

Our Ref: BS/KO

February 2014

ALL PARENTS

Dear Parent/Carer

At the start of another very busy half-term during Dormston's Year of High Expectations I thought it might be useful to write to you to keep you informed of some of the things that are on our agenda in the coming weeks. As a school we feel that a lot has changed since the start of the year but as always our key focus continues to be improving the quality of learning that each pupil receives.

The systems that we have put in place to monitor the quality of learning are starting to show a positive effect. Perhaps the best indicator of this is the Pupil Voice activities that we carry out every half-term. In these sessions we ask pupils what they think of the school, for example, what are we getting right and what can we improve further. An OFSTED Inspector once told me that if you ask the pupils at the start of a visit about the school and their learning the results that the Inspection Team get at the end always mirror what the young people have said. It is for this reason that we put a good deal of emphasis on what we learn from our pupils.

Pleasingly, pupils are reporting that the school is on the up. They believe that learning and behaviour have improved since September. One particular highlight for me is that pupils have really bought into having higher target grades. They can see that their teachers have higher aspirations and expectations of what they are capable of than was previously the case. Interestingly, they are keen that we expect even more from them. I am delighted by this because it confirms what I have believed about our young people from the very first day that I began working here; that they are extremely capable and we are very lucky to have such a talented cohort. However, we are not complacent in any way. The gains we have made have been hard won and we still have a long way to go to achieve what I know we can. We will continue to rigorously monitor what is going on in our classrooms so that we provide our young people with the best possible start in life.

There are many other areas of school life that significantly contribute to a pupil's experience. One important area is how children socially interact with each other and all the adults in the school. Since September, as a new comer to the school, I have noticed a marked change. I want to lead a happy and positive school and I have always believed that it is important that we all treat each other with courtesy and respect. No one is perfect and people make mistakes, which is part of learning as you go through life but I am increasingly seeing pupils being honest when things go wrong. I think that this is a very positive development because it tells me that our young people are prepared to take responsibility for themselves and their actions. Equally, I want our pupils to be proud of their achievements, of which there are many.

As always when I write to you I need to highlight a few issues that we are currently experiencing and trying to work on in school. Issues include the use of social media, pupils arriving at school without the correct equipment, litter, attendance and punctuality.

Many pupils use Facebook and other types of social media. This is now a part of everyday life but on occasion it does worry me. Often people are prepared to say and behave in a different way on there than they would face to face. I would ask all parents to be mindful of their child's use of social media so that they stay safe and that they do not find themselves in situations that they are not equipped to deal with. As a school we will continue to speak to the pupils about this issue.

As you may know I am a Head Teacher who still teaches. There are two main reasons for this. Firstly, I think it is important that you practice what you preach and secondly because I really enjoy it. One of the biggest barriers to learning that we are currently experiencing in school is pupils who do not come equipped correctly. If pupils do not have pens, pencils, etc. it can have a devastating effect on learning because the teacher has to spend time distributing equipment therefore lessening the pace and progress that can be achieved. We are taking this issue so seriously that we will carry out spot checks after half-term to get a clearer picture of the situation. In cases of hardship as a school we will always support our pupils in any way that we can.

I am delighted to be able to report that the school's Governors have given the go ahead for us to investigate improving the social facilities for the pupils. The plans that we would like to put in place would cost hundreds of thousands of pounds but I believe would transform the experience that our children have. One of the things that Governors want to be convinced about is that any changes would be treasured by our pupils and it is for this reason that from this half-term onwards we need to have a big push on decreasing the amount of litter in school. I very much see it as everyone's responsibility to put their own litter in a bin so that our environment is as pleasant as possible.

Attendance and punctuality have both improved since the start of the year. We believe that good attendance and punctuality are the keys to achieving well. We would ask for your continuing support to ensure that all children get to school on time for every day possible.

As you may have seen in the press there is due to be another Teacher's Strike on 26th March. As the situation unfolds we will keep you informed of our plans.

Finally, thank you once again for your continuing support.

Yours sincerely

Ben Stitchman
Head Teacher