

Our Ref: BSN/KON

March 2016

ALL PARENTS

Dear Parent/Carer

Once again we have reached the end of another term. The spring term this year has flown by, partly because it is relatively short, and also because we have packed so much in. The pace of school life does not let up and perhaps this is why there is never a dull moment. As a school we have a lot to be pleased and proud about in the year so far, but we also have more that we want to accomplish during the remaining weeks of the school year.

Attendance remains an absolute priority in school. Once again we are on course to break the attendance record. As I have consistently said, Attendance is a crucial indicator of a school's performance. It tells us how pupils feel about school, so it is pleasing to note that it has improved again on the previous year. I am sure many of you will have read in the press that the government has changed the attendance percentage at which it considers a pupil to be a persistent absentee from 85% to 90%. In real terms, this means any child who has 1 day off a fortnight on average or 4 weeks off per year. When I speak to parents about attendance, some feel that 90% is quite good, but when you consider that if a child had that level of attendance throughout secondary school they would miss more than half a school year it shows that it is actually pretty poor. There is no doubt that there is a direct link between attendance, achievement and life chances. Who does not want their child to have as many opportunities as possible? Perhaps one of the best things that any parent/carer can do for their child is make sure that they come to school every day.

Over the past few weeks we have had a number of visitors to the school. Although the focus of the visits was not behaviour, all our guests have felt compelled to comment on what they have seen. In short, they have been extremely impressed. For example, we have had a visit from an outstanding school that is one of the highest performing schools in the country. Their teachers actually said that they believed that the focus and behaviour of our pupils was better than at their school. Indeed, on their tours of the school they did not see one example of off-task behaviour. I am very pleased by this because one of our major foci this year has been trying to eradicate low level disruption in lessons. The truth is that this is a very difficult aim but there is no doubt that we have improved dramatically. The reality is that children come to school to learn and nobody has the right to stop that process. It is not something that we will accept or tolerate at Dormston.

An area of concern for any school is safeguarding. Right at the top of any parent or carer's list of concerns is that their child is safe. This is also our number one priority. Probably the biggest issue we have to deal with in school is technology and its misuse. It is very easy for adults to say how different things were in their day but this really is an area of huge and not

always positive change. In common with other schools, some of the situations that our pupils get themselves into are every parent's nightmare. I would strongly encourage you all to keep yourself informed about what your children are up to online. In school we have recently had a "Safer Internet Day" to highlight some of issues that pupils can encounter.

Homework is an area that we are looking to improve. I am a believer in homework. I think it can support and speed up learning as well as develop vital skills like time management, self-reliance and resilience. We have spoken to our pupils and the consistent message seems to be that they are getting more homework and that they feel it is more useful than was previously the case. Predictably, what I consider to be good homework (extended writing tasks or exam questions) are less popular with pupils. However, I still think we can improve in this area in a number of ways. Firstly, as teachers we need to stick to the Homework Timetable more faithfully. Secondly, we must make sure that all homework is useful, and thirdly, we need more support from home to ensure that every child engages and completes any work set to the highest possible standard. In short, there is more to do in this area.

The school continues to have some great extra-curricular opportunities. Our Duke of Edinburgh group is huge this year and our sports teams are having good seasons. However, it would be wrong of me not to give a special mention to our most recent school production, The Return to the Forbidden Planet. It was an incredible show. The cast were astounding. It was a real moment of clarity for me when I could see very clearly just what our young people are capable of. I have said many times that the pupils at this school are as good as at any school in the country. On those four nights in February, no one would have doubted that statement.

Yours sincerely

Mr B Stitchman
Head Teacher