



20th July 2022

Dear Parents/Carers

As we arrive at the end of the summer term, I would like to thank you for all your support during my first year of headship at Saint Bede's, which really does seem to have flown by. I would also like to highlight some expectations and standards we will be paying particular attention to in September, as well as updating you on some staffing changes and the arrangements for the start of term.

Attendance

Attendance at school is essential to ensuring children get the most from their school experience spiritually, academically and socially. It has, of course, been a challenging year for school attendance. Large numbers of pupils have, at some point, had to be absent from school due to COVID-19 illness and self-isolation. There have also been more instances of pupils being taken out of school on holiday during term time, with so many trips delayed or postponed since 2020. Overall attendance at Saint Bede's, as is the case nationally, has been well below what would normally have been expected before the pandemic.

Whilst I recognise that COVID-19 is not quite behind us, from September 2022 we will be returning to the very highest levels of expectation regarding attendance. Parents and carers are legally required to ensure their child attends school every day, unless they are too ill to attend or have been given permission to be absent due to an exceptional circumstance, such as for a medical appointment which you have notified the school about in advance and cannot take place outside of school hours. Parents and carers commit an offence if their child does not attend school regularly and their absences are classed as unauthorised. They may receive a penalty notice (fine) from the local authority or be prosecuted in some cases. Local authority guidance currently states that a penalty notice may be issued if a child has 5 days (or 10 half days) unauthorised absence in a term, or 7 days (or 14 half days) across two consecutive terms.

I am unable to grant permission for a child to be absent from school during term time unless the circumstances are exceptional. This means that permission will not be granted for holidays during term time due to, for example, parental work commitments or the lower cost of holidays during term time. A penalty notice may be issued immediately if your child is absent during term time for a holiday without permission having been requested or granted by the school.

Punctuality

Punctuality is an important habit pupils must develop to prepare for future study and work beyond Saint Bede's. If a child is late for school in the morning, they may miss assemblies and form period, which are crucial to the Catholic life of the school. If they are late for lessons, they may miss important learning. The vast majority of our pupils are on time for school every day.

Pupils are expected to be in form period or assembly at 8.55am. From September, if your child is late for school in the morning (without a good reason, such as a school bus service running late), they will receive a 15-minute detention at lunchtime on the same day. If your child arrives after 9.10am, the detention will be 30 minutes. If your child arrives after 9.30am, when registers close, in addition to the 30-minute detention this will be recorded as an unauthorised absence for the morning. This means that if a child is frequently late for school after 9.30am, the parent/carer may receive a penalty notice from the local authority as with non-attendance.

Uniform

As you are already aware, a replacement school skirt is being introduced for September 2022. I would also like to remind you of some other elements of our uniform and appearance policy which will be enforced firmly, fairly and consistently in September:

- Make up, false tans, false eyelashes, eyebrow enhancements, nail varnish and false/acrylic nails are all inappropriate for school and should not be worn.
- Shoes should be traditional flat, all-black, polishable school shoes with no visible logo or other embellishments. Boots, trainers and slip-on 'ballet' shoes are all inappropriate for school and should not be worn.
- Pupils may wear a single small stud in the lobe of each ear, a suitable watch and a crucifix or cross and chain. No other jewellery is permissible. No exceptions will be made to this policy on the basis that time for healing is required, and plastic 'retainers' are not an acceptable alternative for jewellery that is not allowed.
- A suitable outdoor coat may be brought to school. Hooded jumpers, sportswear, tracksuits, sweatshirts, gilets and body warmers are not permissible and will be confiscated immediately in September.
- The blazer is a compulsory item and must be worn at all times, except in classrooms during lessons when it may be removed for comfort.

Uniform (continued)

Pupils will be sanctioned for non-compliance with our uniform policy, which may include working in our Inclusion Room until the issue is resolved. In some circumstances, we may contact you to arrange for your child to be sent home to correct a breach of the uniform policy. Please therefore ensure your child is fully compliant with all our uniform and appearance expectations in September, in order to avoid any unnecessary disruption to their learning.

Having listened carefully to feedback from pupils, from September we will no longer insist long hair is tied back, except for practical activities such as PE lessons, Technology lessons and Science practical work.

Staffing changes

At the end of the academic year, we say goodbye and good luck to Mrs Lowe (RE), Mr Roe (Maths) and Mrs Sharpe (Science) as they move on to new opportunities elsewhere. Father David is also moving on to continue his ministry at St Bernadette's in Bispham and will be greatly missed by us all.

In September, we will be joined by Miss Bowers (RE), Miss Clayton (Maths), Miss Dixon (Geography), and Dr Godley (Science).

Parent Information Evenings

As I explained in my recent update, in the new term we will be inviting all parents and carers into school for an information evening in the school hall. During these events I will set out the year ahead, update you as to any significant changes in school and most importantly provide you with information and advice as you how you can best support your child over the coming year. The dates for each event are set out below and I will write to you again with further details at the beginning of term. We look forward to welcoming you into Saint Bede's.

Year 7 (current Year 6 pupils) - Wednesday 5th October, 6.30pm
Year 8 (current Year 7 pupils) - Wednesday 14th September, 6.00pm
Year 9 (current Year 8 pupils) - Wednesday 14th September, 7.15pm
Year 10 (current Year 9 pupils) - Wednesday 7th September, 6.00pm
Year 11 (current Year 10 pupils) - Wednesday 7th September, 7.15pm

'Setting' arrangements

Over the course of the year, we have been reviewing our approach to pupil grouping. As a result, from September we will be moving away from grouping children in a very linear 'Set 1 to Set 6' model in Years 7-9. We believe this approach can be demotivating for some children, and place an artificial ceiling on the level of ambition or challenge. This is a view that many parents and carers have shared with me either directly or through the parental feedback survey earlier in the year. Whilst next year we will continue to group children in Years 7-9 to an extent based on their academic performance, these groups will be broader and there will be high expectations for all. I will write to you again with further details at the beginning of term.

Return to school

Our new Year 7 pupils will join us on Monday 5th September at 8.55am. Pupils in Year 8-11 will return on Tuesday 6th September at 8.55am.

And finally...

Once again, I am hugely grateful for the support I have received from across the Saint Bede's community since joining the school. I have enjoyed the opportunity to get to know many of you through our meetings and various school events, and I recognise I am extremely fortunate to lead a school with not only such wonderful children but also parents and carers who are so engaged with and supportive of the work of the school.

I wish all our pupils, parents, carers and families a happy, restful and safe summer break, and look forward to welcoming pupils back for the 2022/23 academic year in September.

Yours sincerely

Mr P Marsden
Headteacher