



PUPIL ATTENDANCE:

Dear Parent/Carer,

I have written to you on several occasions this term about our new School and Trust Attendance Policy.

As you will be aware, we have set an aspirational school target of 97% pupil attendance per year. Presently, school attendance is 96% for the year, which puts us in the highest 20% of schools nationally. This is positive. However, we know that we cannot take for granted that our pupil attendance will remain high, or – as we hope – that it will edge nearer towards our 97% target as we move into the Spring and Summer. It is also an ongoing consideration that 8.2% of our pupils are classed as ‘persistent absentees’ (i.e. Where their attendance is less than 90%); this is something that we have to look at very closely as we know that this level of absence significantly affects pupils’ learning and wider wellbeing.

Within our new policy, we have revisited our monitoring procedures and have acknowledged that early identification and communication with parents where pupils fall below our school target of 97% (and further ‘trigger points’) is in everyone’s best interests. Where a pupil falls below 97% attendance, we will initiate a ‘monitoring period’ to ensure that – as we would expect – attendance improves (for example, following a period of illness). I appreciate that this may seem somewhat daunting for parents/carers, but please know that this is not a mechanism designed to ‘threaten’, but rather, to do two things: to raise parent/carers awareness of the school’s statutory duties to monitor pupil attendance and challenge persistent absenteeism, and to give parents/carers an opportunity to work with the school – in partnership – to ensure that their child attains the best possible attendance for the year.

We will be sending a communication to parents/carers whose children have less than 97% attendance for the year via Arbor (wb/5.2.24) indicating that their child’s attendance will be monitored for a four-week period after half term. Parents/carers will be able to anticipate that they are to receive this communication by checking their child’s attendance on the Arbor app/website, and I have attached the model letter to be sent to this week’s News Bulletin so that you are fully aware of the content of the letter. Hopefully, this will alleviate any undue anxiety or confusion by receiving this communication.

It is imperative that I also reaffirm that for some pupils, at certain times throughout their primary school career, it will be very difficult for parents/carers – despite their very best efforts – to attain 97% attendance. Please know that every child’s individual circumstances will always be taken into consideration and that we will always strive to work in partnership with you – especially when maintaining good attendance becomes a challenge.

Please remember that a request for leave of absence should only be made after taking into consideration all the information within our school 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.

As ever, if you have any questions, please do not hesitate to get in touch with me for a chat.

Yours in Faithful Optimism,

J Wheatley
Headteacher

IMPORTANT DATES/TASKS THIS WEEK:

- Parking – Please remember that the church car park (off Dockendale Lane) **should not** be used for parking before or after school. Please also avoid parking on Windermere Gardens as ongoing utilities works are anticipated to continue over the next few weeks.
- Years 2 and 3 will have a *Muddy Monsters* forest school session in school on Friday 2nd February 2024. Pupils will need to come to school in appropriate warm outdoor clothing and footwear, and should bring a full change of clothes and indoor shoes to change in to. Reception Class and Year 1 will have their session on Friday 9th February.
- Please complete the following registration of interest if your child would like to be considered for a new multi-sport after-school club starting after February half-term (see note below):
<https://forms.office.com/e/5NZu6QBSAA>.

SCHOOL UPDATES & REMINDERS

SPORTS UPDATE:

Pupils across school continue to benefit from excellent sporting opportunities at St Mary's. This week, pupils from Year 1 enjoyed a fantastic multi-sport event at Gateshead International Stadium facilitated by the Gateshead School Sports Partnership in conjunction with Gateshead College. Pupils participated in a range of challenges and had a wonderful time honing their new skills. Next up was the turn of KS2, and our Y4 basketball stars, who participated in a competition at Whickham School on Friday. The pupils thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to compete against local schools and demonstrated amazing determination and fair play. You can see photos from both events on our school website and X page (@whickhamstmarys).

NEW AFTER-SCHOOL CLUB:

Buchanan's Football for All Ltd are delighted to offer a Multi - Sports after school club for pupils of St Mary's. Our belief is that sport plays a vital role in physical and mental wellbeing and that the social benefits of sports, especially for children, really help to improve confidence and resilience.

All the Multi -Sports sessions will be coached and lead by an ex professional sportsman, who is a UEFA B qualified coach and PE Teacher (with Qualified Teacher Status) with many years of experience linking Pastoral and PE roles within schools.

Our focus is on making sport fun and enjoyable, whilst teaching pupils how to always react in a sporting manner to both victory and defeat.

We believe that taking part in sports clubs, delivered with quality, will provide positive outcomes for your child and we, at *Buchanan's Football for All Ltd*, look forward to delivering the quality sessions that will inspire your child and help them to develop a love for sport that will carry on throughout their lives.

There will be two sessions on offer per week: KS1 on a Wednesday afternoon and KS2 on a Thursday afternoon (3:20-4:20pm).

The cost for a half-term (approximately 6 sessions) will be £40, paid in advance.

I look forward to working with you soon.

W. Buchanan
Buchanan's Football for All Ltd