



Dear Parent/Carer

Welcome back to you all at the start of the new term. I trust that everyone has had a restful and enjoyable Christmas and a great start to 2024. It's always a privilege to welcome our pupils back to school and to share in the joy and excitement of their catching up with friends and the tales of their winter breaks. We have enjoyed a fantastic first week back; the pupils, as ever, have been a true joy.

On Tuesday, during our first 'Celebration of the Word' of the new year, we shared the stories of the Epiphany and the Baptism of Our Lord: two recently celebrated feast days of the Church which recall very different times in the life of Jesus, but which share an intrinsically linked message: that God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to demonstrate to us the fullness of His love for all of humankind. In a world so often lacking in many of the fruits of this love: patience, tolerance, respect, empathy and kindness, this Gospel message is a timely reminder for us all at the start of a new year that the way we are called to live, as Christians, is so very necessary in our world today. As we embark on a new year at St Mary's, we should be filled with encouragement from the certainty that God's love for us knows no boundaries and should be secure in the belief that – strengthened by this love – we can achieve great things. We look forward together to sharing in the many successes and celebrations that the year will bring, but more than that, we look forward to travelling the journey alongside you and your families, and in sharing this year with you and your children.

I wrote to you at the start of term to explain that we are currently in the process of recruiting a Senior Office Administrator, so – at present – we are somewhat short-staffed in the school office. Please continue to communicate – where possible – via email at info@stmw.bwcet.com, or if requiring urgent attention, via phone on 0191 4205828; where necessary, you may need to leave a voicemail, and a member of staff will get back to you as soon as possible. I trust that we will have positive news about a new appointment soon.

I would also ask that you read and digest the information attached to this week's News Bulletin regarding our new school and Trust Attendance Policy. We all know that strong school attendance helps our pupils to do well emotionally, pastorally and academically. It is in partnership that we strive towards strong attendance for all our pupils; of course, we have a statutory duty to challenge pupils' non-attendance in certain outlined circumstances, and of course our new policy re-affirms and outlines how this will be done, but please know that we wish to work with you – not in spite of or against you – in attempt to meet our school (and Trust) targets for attendance. As a team, staff and Governors have worked so hard over the past eight plus years to help foster an ethos of mutual respect, shared high expectation and openness with our families, and I would be loathed to see any disenfranchisement of our parents and carers due to miscommunication or understanding around new policies or practices which we may be required to put in place. I will continue to be up front and open where we have concerns about pupils' attendance or punctuality and continue to encourage you to contact me at school should you wish to discuss any matters relating to your child's school attendance or any other concerns or considerations you may have.

Thank you in advance for your continued support and co-operation over the coming term. I pray that this will be an incredible year for us all.

Yours in Faithful Optimism,

Mr J Wheatley
Headteacher

IMPORTANT DATES/TASKS THIS WEEK:

- Please ensure that you can access the school's *Arbor* system (<https://stmw-bwcet.uk.arbor.sc/?/home-ui/index>). You can use your *Arbor* account to:
 - Review and update key information for your child.
 - Monitor your child's attendance.
 - Pay for school meals, music lessons and trips (this should be done in advance).
 - Access school communications (also received by email).
- Please pay for school clubs as instructed. Payment for the upcoming term of Tennis sessions should be paid here: <https://clubspark.lta.org.uk/wedotennisltdp/Coaching/Course/b3473756-2412-4338-9d23-26d70d12b57d>.
- If your child is to receive small group violin or viola lessons in school, please make payment for the upcoming term on *Arbor*. If your child no longer wishes to receive lessons you must contact Mr Wheatley to inform him of this.
- Please make sure all uniform and other items coming into school are clearly labelled.
- All pupils across school are invited to have a FREE school meal on **Thursday 18th January** as part of a Trust-wide day of celebration. You do not need to give prior notice if you intend your child to take advantage of the offer on the day.
- Please read and share the enclosed polite start of term notices and thank you in advance for your continued co-operation and partnership.
- Please come along to our Friends of St Mary's coffee morning in support of Macmillan Cancer Support from 9-11am on **Friday 26th January**. All welcome!
The event will be 'cashless', but we would politely ask for any donations to be made here: <https://www.justgiving.com/page/friends-of-st-marys-catholic-primary-school-macmillan-jan2024?newPage=true>.
- There will be a brief meeting of the *Friends of St Mary's*: parents/carers and friends/family of the school, at 8:50am on **Thursday 18th January**. The meeting will be to plan for the coffee morning on 26.1.24.

SCHOOL UPDATES & REMINDERS

PUPIL ATTENDANCE:

Please see attached a letter from Mr Wheatley regarding our new Trust and School Attendance Policy and the policy itself. Please ensure that its content is shared with all parents/carers.

Request for leave of absence should only be made after taking into consideration all the information within the policy. Request forms are available on the 'School Policies/Documents' page of the school website (<http://www.whickhamstmarys.org.uk/school-policiesdocuments.html>). If you require a paper copy, please contact the school office.

PUPILS MEDICAL INFORMATION:

Medical information – Further to the *Arbor* check, please ensure the 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.

EXPLORE THE CURRICULUM:

Our Spring Term 'Explore the Curriculum' events will be held on the following days:

CLASS	DATE
Reception	2:15pm Wed 7.2.24
Year 1	2:15pm Thursday 8.2.24
Year 2	2:15pm Tuesday 6.2.24
Year 3	9:15am Thursday 8.2.24
Year 4	9:15am Tuesday 6.2.24
Year 5	9:15am Friday 9.2.24
Year 6	2:15pm Monday 5.2.24

The events will give parents an opportunity to review pupils' learning in their books as well as to receive some curriculum updates. We will also be using the events as an opportunity to gather feedback and views regarding school communication.

PARENTS' APPOINTMENTS:

Spring Term Parent/Carer consultations will be held on the following dates:

CLASS	DATE
Reception	Friday 1.3.24
Year 1	Wednesday 6.3.24
Year 2	Tuesday 27.2.24
Year 3	Thursday 29.2.24
Year 4	Monday 4.3.24
Year 5	Thursday 7.3.24
Year 6	Wednesday 28.2.24

Details outlining how to sign up for your appointment via *Arbor* will be issued in due course.

The focus of the appointments this term will be:

- A pastoral update.
- A review of pupil outcomes and targets.

PE:

Pupils' PE days will continue to be as follows:

Reception – Friday

Year 1 – Tuesday and Thursday

Year 2 – Wednesday and Friday

Year 3 – Monday and Wednesday

Year 4 – Thursday (PE and swimming both on Thursday)

Year 5 – Tuesday and Thursday

Year 6 – Wednesday and Friday

Pupils in Y4 will continue to attend swimming on Thursday afternoon.

Pupils should bring their swimming kit in a small, clearly named drawstring or carrier bag. Pupils should bring a swimsuit (no long board shorts), a towel and – if they can confidently put one on without adult assistance – a swim cap. Pupils may also bring their own goggles.

If you do not feel that your child is able to attend their swimming lesson for whatever reason, you must contact the school office for a conversation with a member of staff – please do not simply send your child in with a message as this will not be accepted as a reason for their non-attendance.

UNIFORM:

A reminder, at the start of a new year, about the high standards we have for school uniform. Our full school uniform requirements are available to view on the 'Parents - School Documents' area of the school website (www.whickhamstmarys.org.uk).

In particular, please remember that school shoes should be:

- Black leather (or 'polishable' leather substitute).
- Fastenable (strap or laces).

For clarity, the following would not be deemed suitable for school:

- Black trainers (sports brand/ designed as a training shoe).
- Anything with an 'open-toe'.
- Loose fitting 'loafer' style shoe.
- Anything with a heel or platform.
- Lightweight 'knitted' material.
- Anything that could be classed as a 'fashion shoe'.

Please also ensure that all items of clothing are marked with your child's name; we have already recovered brand new items of clothing from various areas around school for which it has been impossible to identify the rightful owner as they are unnamed. Please also remind your child that it is their responsibility to look after their belongings and ensure that they return home with everything they brought to school in the morning.

HAIR AND JEWELLERY:

We would also ask that all parents ensure that their children are sent to school each in line with school policy. Expectations are outlined in the school's Uniform Policy and Dress Code.

Please ensure that pupils are not sent into school with earrings; all earrings must be taken out before the start of school irrespective of how long since the piercings were made. Pupils should also not wear necklaces or bracelets in school.

Pupils' hair should not be dyed (even 'natural' colours) and shaved hairstyles should be no shorter than a grade 3 and 'tram lines' or designs should not be shaved in to pupils' hair (even if your child is desperate to be the Bruno!). We would also ask that coloured hair braids are also removed from hair.

AFTER-SCHOOL CLUBS:

Presently, there are places in our after-school Tennis session on a Monday (Years 3-6) and in both Gymnastics classes on a Friday (KS1 and KS2). Please email the school office to express interest regarding a place.

We will also be sending information over the next couple of weeks regarding a new after-school opportunity we are hoping to offer pupils in KS1 and 2 on a Wednesday and Thursday afternoon – watch this space!

A HUGE WELL DONE...

To Aisling and Teaghan, two of our Year 6 pupils, who were recently inducted into the *Guild of St Stephen* after having served on the altar at St Mary's RC Church for several years. The girls have demonstrated admirable commitment to this important Ministry in the Church and are wonderful role models and faith leaders.

If your child has already received the Sacrament of Holy Communion and would like to begin serving on the altar, please make contact with Mr Wheatley at school or Canon Peter Leighton via the parish office(<https://www.theparish.org.uk/>) for more information.

