

Our Ref: BSN/KON

July 2016

ALL PARENTS/CARERS

Dear Parent/Carer,

Once again we have come to the end of another school year. It seems like only a matter of weeks ago that we were starting back in September. As is always the case, the year brought challenges, difficulties and triumphs. One thing that has remained constant in my three years at the school is my unshakeable faith in what our young people are capable of. As a school we are very fortunate to have been entrusted with the education and care of your children. Despite it sometimes being a tough job, nothing would convince me that it is anything other than the best job in the world!

As you all know, we have a very simple and straight forward mantra at Dormston. The first of our key areas is **attendance**. It seems obvious that the more a child attends school the more they will learn. This year our whole school attendance figure will be 95.2%, this is an improvement on the previous year and will be better than the national average. However, it is below our whole school target of 96%. Next year as a school we are going to concentrate on pupils who have attendance that is less than our whole school target. I know that there has been a lot written in the press about what reasonable attendance is. Some believe that anything better than 90% hits that mark. I have to say that I fundamentally disagree with this. Firstly, because I am not interested in any of my pupils having only reasonable attendance. Secondly, because the numbers simply do not add up, 90% attendance means that a child is missing 4 weeks of school per year. If their level of attendance was the same through their 5 years at Dormston they would miss over half a year. The strain that this puts on the individual pupil and the rest of the school is considerable. They miss a lot of learning that they need to catch up on and the additional support that they require has a detrimental effect on other pupils. The teacher has to devote time to this and therefore not to the other pupils.

So the obvious question is what can we do? Well, I think that the answer is a lot if we see it as a priority and support one another. We can all be unwell from time to time but having 4 weeks off through illness during the course of the year is a real worry. Very often pupils whose attendance is at this level have a few days off at a time on 10 or 12 occasions during the course of the year. I regularly have meetings with pupils and their parents/carers regarding attendance and I always ask pupils to be completely honest with me and tell me if there have been any times when they could have come to school. The answer is always that

there were. It is in this area that I think parents/carers can help. Suggesting to a child that they should go to school and see how they get on during the day is always a good tactic. Next year any child who has attendance of less than 96% will be very carefully monitored and supported because being at school day in and day out is the key to success.

The second area that we are always very focused on is **behaviour**. We monitor behaviour very closely because the school believes that every child has the right to feel safe and learn without interruption. One of the key areas that I wanted us to focus on this year was low level disruption in lessons. One of the jobs that I complete religiously every day is to walk around school and go into lessons at least twice. It is also something that I require of my senior management colleagues. It helps us to understand more clearly what is actually happening and it helps us to build relationships with staff and pupils. I always tour the school a lot with visitors. Perhaps one of the most striking differences between now and three years ago is what is going on in lesson time. It is very unusual to see a pupil not in their lesson and it is even more surprising to see pupils not working diligently in lessons. This is a real achievement for the school and something that is having a massively positive effect on learning, but we can and must get better still.

As a parent with a child at school myself I know all about the annual trip to the shops before returning to school to get **uniform** for the new school year. I can still remember some of the fraught trips with my own mum where I would try and convince her to buy me a certain pair of school shoes, trousers or coat. My mum would never be convinced by what I told her and would always refer carefully to my school's policy. I would ask you to do the same. We do expect every child to follow our rules without exception. I have enclosed the uniform policy, uniform poster, and some additional information regarding shoes. One point I would like to make is that we do not allow trainer style shoes simply because we do not believe that such a thing exists. As with all these matters, as the Headteacher, it is my interpretation of the rules that is binding and not that of a parent, carer or child. If in doubt, please get in contact with us and retain your receipts so that any item that does not meet our uniform policy can be returned. If we are not happy with any child's uniform in September we will expect it to be replaced immediately.

What is happening in the classroom will change significantly in September. As you may be aware English and Maths GCSE have already been altered and other subjects will follow suit in the new Academic Year. The emphasis will now be on final exams rather than coursework. The Government have also decided to increase the difficulty (quite rightly in my opinion) of all subjects. To reflect this, almost all departments have been required to re-write their programmes of study. The aim from our point of view is to make learning much more challenging and stretching than it was previously. Our pupils are bright and capable of rapid progress, to help them to achieve this it is vital that we provide them with learning that allows this progress. We will also assess them in a way that mirrors what they can expect at the end of Year 11. I know that this might sound like a small thing but it really is not. One of

the major issues in many schools is a lack of challenge, particularly in Year 7 and for the more able pupils. If we get this right all our pupils will progress wonderfully.

All this means that there will be greater expectations of not only staff and pupils but also parents. Together we are an incredibly powerful force and for the benefit of our children we all must play our part. It is for this reason that I am asking for your continuing support with **homework**. We get more referrals for a lack of homework than anything else. Parents can have a substantial and significant impact in this area by providing a quiet work area at home and by taking an interest. Your help in this area will have a big impact on just how well your child does.

As I have written before, one of the biggest worries every year is recruitment. Getting good quality staff in schools is becoming increasingly difficult. A few years ago every vacancy we advertised would attract 10 or more applications. Now we are lucky to get more than a handful. However, through some good planning, and the school's improved reputation, we have attracted some fantastic new colleagues for September. I am very excited about watching them in action and seeing them working with our pupils.

Dormston's extra-curricular provision has improved significantly over the past three years. I believe that this is vital because coming to school should be something that pupils enjoy. A big part of that enjoyment is what happens outside the normal curriculum. In addition to what we already offer we are working on a range of new and exciting opportunities. Perhaps one of the biggest will be our new House Arts Competition, I am also investigating the possibility of having some kind of Music and Arts Festival next summer so watch this space.

The summer holidays will also be a very busy time for our Premises team. We will be making another raft of changes to the site. Some of the changes include a new state of the art Food Technology room and the first stage in the refurbishment of our toilets. I don't think you can underestimate the impact of these changes on how pupils and staff feel about their school.

It has been another incredibly busy and challenging year. I sincerely hope that you and your families have a happy and restful holiday.

Thank you as always for your continuing support.

Yours sincerely

Mr B A Stitchman
Head Teacher