Back in January Dormston's 'Year of High Expectation' began; the idea behind it was that as a school community we needed to reset our sights as to what each of our pupils was capable of. The pupils at Dormston are a match for any that I have worked with, the only difference being that they need to be convinced of their abilities.

In my view there is no reason why any child at this school should not go on to achieve their hopes and ambitions and that it is our job to help them to do that. Whilst I am Head Teacher of Dormston every year will be a year of increasingly high expectations, but I believe that we have made some very encouraging progress this year. This is the ethos of our school. We have very high expectations and aspirations for all our pupils. We do not accept that anything is impossible.

As you know we have a simple mantra of Attendance, Behaviour, Classroom, Ethos, Environment and Extra-Curricular (A,B,C,E,E,E) and I am very firmly of the opinion that as each of the six individual aspects improves it leads to further improvements in the other areas and therefore in the school as a whole.

The school's staff have worked tirelessly to improve attendance over the last year. Attendance is a great example of how improving one aspect of a school feeds another, which then in turn improves attendance again. In the academic year ending July 2013 whole school attendance stood at just over 93%, it is now 95.6%. This is a remarkable change and demonstrates some very significant points. For example, it tells us a lot about how pupils feel about school. Pupils are good attendees when they feel safe and well cared for and when they believe that it is worth coming to school because they will be well taught, which will lead to them making good progress. It becomes a virtuous circle: pupils come to school more, so they learn more, and the more they learn the less they want to be away because they enjoy doing well. I am hopeful that by the end of the year we could have whole school attendance well in excess of 95% which will make us the best attended school in North Dudley and one of the best in the whole of the area. Our aim is get over 96% and to have no children in school that are persistently absent.

Good behaviour is always the first thing that any perspective parent wants to discuss and see when they are touring the school. My eldest child is due to start Primary School this year and it is my first concern when I have visited possible schools. I want to see happy, friendly and polite children who do as their teachers and other adults ask them. It is perhaps this aspect of our improvements that I am most pleased with. Our pupils are well-mannered and keen to help. As in any school we sometimes have to deal with behaviour that we do not like, but we now do this consistently so that everyone understands what our expectations are. Over the coming year we will look to strengthen our work on the level of effort that every child puts into their work. Every pupil is capable of trying their best (and many do all the time) irrespective of their ability so we need to make sure that we set our school up to encourage this to happen. We have already introduced a new Rewards System, and developed the use of effort data, but we think there is more again that we can do.

Over the next twelve months we will introduce some ideas that we believe will lead to further improvements. I will of course let you know about them in due course. Uniform is much improved but there is always the need to keep working on it. I have already mentioned that I believe that we should alter what footwear children wear to school. I will update you with any changes that are agreed by Governors.

It used to be the case that it was girls' hair that was sometimes an issue; however, it is now becoming increasingly the boys that we have problems with. The latest fashion seems to be long hair on top and very short at the sides and back. Whilst it might be fashionable it is not acceptable in school. Any child with a hairstyle that the school feels is unacceptable will be expected to change it or be isolated. I know that it is often difficult for parents to say no to their child but all parents/carers need to be aware that the school's decision on such matters is final.

The quality of teaching in the classroom is the key to the success of any school. I was pleased to read in our OFSTED Report that the Inspection Team agreed with the school that the quality of teaching was rapidly improving. Our stated aim is to make sure that every child enjoys solidly good teaching over time in all their subjects. Our monitoring systems allow us to accurately identify strengths and areas for improvement. Indeed OFSTED have now asked us to support a number of schools to help them to improve. At the same time, we know that we have a way to go to be as good as we would like and therefore we will continue to work as a school community to be the best that we can be.

We are starting to see the benefits of changing our curriculum in terms of increased progress. The whole school and individual departments have worked hard to significantly increase the level of challenge that each individual child receives. After we come back we will unveil the latest addition to our GCSE strategy which will massively increase the focus of preparing for exams. I am personally very excited about its potential.

Over the course of the year, the school has invested over £500,000 on improving the school site. We will continue to put as much money as we can afford into making our facilities better. The impact we have had so far has been huge. Pupils tell us that they feel really proud to attend our school and that they love the changes that we have made. We have got a list of future projects that we would like to complete that I believe will dramatically improve the school and therefore the quality of learning that each child enjoys.

It has certainly been a very busy year. We have achieved much, but there is still a lot more that we want to do, and will do, to continue improving our school. I hope that you and your families all enjoy a happy and safe Christmas and New Year. As always thank you for your continuing support.

Yours sincerely

Ben Stitchman
Head Teacher