

21st December 2018

Dear Parents/Carers

Before we break up today I want to thank you for all the exceptional support for your children. They are delightful, hardworking and polite. This term has been one of great achievement and we have all really enjoyed the last couple of days. The quality of the Nativities, from Early Years children and Key Stage 1 as well as the Carol Service from our Year 3, Year 4, Year 5 and Year 6, was exceptional. The quality of the singing, acting, dancing and narration has been second to none. Thank you for your continued support for our school.

Farewell

As you are aware, today is Mrs Dunn, Mrs Firth and Miss McCullough's final day with us. In the time they have been at St Aloysius, they have played a key role in helping to transform children's lives. Pupils and staff will miss them greatly. They will miss their compassion, sense of humour and support.

Mrs Dunn has been at St Aloysius for four and a half years and she has progressed to the position of Assistant Headteacher, coordinating the day to day running of the Junior School. She has also led on significant school improvement priorities including teacher training, Maths and RE. I'll miss a great friend of mine. I know that she will thrive in her new role as Deputy Headteacher at St Joseph's.

Mrs Firth who works with us for one day a week will also be leaving us today. She is a wonderful, outstanding teacher and will be missed by all.

Finally, Miss McCullough will be leaving Y5. It has been a pleasure seeing Miss McCullough thrive. I have seen her confidence in the class develop rapidly and she is very well thought of by pupils and colleagues. She has just been successful in her application to teach at St Wilfrid's in Gateshead. Mrs Fenwick returns to us in January and she will work in Y5.

Last week Governors appointed Mr Shaun Rushton and Mrs Vicky Balfour to leadership positions within the school. Mr Rushton will take on responsibility for teacher training and English and Mrs Balfour will lead on RE and Science and they will both become part of the leadership team at St Aloysius. They will both thrive in their new positions.

Christmas Services at St Aloysius

You are very welcome to attend any of the parish services over the coming days. I know Fr Dave and Rev Peter Jones will give you a very warm welcome. The times of the services are as follows:

Monday 24 December	5.30 pm	Carols	(St James)
	6.00 pm	Mass	(St James)
	11.00 pm	Carols	(St Aloysius)
	11.30 pm	Mass through Midnight	(St Aloysius)
Tuesday 25 December	10.00 am	Mass	(St Aloysius)

Attendance

Attendance has historically been very strong at St Aloysius with above average levels in the Infant School and Junior School. Last year it dipped in both schools so that it was broadly in line with the national average. There were two main reasons for this: firstly the amount of holiday during term time. Also, we have a very small minority of children where their attendance is classed as persistently absent. For a child to be classed as persistently absent then they have to have an attendance rate of lower than 90%. This means that they miss on average one day every two weeks, out of a possible 190 school days children with 90% attendance only attend 171 days at school.

Any child where their attendance levels are low are not be able to achieve as well as they can. It is much harder for a low attendance child to make the progress they could. A child whose attendance is over 96% has the best chance of success and statistically children with good attendance achieve the best at the end of primary school and secondary school.

To ensure that our attendance rates move back to above average again we have changed our attendance procedures so we can support parents and, where appropriate, challenge them to ensure their children's attendance improves.

We do not authorise term time holiday. We will only authorise a day absent from school as a result of illness or in exceptional circumstances. We consider exceptional circumstances to be a one day absence as a result of a special family occasion such as a funeral or a wedding.

Alongside this, we are closely monitoring children's attendance falling below 93% and any parent of a child like this will be sent a letter of concern to make them aware that their child's attendance is below average and ask for their support in ensuring that it improves.

On a weekly basis leaders examine individual attendance patterns and decide next steps. This often results in a phone call or a meeting between school and parents. Where we remain concerned about children's attendance we will ask the Local Authority to make home visits to pupils with low or unexplained attendance. We appreciate that at times your child is genuinely ill, however days missed means losing valuable learning time.

Alongside increasing the sanctions, we also want to reward the many children who attend school regularly and we are going to do this by introducing a weekly prize in the Infant and Junior school for the best attendance. We will do this by introducing the best attending class award. We will also reward individual children who have had very strong attendance each term.

I would like to thank the overwhelming majority of you because your child's attendance is very strong and this term the attendance figures are improving to above average again. I would ask you to be mindful of booking term time holiday because going forward we can not authorise it. Pupils who have low attendance will be referred to the Local Authority Attendance Service for further investigation. Parents who remove their children from school for extended periods during term time or have consistently low attendance will face a penalty notice or risk the loss of their school place.

Congratulations

Our various choirs have been busy over the last few weeks. They've sang at local care homes, Central Station and at Beamish. They have developed into having an outstanding reputation and are an asset to the school community. It is a joy to hear them. I'm really proud of them.

Finally...

I know lots of our children will be receiving electronic, internet ready gifts or smart devices at Christmas. Please help them to embrace the opportunities of our internet world by checking what they are doing online, who they are communicating with and how they are communicating with them. Last week our Y5 and Y6 classes have had E Safety teaching which was focused on keeping themselves safe online. As part of our workshop programme next term we will prepare some resources for all our year groups and their parents. In the meantime there are a variety of fantastic online support resources for parents. I've put a link underneath for a very good digital magazine which I strongly recommend that you read.

<http://smartfuse.s3.amazonaws.com/d3a3ddb3f55b92cb348b18b85f43909a/uploads/2013/12/Digital-Parenting-6-NEW.pdf>

Enjoy your Christmas break. It is a real privilege to work at St Aloysius. The staff are very hardworking, talented and caring, and your children are a delight. I look forward to seeing you again on Tuesday 8 January.

Yours sincerely



N Conway
Headteacher

