

Dear Parents and Carers,

The start of the school year is a very special time, especially so for our new Reception Pupils and their families - they will all have experienced that mix of emotions today as their youngsters take that first step into their new beginning, the start of their educational journey. We hope that this will be the dawn of a very happy and productive seven years at St Gregory's and we look forward very much to making everyone connected with our new starters, feel welcomed and happy to be joining the St Gregory's family. I have to say that we have had a very promising start with no tears (from the children anyway), so, so far so good and yes, we do have to come back tomorrow!

A brief word to wish all of our recent Y6 children the very best of luck as they begin their secondary education this morning, it is a big day for them too and we very much hope that they settle well and go on to great things as so many of our past pupils have done. Word has reached us of successes galore with our former pupils excelling at GCSE, A Level and Degree Level at schools across the region and universities across the country. We know too that many are thriving in the world of work in all sorts of professions and we can welcome several back here this week with their own children as the cycle starts again. These are the role models for our current pupils and hopefully will inspire them to achieve to the best of their abilities, whilst also retaining those key attributes of care, courtesy and concern for all and especially so for their friends and schoolmates, that exemplify our St Gregory's children.

I must take this first opportunity to say a big thank you on behalf of the staff here at school, to so many people, for their great kindness and generosity at the end of last term. As usual, staff were inundated with gifts and cards, the latter containing so many thoughtful and encouraging messages - thank you all, these are very much appreciated. It was poignant to say goodbye to several families who have had children with us, in some case for over eighteen years - thanks to them all for their incredible support across this period, you will be missed. Of course, we are fortunate to be able to say that we look forward to welcoming several brand new parents / carers to school this week - we hope that your experiences will be just as enjoyable and productive in the coming years.

It is a pity that the weather has been inclement so far today as the children do love to get outside and catch up with all of their friends across the school, but things may pick up later this afternoon. The new school roof is getting a thorough testing out and it certainly looks as if the contractors have done a decent job and to schedule too.

You may have noticed that we have a new play feature to replace the old wooden play and seating area that was getting in a very poor state of repair. This is another example of SAPA funds being put to good use, with this being the second feature improved after the Reception pergola was repaired and updated in the Autumn term 2016. It is a slightly smaller but perhaps better suited to the little ones who play in this area and it still duplicates as a useful sitting spot for parents and carers.

The children look in "fine fettle", sparkling in their new uniforms and very happy and cheerful to be back, certainly the school feels fully alive again and there is a lot of infectious optimism as we move forward. Thank you for helping them to look so smart. We will have to see if this vision of perfection survives the first full week of playtimes! Of course it is a huge help if the children's names are clearly legible in every item of uniform, old and new - it can be upsetting if new garments are misplaced early in the term, but a little forethought can save the day.

From a pupil well being point of view this is usually the time when I ask that all medication held in school, including inhalers etc. is checked and updated as appropriate. Parents / carers are requested to check the "safe to use" date and bring new ones if necessary. Mrs Rochford will be available to meet with parents / carers to check and store replacement medication if appropriate. Some parents / carers have already made a good start with this.

A reminder that every KS1 child receives a free school dinner and we are hoping that everyone will take advantage of this, especially as lunchtimes together are such an important social occasion and a great opportunity for enjoying the company of their Pastoral Care partners. For Key Stage Two children the cost of a school meal remains the same at £2.10 per day or £10.50 per week payable each Monday morning or per month / term if this is what parents / carers prefer. Cheques made payable to "Borough of South Tyneside".

Parents / Carers who wish their child to take a packed lunch need to write requesting this on a term by term basis - there can be a waiting list.

School milk is chargeable for the majority of pupils at £9.10 per term or £27.30 per year. There remains a difficulty for both the school and some of our families as the "entitlement" to Free School Milk still needs a form to be completed and these are available to collect from and return to the school office.

I would be very grateful if **ALL** families who are on Income Support, Income Based Job Seeker's Allowance, Income Related and Employment and Support Allowance, Support under part V1 of the Immigration and Asylum Act or if the Household Income is less than £16,190 or you have the Guaranteed Element of State Pension Credit, complete and return a form as soon as is practicable.

The importance of this cannot be overstated, not only because families are entitled but also because the school's income is indelibly linked to these "Pupil Premium" Monies. At the minute the school receives around £30,000 annually from this funding source to provide additional classroom support, but if families do not apply then the government will simply hang on to the money and we will all lose out.

So whether your child takes school milk or not please complete the paperwork in order that we can secure the additional funding to which these children are entitled. Your assistance is very much appreciated.

With regard to PE and Sports it is essential that all of the children have their kit with them for both PE / Swimming in curriculum time and for after school club participation. Swimming will commence next week at Haven Point Pool across the Autumn Term - Y3 are first on the rota. Details from class teachers regarding PE sessions and curriculum coverage etc. are imminent and some of our After School Clubs should commence from next week with others starting the week after. Also, Post School Care with "Bright Sparkz" is up and running already, providing an excellent service, as I'm sure many are aware.

Finally, here are some dates for your diaries:

- Monday September 18th: New starters commence full time: Allocation of Pastoral Care Partners;
- Open Evenings: Monday October 16th - Thursday October 19th;
- Monday October 23rd - Friday October 27th : Half Term;

(All Staff CPD sessions are Twilights this term - no additional days off for the children: CPD 2018 dates are: Friday February 9th and Monday June 4th 2018)

- Nativity Performance: Tuesday December 19th and at 2.30pm;
- Christmas parties: KS1: Wednesday December 20th : Y3 / Y4: Thursday December 21st and Y5 / Y6: Friday December 22nd ;
- School will close for the Christmas Holidays on Friday December 22nd at the usual time and we return after the celebrations on Monday January 8th 2018.

I look forward to seeing you all as the term progresses.

Best Wishes.

Yours Sincerely,

K J Smithson. Head Teacher.