

Dear Parents and Carers,

Firstly, well done! We have all managed to navigate the first half of the first half term of the year!

This is not tongue in cheek, with the largely publically hidden backdrop of Covid-19 issues that STILL plague us daily (!), plus a month without internet and phones, we have managed to not just survive September, but thrive.

The admin team and our Tech support Mark need a medal for getting the drama of the transition from one internet and phone provider to another sorted – what a nightmare. Thank you so much for being patient with us whilst we sorted this out.

All staff started the term with Safeguarding training and as some of you will already know, we have been proactively challenging those who we have not met before as we resume more free flow into and out of school morning and evening. All of our policies, and our curriculum, have been updated with respect to peer on peer abuse, which is high on national media agendas and totally different to bullying, and other things like cyberbullying – so please take care to monitor your child's devices.

The last couple of years has been so disruptive and disrupted for families, children, and schools that inevitably we will have children who have struggled to settle back into what would previously been considered 'the normal routines' this past month, in particular some of our children with additional needs. As a community we embrace all of our children and their diversity, we welcome our children working with (and alongside) those who are different and unique in so many ways. We teach our children here that each of us is special, including those who need support – we don't discriminate or make fun of children and we try to support their families as they integrate into situations that their children find a struggle.

As caring and compassionate adults, I know that you will all support us in embracing this ethos, even when it can be tempting to participate in negativity. Your children will be watching you, and us, closely for how to behave and talk about a variety of situations and people and this 'forming' stage of their development is vital in how they will handle situations in the future. This means it is so important that we all model for them the tolerance they will need to have in a diverse society. I would ask that across school if you are in a 'WhatsApp chat' you are careful to be compassionate and understand of the impact of negativity about children – they are growing and developing and nobody wants to see awful comments about their child, particularly if they are really struggling, or have a physical or cognitive need. Sadly, Covid affected many specialist appointments (for over 18 months) and these delays are affecting children in all aspects of their lives, including how they may access school, this is something we need to respect and acknowledge.

Our early years children have done well and coped effectively with the new demands and expectations of the Government 'Baseline Assessment'. Staff have worked collaboratively to support the competing demands of how we work in Phonics teaching for example, whilst implementing the Baseline – no formal teaching was allowed to happen until this had been completed, only lots of learning through play. Therefore no phonics could be taught and Mrs Williams has literally been chomping at the bit to start. Mrs Ahmad and her team have been working systematically to assess 65 children in the meantime, (this is actually no mean feat because some of our EYFS children are just 4, some are still keen to do things like eat sand, or not yet confident coming to school as they haven't been to nursery, not yet ready to sit or stand still, or not yet toilet trained etc.). Anyway, Baseline successfully done, with phonics baselines swiftly following, whole class phonics started on Monday in EYFS, and we will welcome the representative from Read Write Inc next week to look at both this and the phonics group work in Y1 and 2. We have been looking at streamlining the interior environment and also working on how we record learning. Having trialled Tapestry for the last year during lockdowns we have decided this is the most effective way of doing so – whilst also communicating with you what your child is doing every day. Mr Barnes, the most keenly artistic member of our team is busy making plans for a visual feast over the road and I will be having a good look at what is going on next week (with Gus of course!). Once our EYFS children have been given permission to meet Gus, he will be a more regular visitor in the EYFS. Well done team on the infant site – incidentally they cannot wait for half term when the outdoor area will get an impressive re-vamp

Infant children have quickly settled back despite the last two year's disruption and it has been wonderful to see so many of them at break time chatting happily away about what they love about learning and their summer holidays. They loved the National Fitness Day activities and I know that Miss Roberts was super impressed with the whole school for participating in this – you all know already that I am a massive fitness freak so I was always going to be supportive of this but it is brilliant to see our children so active (even Mrs Hughes in the office wants a boot camp....)

We have yet to start conversations about Christmas but it is only round the corner and before then we plan to work with the PTA on a Halloween disco in which children can have fun and regain some of the normality of previous years, in a Covid-safe way. More information about this to follow. I had a lovely meeting this week with Hannah, the new PTA chair, who has been working with the wider PTA to come up with some ideas that we will share shortly. There is so much excitement around school to find our way through the Covid conundrum and start booking visitors, trips, or events that enhance the learning and really bring it to life. Unfortunately, so many companies have had to increase prices and this will inevitably impact on us, and you, but where we can we will minimise the financial implications.

Over in Key Stage 2 we have also welcomed visitors in who have discussed maths and art, we have some new volunteers going through DBS, I have completed all teacher performance reviews across school and am delighted in the way that our team work. Next step now is to conduct subject leader reviews and then Teaching Assistant performance reviews... it is as ever super busy! The children are already back to swimming, attending after school clubs and preparing to engage in things like pupil parliament, re-establishing our working ethos.

Our pastoral team, Mrs Liversey (pupil premium and disadvantage lead), Mrs Cotton (learning support mentor and Deputy Safeguarding lead) and Mrs Morphet (SENDCo and Safeguarding Lead) have all been working hard on supporting children and families with barriers to being able to access learning and they are now ably joined this year by Miss Skillen who will focus on English as an Additional Language.

All teachers have been enjoying getting to know your child and look forward to next month when they will be talking to you about how well they have settled during your online Parent's Evening meeting.

Mrs L would love to hear from more of you keen to be involved at Parent Forum, this is a group of parents who meet once per term and give us their views on any changes we are planning to make or changes made – please do contact her as a way of having your voice heard. Other ways you can involve yourself in school are via the PTA and they are looking for help all the time, and also our Governor roles (3 of which are up for renewal).

We welcome 13 student teachers next week, all PGCE from Chester Uni and we have the first Governor meeting of the school year on Tuesday night!

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