



SCHOOL UPDATES

WELCOME BACK:

So here we are at the start of another school year – the Summer holiday a now too distant memory for us all! It has been wonderful to welcome the pupils back in to school, and St Mary's has once again become alive with the sights and sounds of learning and laughter – which we're so blessed to be a part of. We have welcomed 27 amazing young people in to our Reception Class, and it has been a delight to see how well they've settled in to life at St Mary's, and we can't wait to see how they blossom and flourish over the coming weeks and months.

As with every new year, we hit the ground running, and don't look back until Christmas! I've attached a list of diary dates for the upcoming Term, but please be reminded that there will always be alterations and additions as the weeks progress, and that these will be found within the News Bulletin that will be produced each week. I would also urge you – if possible – to attend the annual Curriculum Information Evening, due to be held at 5pm on Monday 18th September. At this event, you will have a chance to meet your child's class teacher, to have a look around their new classroom, and to receive information about the upcoming school year. I will be talking to parents about, among other things, highlights from 2016-17, curricular and extra-curricular updates for the year ahead, as well as news about our current systems for communication and sharing information regarding your child's learning. It would be wonderful to see as many of you there as possible as we embark on what I'm certain will be an incredibly successful year for us all.

Finally, I would like to extend an open invitation to you all to join in the celebration of our first school Mass of the year this Thursday (14th September); it will be an opportunity to kick-start the academic year in praise and thanksgiving, something that we do so well here at St Mary's.

I look forward to sharing in a highly successful, fruitful year with you and your families; and as ever, if there's anything at all you would like to chat with me about over the coming weeks, please don't hesitate to get in contact.

Yours,

J Wheatley
Headteacher

RECEPTION CLASS OPEN MORNING:

For anyone who has a child who will start school in September 2018, there is an open day on Wednesday 4th October. There will be two sessions, one starting at 9:30am, and one at 1:30pm; each session will consist of a tour of the school, to see the school in full swing, and an opportunity then to have a chat with Mr Wheatley and ask questions you may have about the school or the admissions process. Please spread the word to other interested parties, and if you are unable to attend on this day, please just get in contact with school to arrange a mutually convenient alternative. Applications for children who attend Duckpool Pre-school, or whose parents/carers have already expressed interest in applying for a place at St Mary's, will receive a pack outlining the admissions process, and copies will be available at our open day. The deadline for Admissions to Reception 2018-19 is 15th January 2018.

SECONDARY ADMISSIONS:

Pupils in Y6 will have received a letter regarding Secondary Admissions in their blue bag today. Please be reminded that the deadline for the online application is 31st October 2017. Please feel free to get in contact with the Gateshead School Admissions team, or indeed the school office, if there is anything you would like to discuss about the process.

FREE SCHOOL MEALS:

From mid-October, Universal Credit will be replacing Income Support, Income-based Jobseekers Allowance, Income-related Employment and Support Allowance, Housing Benefit, Working Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit. All individuals/families accessing Universal Credit will be eligible for Free School Meals from the date on which the entitlement is confirmed. Along with this benefit comes access to further funding for school through the Pupil Premium. For every child who has ever received Free School Meals, the school receives funds to promote learning and progress for that child each year for the remainder of their school career; in the primary school this is presently £1320 per child per year.

With the introduction of Universal Free School Meals in the Early Years and KS1, we have seen a significant drop-off in the numbers of pupils who are in receipt of Pupil Premium funding (which is triggered after parents/carers complete an application for Free School Meals). Though as a parent/carer you will only feel the financial benefit of completing these forms from Y3 upwards (once your child is no longer eligible for KS1 Universal Free School Meals), your child could be missing out on thousands of pounds worth of additional support which is designed to help your child make more rapid progress in their learning.

If you think that you may meet the criteria for 'Free School Meals' – irrespective of your child's age – I would urge you to complete the attached application form (sent out to all families) and return the Benefit's Service at Gateshead Council. For more information, please phone 0191 4333729 to speak to someone from the team, or indeed phone the school office – we'd be more than happy to help.

REMINDERS

UNIFORM:

A reminder, at the start of a new school year, about the high standards we have for school uniform. Please support us in this aim by ensuring that all children are coming to school with:

- Appropriate footwear (ie. black shoes – no trainers);
- No jewellery apart from a watch (ie. no earrings – even taped);
- Appropriate hairstyles (ie. any hair at shoulder length must be tied back; no braids; no die or 'extreme' styles; no shaved hair shorter than a grade 3; no over-sized 'JoJo bows' in hair).

Our full school uniform requirements are available to view on the 'Parents - School Documents' area of the school website (www.whickhamstmarys.org.uk).

SWIMMING:

This year, Year 4 will be attending swimming on a Thursday morning (starting Thursday 14th September). All pupils will need to bring a swimming bather (no board shorts) and towel, as well as goggles and a swimming cap (if needed). All pupils well enough to be in school (bar pupils with a serious injury – such as a broken wrist) are expected to go swimming; pupils will not be permitted to stay in school, or sit on the poolside, due to illness.

PE:

All pupils will begin full PE lessons from next week.

Pupils in Reception will have PE on a Monday and will need full PE kit (no trainers).

Pupils in Years 1-4 will have PE on a Thursday, and Years 5 and 6 will have PE on a Friday; as well as their school t-shirt and shorts, pupils from Years 1 – 6 will need trainers in school each week.

Pupils in KS2 may be outdoors for some sessions; as you will be aware school hoodies may be purchased and worn for PE.

MEDICAL FORMS:

Please ensure school has been made aware of any changes/updates regarding your child's medical needs; this can be done by completing a medical form (available from the school office). Please also ensure that all medication in school is up to date for the new school year.

Please note, medical forms are for serious and persistent medical conditions, for which we would need to store medicine in school, and administer in case of an emergency.

One further medical update for the start of the year is that the school has purchased an Automated External Defibrillator, with all staff receiving training on how to use the device.

REQUESTING A LEAVE OF ABSENCE:

A polite reminder about requesting leave of absence for your child; any parent wishing to remove their child from school (for whatever reason) is asked to complete a request for absence form explaining the reasons for the leave of absence, and to return it to school in good time. School will respond with a set letter explaining whether the leave has been authorised or not. Please remember, Governmental guidelines (amended in 2013) are very clear that leave of absence may only be granted in very exceptional circumstances, and it is at the discretion of the Headteacher to consider each case on an individual basis. Request forms will be available from Mrs Noble in the School Office or from the 'School Documents' page of the school website.

MOBILE PHONES:

If any pupils in Years 5 or 6 are required to bring a mobile phone with them to school for safety purposes (ie. they arrive/leave school by themselves), please could parents/carers complete a mobile phone consent form (available from the school office or school website); all mobile phones must remain switched off during the school day, and be handed in to the school office first thing in the morning.

PARKING:

A polite reminder at the start of the year for all users of the church car park that parking spaces are incredibly limited, and that parents/carers are encouraged to walk – where possible – or indeed to park well away from school in order to ease congestion at the start and end of the day. I would like to make a particular plea that parents/carers make a big effort this year to:

- Avoid double parking and 'blocking-in' other users of the parish car park (there really is only space for parking in two parallel rows) – so that we don't end up with the 'sardine' scenario at the end of the day.
- Refrain from parking on the pavement outside church (an obvious health and safety risk to pedestrians – many of whom are children).
- Avoid arriving after 3:10pm and trying to get a parking space in the parish car park (as traffic flowing in opposite directions on Dockendale Lane poses real difficulties and risks to pedestrians and other road users).
- Refrain from attempting to park in the staff car park (unless attending an arranged appointment taking place within the school day).
- Refrain from parking on Duckpool Lane.
- Refrain from 'double-parking' on streets opposite and adjacent to school (which can cause obvious difficulties for residents).

These requests should ensure, first and foremost, that children and other pedestrians are safe, that the parish car park continues to be a viable option for some of our parents and carers who may have more significant reasons for needing to park closer to school (limited mobility etc), and that we continue to maintain a positive relationship with our neighbours.

If there is anything you'd like to discuss regarding parking arrangements at school, please feel free to give Mr Wheatley a call at the school office.

LINING UP IN THE YARD:

The 'buzz' of the school yard is something that we feel is a real positive aspect of life at St Mary's – and something we would never wish to lose. It is fantastic to have the opportunity to catch up with parents and carers at the start and end of the school day as you're all such valued members of our school family. When the bell sounds, please encourage your child to walk sensibly to their line, and to show school staff that they are ready to begin the school day. In order to aid this process, can I please remind parents and carers to stand well away from the lines, leaving a clear route for pupils to walk in to school without having to weave in and out of adults – which can pose some issues when staff are trying to get all pupils in to school in a safe and orderly fashion. Please also be reminded that pupils in KS1 and the Early Years also line up at the end of the day. Again, please support the school staff to ensure that they have safely handed over all children to their parent/carer by standing well back from the 'lining up area' – demarcated on the school yard with footprints. Thank you as ever for your help and support with this matter.

MUSIC TUITION:

If there are any pupils in KS2 who are keen to receive small group tuition in Violin, Cello or Guitar, please get in contact with school to register your interest (if you don't already receive tuition in school); Mrs Cuggy and Mrs Watson are particularly interested in pupils in Y5 who were part of the string orchestra project last year who would like to continue with their chosen instrument. Information regarding payment etc from the music service will go out in the coming weeks.

AFTER SCHOOL CLUBS:

At present, these are the clubs on offer to pupils at St Mary's:

- Monday – Tennis (KS1 and 2)
Spaces available for the upcoming Term; sessions will run from 18th September to the 4th December (excluding Film Night).
- Tuesday – Happy Feet dance (KS1 and 2)
Already started.
- Wednesday – Choir (Y2-6)
Starting Wednesday 13th September.
- Thursday – Irish Dancing (KS1 and 2)
Already started.
- Friday – Gymnastics (KS1 and 2)
Starting Friday 15th September.

You will receive notification prior to the clubs starting for the year; anyone interested in starting one of these clubs for the first time, please contact the school for more details.

UPCOMING EVENTS

TERM AND DIARY DATES: Please find below a reminder of the Term Dates for the year, as well as the diary dates (attached), as they stand at present, for the Autumn Term. We will endeavour to let you know as soon as possible of alterations or updates to this list, and Mrs Noble will be updating the calendar on the school website (www.whickhamstmarys.org.uk) regularly.

	START	END	HALF-TERM
AUTUMN	4.9.17	22.12.17	23.10.17 – 27.10.17
<i>INSET</i>	4.9.17		
SPRING	8.1.18	29.3.18	12.2.18 – 16.2.18
<i>INSET</i>	8.1.18		
SUMMER	16.4.18	20.7.18	28.5.18 – 1.6.18
<i>INSET</i>	Polling Day (TBC); Bank Holiday 7.5.18		

(1 Inset Day TBC)

THEATRE PERFORMANCE:

We will be treating pupils next week to a Theatre performance of Pinocchio on Wednesday morning. There is no cost for the performance which will take place in the school hall.

Please note, with it being only their third full day in school, our new Reception class will not attend the performance this time.

GREAT NORTH RUN:

A huge good luck to all pupils and members of our wider school community who will be taking part in the Junior and Great North Run. We would love to hear any stories of sporting or charitable success to share with our wider community, so please get in touch to let us know if you have any news to share!

MACMILLAN COFFEE MORNING:

On Friday 29th September, The Friends of St Mary's will be hosting and taking part in the World's Biggest Coffee Morning with all donations going to Macmillan Cancer Support. Invitation is open to everyone, so please bring as many friends and family along and join us in the school hall from 9-10.30 for a cuppa and slice of cake. We are asking you to lend your support by baking or buying a cake to sell on the day; you can find plenty of ideas and inspiration at www.coffee.macmillan.org.uk. We look forward to seeing as many people as possible on the day.

THE WEEK AHEAD:

TUESDAY – Go Smarter pedestrian training in Y3 (for next six weeks).

WEDNESDAY – Pinocchio production Years 1 – 6.

THURSDAY – Whole School Mass (9:30am, St Mary's RC Church; all welcome).

