

**IMPORTANT DATES/TASKS THIS WEEK:**

- REMINDER - Please complete the Autumn Term parent/carer voice survey which can be found here: <https://participate.schoolsurveys.com/BwTEsz32UndGdrNj>. The survey will be open until 12pm on Friday 1st December.
- Meeting for parents/carers, friends and family of the school keen to be involved in Christmas events at 8:50am on Friday 1st December 2023.

SCHOOL UPDATES & REMINDERS**A NOTE ABOUT ATTENDANCE & PUNCTUALITY:**

Dear Parents/Carers,

I can not quite believe that December is almost upon us, and as if by clockwork, we are definitely feeling the distinct 'bite' of Winter in the air at the moment. As we brace ourselves for the remaining four weeks of term, I just wanted to share a polite plea regarding our ongoing joint efforts for excellent attendance and punctuality at St Mary's – something which, we all know, is critical in enabling our children to flourish.

Whole school attendance is currently around 96.3% - just short of our target of 97%. Attendance across school has dropped slightly over the past week due to an increase in sickness absence, and whereas this is not cause for immediate concern, it is worth our joint considerations so that we do not inadvertently put too much distance between ourselves and this annual target over the coming weeks.

Evidently, it is probable that some of our pupils will be affected by seasonal illness at this time of year – some of which may be significant and require them to be off school for a short period of time. There is very little we can do about this other than to ensure that our children are well rested and to seek and follow the advice of medical professionals where required. We have asked parents/carers to be particularly careful with more significant illnesses such as chicken pox, shingles, measles and mumps, where there would be an expectation of 'isolation' for a period of time, and we can advise what to do should you suspect that your child has such an illness.

That being said, we know that continued good attendance helps pupils to thrive – personally, socially and academically, and that both extended and sporadic absence can have a real negative impact on pupils' well-being. As such, we would encourage parents/carers to not be overly cautious with routine illness (coughs and colds). If you are ever unsure as to whether to keep your child off school or not, please contact the school office for a chat and to seek some guidance. I am often humbled at the desire for parents/carers to prevent the spread of illness to other pupils and staff however none of us wants children to be at home and missing out unnecessarily – especially during this special time of year. Please bear this in mind over the coming weeks. I would also encourage parents/carers to consider very carefully the need for any 'unauthorised' absence as this should be avoided wherever possible.

Please could I also ask for a renewed effort to get pupils through the gates before they close at 8:50am. Pupils need to be in school on-time to access their full school offer, and much like 'persistent absence', missed minutes and late starts do have a real negative impact on pupils and prevent them from fulfilling their full potential. Just a thought, but it might be worth setting the dreaded alarm a little earlier over the

coming weeks as we all know how an unexpected icy windscreen or woolly glove hunt can add several minutes on to our already tight morning routines.

I know you will be all over it!

I am – much like you will be – very much looking forward to the glorious chaos of the Christmas run-in, and fully expect that this will be a joyous time for us all.

Yours in Faith,

J Wheatley
Headteacher

SPOTLIGHT SAFETY: Parent/Carer Information

Remember, you can find some really helpful information about keeping your child safe online on our school website: <http://www.whickhamstmarys.org.uk/online-safety.html>.

We would also recommend the use of the parent/carers guides produced by National online Safety <https://tinyurl.com/mb8cus38> as well as their #WakeUpWednesday campaign: <https://twitter.com/natonlinesafety>.

CHRIST THE KING/'YOUTH SUNDAY':

This weekend marks the final Sunday in the Church's calendar, the Feast of Christ the Universal King. On this Feast Day, we celebrate World Youth Sunday – a day on which we recognise the role that young people play in the life of the Church.

In his World Youth Sunday address, Pope Francis calls upon all young people to 'rejoice in hope' and to answer God's call allowing Him into their lives and radiate through them that they may be a beacon of joy, optimism and faith for others.

We pray for young people in our parish and Diocese, that they may have the courage, conviction and faith to live out God's plan for them in their lives, and in so doing, set the world ablaze.

Amen.

OPERATION CHRISTMAS CHILD:

Thank you to all those who contributed to our school's annual donation to the Samaritan's Purse *Operation Christmas Child* appeal. You can find out more about the difference your donation will make here: <https://www.samaritans-purse.org.uk/what-we-do/operation-christmas-child/>.

FRIENDS OF ST MARY'S:

There will be a meeting at **8:50am on Friday 1st December** in the school hall for any member of our school community keen to be involved in a planned family Christmas activity day on Monday 18th December. All are welcome to come along, and those unable to attend the planning meeting can of course still participate in the activity day. More information will be sent out following the meeting on Friday.

ADVENT AT ST MARY'S:

Next Sunday marks the start of Advent, the season of preparation leading us toward the joyous celebration of the Nativity of our Lord, Jesus. Throughout the weeks of Advent, we will be helping our pupils to prepare themselves for Jesus' coming at Christmas in different ways:

- We will come together in prayer and worship, as we always do, at the start of each week in our Monday Celebration of the Word lighting a new candle on our Advent Wreath each week as we journey towards Christmas;
- All pupils will also develop their knowledge of the Nativity story and the Christian traditions of Advent and Christmas in their RE lessons;
- Pupils in KS1 will 'live' the Christmas story through their preparations and performances of a Nativity play;
- Pupils will be learning a selection of Christmas carols and hymns which we will use for our communal celebrations in the last week of term;
- Our 'travelling cribs' will be making their way to the homes of all our KS1 children. Families will be invited to share the Nativity story together and to share in the joyous, hopeful anticipation we are called to this Advent;
- We will be asking families to contribute to the Parish of Our Lady and St Philip Neri 'Love Christmas' appeal to support families in need living in our local community (more below);
- Pupils in KS2 will be invited to participate in a 'Christmas Choir' which will perform at several community events before the end of term.

We hope and pray that it will be a joyous and holy season for us all, and that – as a community – we can make a real difference this Christmas.

'LOVE CHRISTMAS' IN THE PARISH OF OUR LADY AND ST PHILIP NERI:

This year, we will once again be asking for donations for our Parish's 'Love Christmas' appeal. We will be doing this in a slightly different way, however, using the idea of a 'reverse Advent Calendar'. Pupils across school will bring home an empty bag containing an 'advent calendar' which, rather than giving them a daily gift, will ask your child to consider how they can give a gift to someone who is living with real need. The items requested will be distributed within our Parish to families in need of support this Christmas.

The reverse advent calendar packs will be sent home this week and should be returned to school by **Friday 16th December**. There is no obligation to participate, and families should only give what they can. Your generosity will be greatly appreciated.

SPORTS UPDATE:

Huge congratulations to our Y6 tag rugby team who came away with bronze medals from the Gateshead School Sports Partnership tournament finals this week. The team put in some wonderful performances of attacking rugby demonstrating amazing skills, resilience and determination. Even more impressively, the team were awarded the fair play award on the afternoon for respecting the decisions of the referee without complaining – something that is incredibly important for us at St Mary's.

Well done too to our Y2 multi-skills superstars for their participation in a recent event at St Thomas More. The team had an opportunity to try out a number of different events – throwing, catching, aiming and running – and had a wonderful time doing so. The future continues to look bright for sports at St Mary's!

SCHOOL VISITS:

We have had a vast array of school visits over the past term. We have recently completed a piece of work as a staff team to ensure that school visits and opportunities are embedded in our curriculum offer for pupils, and it has been fantastic to see how these visits have brought to life pupils' learning in the

classroom. You can see a selection of photos from each of these visits (such as Y2's trip to Campground Waste and Recycling Centre, and Reception and Y1's trip to Seven Stories, on our school X page: <https://twitter.com/whickhamstmarys>).

