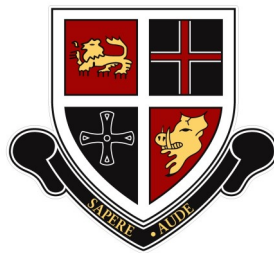


# Life at Durham Johnston Comprehensive School 2020-2021



***Sapere Aude • Dare To Be Wise***

## **LIFE AT DURHAM JOHNSTON COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL:**

### **A GUIDE FOR OUR NEW STUDENTS AND PARENTS**

I would like to welcome you to Durham Johnston Comprehensive School. The school was founded in 1901 and for 118 years has played a significant role in the education of young people in County Durham. Starting at a new school can be very exciting; many students also feel nervous about the change from a school at which they are the oldest and most experienced students. Being the youngest and least experienced again can sometimes be a little disconcerting. Life in a big comprehensive school is very different from even the largest of primary schools. As a well-established and successful school, we have procedures that we follow every year and expectations about the way that we will work together. However, just because we know what we are doing does not help parents who are new to our systems. We hope that this booklet will explain what we do, why we do it and the role that parents play in helping their children settle happily into a successful career at Durham Johnston.

### **Our School Ethos**

At Durham Johnston Comprehensive School we aim to offer students an education based upon both excellence and equity. We have five core values:

**Academic excellence:** progress for all

**Acquiring knowledge:** the importance of being an educated person and knowing things

**Social Justice:** opportunities for all regardless of background

**Public Service:** the importance of making a contribution to society

**Global future:** a rounded education that "open doors" regardless of location or specialism

Over 5 or 7 years at the school we hope to provide as many opportunities as possible for students and to develop their talent, resilience and character. We hope that all the doors in the world will be open to them when they leave us. We offer our young people, irrespective of background, the space to learn and grow and develop as active citizens without fear or inhibition. Our pupils know that they are equally valued as soon as they cross our threshold each morning.

### **Why is good behaviour important?**

We expect that all of our young people will be equally able to aspire to the highest standards of personal behaviour, though some will need extra support to maintain this consistently. We successfully promote good, trustworthy behaviour in order that children are enabled to reap life-long personal and economic advantages. No well-behaved child should have his or her education or development blighted by the bad behaviour choices of others. We have high expectations regarding how students should conduct themselves and parental support in maintaining high standards is essential too.

### **We Welcome Parental Support**

Parents are a key part of our success at Durham Johnston Comprehensive School. We expect parents to support their children as they grow and develop into good citizens of the future. We therefore expect parents and carers to support teachers and uphold Durham Johnston's discipline and authority as we believe that children need to see unity and to have a clear understanding of boundaries.

In more practical terms we expect parents to ensure that their children are always in school, wearing the correct uniform and are well equipped to learn. Our school is a community and it is important that parents and students understand that negative or anti-social forms of behaviour will always be challenged; education is precious and no one has the right to take away learning opportunities from their peers.

### **How do we organise the induction process? What do we take into account when considering transition?**

We try hard to make sure that all of our students are confident about joining us. For those joining us in Year 7, once we know the names of the students who have applied successfully, we start to work quickly with primary schools to manage the transition process. We have a transition team and endeavour to use the knowledge that primary schools have about each individual pupil to help with our planning. In our form classes we work hard to get a good balance between children from different primary schools, girls and boys and children with different talents and abilities. We have 268 young people in every year and they are in 9 tutor groups, therefore, our ability to be flexible is rather limited. We emphasise to our new students that they will retain friendships from primary school, but will also have the opportunity to make new friends. Durham Johnston is a large comprehensive school and our size is a key strength; all of our students get the chance to make friends with people from a variety of backgrounds and they will always find people who share their interests.

Your first point of contact with school, if you are concerned about anything before your child joins the school is their Head of Year, who will advise on all aspects of the transition process. Once your child starts school, then their Form Tutor should be the first point of contact. We ask that you address all concerns or potential issues to either Head of Year, or your son or daughter's Form Tutor who will help you by finding out more information from other teachers if necessary.

As previously referenced, we are a large secondary school and cannot always reply to parents immediately. Please do not be frustrated by this, it is just one of the differences of scale that I referenced earlier. Our Form Tutors do not spend the majority of the day with their tutees and to investigate things fully in a large school can often take time. We also discourage parents and carers from coming into school without an appointment for the same reasons. We care very much for all our students, but are extremely busy between 8.00 a.m. and 4.00 p.m. during the school week. This quality time with students is our obvious priority and we will never accept aggressive or confrontational behaviour from parents or carers.

## How is the school day organised?

Our school day starts early and is organised in the following way :

**08.20** All pupils to be on site and moving towards their Form Class, or Assembly.

**08.25** Registration or Assembly

### Years 7,8

### Years 9,10,11

### Years 12,13

**08.45** Lesson 1

**08.45** Lesson 1

**08.45** Lesson 1

**09.45** Break

**09.45** Lesson 2

**09.45** Lesson 2

**10.00** Lesson 2

**10.45** Break

**10.45** Break

**11.00** Lesson 3

**11.00** Lesson 3

**11.00** Lesson 3

**12.00** Lunch

**12.00** Lesson 4

**12.00** Lunch

**12.45** Lesson 4

**13.00** Lunch

**12.45** Lesson 4

**13.45** Lesson 5

**13.45** Lesson 5

**13.45** Lesson 5

**14.45** Finish

**14.45** Finish

**14.45** Finish

We offer a break-time food service selling a variety of snacks in accordance with nutritional guidance. There is a wide selection of food at lunchtime, also all 'nutritionally compliant'. We have a cashless catering system which enables young people to put money into the cash machines around school at any time of the day (but, not during lessons!) and then to pay for meals using an impression of their fingertip. Parents may also pay for meals in advance using the *ParentPay* facility on the school website. Whilst there are always some problems with such sophisticated technology, the system generally works very well. If you encounter a problem with *ParentPay* please contact a member of staff in the School Office and they will provide assistance. There is a more detailed overview of our catering and methods of payment in the information pack that your child will bring home on Induction Day. Drinking water is available from chilled mains water dispensers around the school and students are encouraged to fill their bottles before school, or at break or lunch time. Young people are allowed water in class (but not in Science, Computing or other practical lessons) as long as they behave sensibly. We do not allow young people to drink fizzy 'pop' or energy drinks in school and will always confiscate such drinks if we see or find them. Please do not buy these drinks for your son or daughter and discourage them from buying them from local shops before school.

## What do students need to do on the first day of term in September?

The autumn term begins on 3rd September **and students should arrive by 8.20 a.m. at the very latest.** If your child is to travel by school bus, the Local Authority will send a bus pass and journey instructions to your home address at some point during the summer holiday period. If your child is to travel to school by service bus, or will walk or cycle, please make sure that they know both the way to school, and how long it will take. First days can be nerve racking and younger students can get very anxious about being late.

Please do **not** arrange to bring your child to school by car unless this is absolutely unavoidable. Children need to develop the independence of getting themselves to school

on time and can benefit from the exercise that walking or cycling offers. **We do not have any parking or even drop-off space for parents on our site** and we are instructed by the Local Authority and the police to prevent parents coming onto the site in cars. The car park is so congested that any additional vehicles driving on to site constitute a safety hazard. Some parents have expressed concerns about this. Our car park was built in 2009 based upon an environmental plan that set out to encourage students and staff to walk or cycle to school. The school gate is always supervised at the start and end of the school day and parents can only access the site by car if their son or daughter has a medical condition that necessitates them being dropped off. Parents are sometimes are offended by this, so it is best to be clear from the start: **you may not park or drop off in our car park.** If you are bringing your child to school by car because there is no alternative, please arrange to drop them off and pick them up in the lay-bys to the north and south of school, or in Redhills Lane, being mindful of residents' access.

Please arrange for your child to arrive between **08.00 a.m.** and **08.20 a.m.** We do not offer supervision before 08.00 a.m. School ends at **14.45 p.m.** and, apart from our wide range of extra-curricular activities, **we do not offer any child-minding or supervision at the end of the day.** If students are present, unsupervised, after 3.00 p.m. it poses a significant safeguarding risk. On the first day of term your child will spend the morning with their Form Tutor. Crucially, they will be issued with a Student Organiser; a key document for both organisation and communication between school and home. They will also be given a locker key.

### **When do parents have additional opportunities to meet teachers or school leaders?**

We have responded to requests from parents in previous Year 7 cohorts and changed the timing of parents' consultation evenings. The Year 7 evening will now take place in March, so, as to base discussions on the progress made during the first term of Year 7 and to identify any necessary intervention during the remainder of the academic year.

On occasion, parents can initially be frustrated by the differences between Year 6 of primary school and Year 7, that in contrast with the close and personal relationships between Year 6 parents and teachers, they feel distant from our Year 7 processes. The link with the Form Tutor is crucial here, and we hope that parents will feel able to make contact should there be any issues arising. In addition to the parents' consultation evening and the review meeting, we offer a 'parents' information programme'. Subject Leaders will demonstrate how learning takes place in English, Mathematics and other subject areas. This helps parents feel part of the school community, helps them to understand the school and how best to support their child. Our website also has a significant number of resources, subject specific content and parental guidance.

## What subjects are studied by Key Stage 3 students?

Durham Johnston is a very traditional school and the KS3 curriculum is exactly what you would probably expect! Students study:

English

Mathematics

Science

French

History

Geography

Religious Education

PE

Art

Computing

Music

Technology

PSHE (Personal, Social and Health Education)

These subjects form the basis for our Key Stage Three Curriculum Pathway, remaining very consistent in Years 8 and 9, but with the addition of a second language for almost all of our students; currently Spanish, German, Mandarin or Latin. We believe that the traditional subject areas give young people a variety of interesting things to learn about and the chance to get to know the world. We seek to prepare our students for a changing world, but to also ensure that they have an excellent general knowledge. 'Knowing things' can be very important in building confidence; going into greater depth can develop a life-long interest in learning.

Most of our classes in Year 7 are taught in form groups except for Maths and English, where the young people are put in sets according to ability as reported by the primary school. More subjects are 'set' in Year 8 and 9. If a child is in the 'wrong' set, the department will adjust their set after baseline or progress tests have been completed. Our main priority is always that students can access appropriate material and that they make progress. Sometimes it is hard for parents to understand that a child who may have been among the cleverest at primary school is not in 'set 1.' However, we have 270 young people in every year group. All of our sets are expertly taught and give students the appropriate level of complexity and work that they will find stimulating and challenging.

Your child's progress is monitored on a day to day basis by each of their subject teachers. The Subject Leader for each department has an overview of progress for the cohort and our departments meet with regularity to plan for individual students and groups. You will receive two reports during the school year. These reports show the extent to which you child is **secure**, **developing** or **exceeding**, based upon the material that they have been taught in every subject. There are also grades for personal organisation and effort and these are very

important to the school. All students are different and have different strengths and areas for improvement; they will progress at different times and in different ways. Some will be academically more able than others. This is normal and expected. However, students who take responsibility for their organisation and who work hard will always do well and this is more important than relative ability. We want all students to be engaged by their learning, to be well organised and to help others within society.

We try to make sure that more vulnerable children have extra support. This may be provided by a member of staff from the Learning Support department, or sometimes from a talented student from our Sixth Form (who will have been well prepared and trained).

Young people with special educational needs are assessed by our **Head of Learning Support** and **SENCO Mrs Farrell** and then carefully placed into the most appropriate classes. Most needs are met in secondary school this way, augmented by some withdrawal from classes to help with basic skills, such as a phonics programme.

Homework at Durham Johnston can be very important in helping young people to prepare for lessons, to improve the quality of their work and to develop a wider interest in the subjects that they are studying. As a school we have carefully considered our position on homework and have taken into account the concerns and opinions of students, parents, teachers and school governors. We have also studied much of the available research that focuses upon how best to make homework relevant, manageable and worthwhile for students.

All homework that is set at Durham Johnston for KS3 and KS4 will be based upon three simple rules. Homework will help students to **Get Ready** for lessons, to **Get Better** so as to improve the quality of their work and, finally, to **Go Further** in researching and finding out about subjects that they are interested in, or that their teachers recommend. When homework is set for your son or daughter it will be linked to one of these three categories and the subject teacher will explain clearly why the homework is being set. As part of this approach each teacher at Durham Johnston will make a professional judgement about the type and frequency of any homework that is set for each class or individual student. We do not outline a homework timetable as we feel that it can lead to unnecessary homework being set. If students have available time we would encourage them to read for pleasure, to spend time with others or to play games. Completing unnecessary homework can have an impact upon the desire to learn and is of no benefit.

You can read more about how we manage learning and achievement for all of our students by looking at our most recent OFSTED report, which is published on the school's website.

### **What equipment will students need when starting at Durham Johnston?**

Your child will, of course, need a sensible and sturdy bag to carry his or her books around. Every child is given a locker in Year 7 which will be theirs until the end of Year 11. The keys are given free of charge on the understanding that they must be returned; replacements cost **£15**.

They will need a pencil case with pens, pencils, rulers, coloured pencils and other equipment. It is their responsibility to arrive well-equipped for every single lesson.

Excellent behaviour is also a key to learning and we have very high standards. Each teacher will teach his or her class how to behave in the early weeks of the year, outlining subject specific expectations. Form Tutors will also give advice about form time and behaviour around the school. Our extensive Behaviour Policy is on the school website for parents and we believe that a disciplined start to Year 7 allows students to form good habits that help them to integrate effectively and to form good relationships with their teachers.

The Student Organiser is the key to most of these things. It must be taken to every lesson and all homework and other expectations recorded in it. It is our mechanism for communicating with you, too. Please check and sign it weekly. You may put notes and other information for your child to share with their teachers.

Uniform is also very important to the standards that we set and we expect every single one of our young people to be **correctly dressed at all times whilst at school**. It is really important to us as we are a genuinely comprehensive school. Uniform helps children from very different backgrounds to mix effectively together and to have a sense of a shared culture and ethos. Our uniform is also practical, and reasonably cheap. Our uniform policy is set out on the school website. Parents should note pupils are not allowed to wear ANY jewellery, nor do we allow recently-pierced ears to be covered by plasters. No young person below sixth form age may wear earrings or jewellery of any sort. Earrings and any other visible piercings must be taken out. The wearing of false nails or eyelashes is not permitted. It is important to share this with all parents or carers now, as we will not make exceptions in September. Please will you make sure that **all uniform and PE kit is labelled** with your child's name. It is the very nature of uniform that it all looks the same, so **it really does need to be named**. Each year a significant amount of expensive clothing is left at school. Our rules are fair and we would ask you to fully support them. If the school and parents work closely together and support each other, then issues of behaviour and uniform are often addressed very quickly.

### **What is Durham Johnston's position regarding mobile phones and smart watches?**

There is significant research associated with the use of mobile phones by young people, particularly regarding the negative and potentially damaging impact of unregulated social media use. Behaviour at Durham Johnston is of a high standard. However, we often have to address issues that occur **outside** of school because students lack the maturity to use modern technology safely and do not behave in an inappropriate manner. **The way in which students use their phones outside of school is a parental issue**. We will always try to help and offer support, but parents and carers need to think carefully about whether or not their children are mature enough to have a phone and, if they choose to make that decision, should regulate any use very carefully. We advise that students do not bring mobile phones or smart watches to school. They are expensive items that can be easily lost and we cannot guarantee to keep them safe. **Students are not allowed to wear smart watches but may bring mobile phones to school. However, phones must never be seen or used anywhere on the school site**. A student breaching this regulation will have their phone confiscated until the end of the school day, after which time they may collect it from Reception. If this happens more than once, we will contact parents. It is important to note that students cannot take photographs anywhere on the school site due to data protection laws.



## What is the school policy regarding attendance?

Please make sure that your child is at school every day on time. There is incontrovertible evidence that once a child's attendance falls below 95%, their achievement falls. They must be in school if at all possible. 100% attendance is even better and has genuine impact upon results at GCSE and A Level. Students find it easier to understand work, the expectations of their teachers and what is needed for success in public exams. They are more likely to learn when they are always in class and it allows them to take advantage of a wider range of additional opportunities.

- We will contact parents and carers if pupils are not in school
- Follow-up any unexplained absences, especially for pupils with attendance problems
- Arrange an interview with our Attendance and Welfare Manager if attendance is a cause for concern and falls below 92%
- Refer any concerns to the Local Authority when school led interventions have not improved school attendance and when additional needs have been identified. Unauthorised absences can lead to statutory intervention
- Refuse to authorise any requests for leave of absence unless there are exceptional circumstances. (Taking unauthorised leave during term time could result in Fixed Penalty Notice.)

We understand at times it may be necessary to attend a medical or dental appointment during school hours but we would encourage a pupil to come into school to get their present mark first for that session. It is always best if those appointments can take place before or after school. If your child is too ill to attend then you must let us know **before 8.20 a.m. on the first day of absence**. You may do this by telephone (0191 384 3887 – choose Option 1) or by email [school@durhamjohnston.org.uk](mailto:school@durhamjohnston.org.uk) If your child is likely to be absent for a longer period of time, please keep us informed. A child should not be well enough to leave the house if he or she is too ill to come to school.

Amendments to the 2006 school attendance regulations came into force on 1 September 2013. The amendments make it clear that a Headteacher may not grant **any** leave of absence during term time unless there are exceptional circumstances. Requests for leave of absence should be made in writing to the Headteacher. A LOA request form is published on the website and copies are available from the school office. Experience and research tell us that children who are taken out of school often never catch up on work they have missed. This affects test results and can be particularly harmful if your child is studying for examinations. Some children also find it very hard to renew or keep up friendships with their classmates. Term and holiday dates are published in the student organiser and on the school website.

## What different extra-curricular opportunities are provided for students?

We have an extensive programme of lunchtime and extra-curricular activities to which all children are welcome. The exact programme is published in the first two weeks of term and is available on the school website too. Free transport is provided after school on Wednesday afternoons to enable those young people dependent upon school transport to stay in school for extra-curricular activities. Parents should please note again that there is **no child care** at Durham Johnston. If a young person decides to stay behind in school it must be for a specific activity as published in the extra-curricular activities programme, or by arrangement with an individual teacher.

One of the most important aspects of life in secondary school is that young people begin to start to take responsibility for themselves. It is very important therefore that you develop an arrangement about how your child will let you know what is happening after school if he or she is taking part in an activity and how they will get home. Also, if your child is to be picked up, at what time and where. We try to make sure that all the pick-up times for team engagements are published on the website. Please do not be late to collect children playing in away fixtures or returning from educational visits. If you are picking up a child after an activity or fixture, it is fine to come into the school car park after 15.15 p.m. after the school buses have gone.

### **How will the school communicate with parents during the school year?**

We try very hard to communicate effectively with parents; it is important to us that you feel part of the school. For example, the weekly bulletin, published every Friday, highlights events which are planned in addition to informing parents about the life of the school. It also provides links to letters sent to parents in pdf format, and information about extra-curricular events. As a Headteacher, I also try to share my thoughts about important developments for the school via our website with regular letters and updates.

The student organiser has much of the information you need as a parent at Durham Johnston. The **'what should I do if ....?'** section contains very useful answers to frequently asked questions. Parents can communicate directly with the Form Tutor using the organiser too. Although we are a large organisation, should you need to telephone or email, we will endeavour to get back to you as quickly as possible. It is important to note that we are always busy between 8.00 a.m. and 3.00 p.m. If you have a general enquiry we recommend you visit the school website. **You can also download the Durham Johnston App free of charge to your smartphone. Instructions are printed on the back of the brochure.**

Durham Johnston is an outstanding school and its success is based upon the relationships that staff form with students and their families. We have very clear systems and expectations, but fundamentally, everything that we do is for the good of our young people. We are excited about the arrival of our Year 7 students in September and hope that our new intake make new friends, learn things that they didn't already know and feel proud to be students of the school.

To ensure your child's safety it is essential that the school holds up-to-date contact details in case of an emergency. Please make sure that you notify the school of any change in family circumstances (including any temporary arrangements), changes of address and telephone numbers as soon as possible.

### **How should parents and carers communicate with the school?**

We are a very busy and hardworking school and our teachers are committed to supporting and developing all children. We think very carefully about how we communicate and try to avoid any emotional or ill-considered judgements. I would encourage you to think in this way too. It is never possible for the school to respond immediately to a concern that you might raise. Our teachers are very busy between 8.00 and 3.00 p.m. and cannot check emails and reply to queries as they are teaching, marking and planning. We will always try to reply as quickly as possible, but our response will rarely be immediate. We will always be polite and considerate and would request the same from other members of the school

community. We will not tolerate any aggressive or offensive behaviour. On occasions, parents or carers will visit school without an appointment. If this does occur, we will not be able to meet with you, as all appointments should be made in advance.

- If you have a query or there is something you would like to discuss, your child's Form Tutor is usually the first person to contact. You can do this by telephoning or emailing the school, marking your email for the attention of your child's form tutor. Reception staff will forward your email and the form tutor will endeavour to contact you at the earliest opportunity.
- If your concern is of a more serious or urgent nature, then you should contact your child's Year Leader. Please be aware that Year Leaders also have substantial teaching commitments and may not be able to respond immediately, however they will endeavour to contact you at the earliest opportunity.
- If neither the Form Tutor or Year Leader is available, please leave a message with Reception staff who will refer your concerns to the appropriate member of the Senior Leadership who will endeavour to respond to your enquiry at the earliest opportunity.

In the event that the member of staff whom you wish to contact is teaching or in a meeting when you telephone, a member of the Reception team will take down your message and will forward it on to the member of staff concerned.

Whilst we always try to respond quickly to enquiries, it is important to note that between 8.00 a.m. and 3.00 p.m. teachers are focussed on meeting with students, teaching, supervising school events, planning and marking. The first commitment of our staff is to teach and to ensure that all our students make progress. It is therefore it is not always possible for staff to respond to parents or carers during the hours of 8.00 a.m. and 3.00 p.m.

We do ask that parents maintain regular contact with us in school with regards to absence notes, attending parents' evenings and by signing their child's planner each week.

We strive to keep children safe and maintain a happy and orderly community at Durham Johnston Comprehensive School but we find it hard to solve problems within or between families, or disputes in the local community so we ask that such issues are kept out of school. The issues take time away from learning and are not the school's responsibility.

Sometimes parents find their children's behaviour very hard to manage. The school is able to offer some support based on our years of experience working with your people, and by directing or referring them to other specialist services. If you are struggling, we will always try our hardest to support you.

### Senior Leadership Team

Headteacher	Mr O'Sullivan
Deputy Head	Mrs McFadden
Assistant Head	Mrs Bell
Assistant Head	Mr McArdle
Assistant Head	Mr Weaver
Assistant Head	Mr Wright
Director of Resources	Ms Charlton

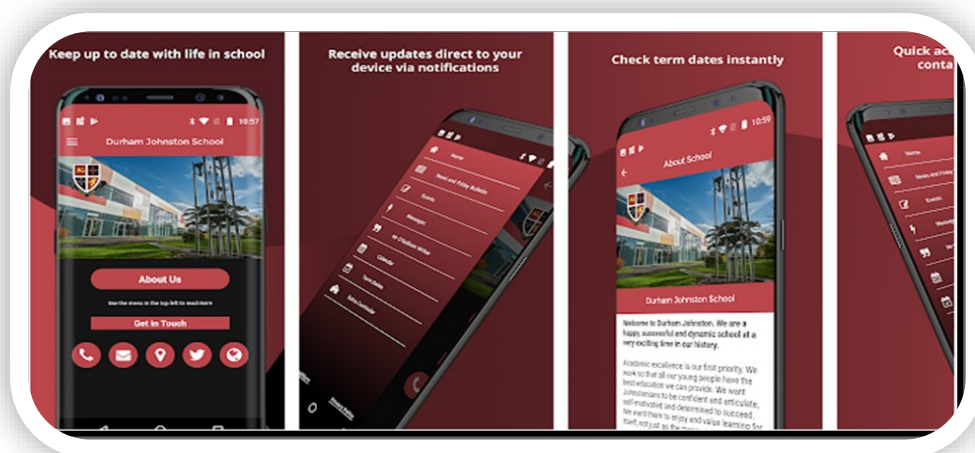
### Year Leaders

Year 7	Mr Simpson
Year 8	Mr Noble
Year 9	Mr Digby
Year 10	Ms Owen
Year 11	Mr Bowman
Head of 6th Form	Mrs Lennon
Deputy Head of 6th Form	Mr Wilbraham



DURHAM JOHNSTON  
COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL  
DARE TO BE WISE

# Durham Johnston App



Good communication between school and home is vital if students are to do well and we encourage parents to take advantage of our free app.

The app can be downloaded free of charge from both Google Play and Apple's App Store. Downloading the app to your device will allow you to keep up to date with current news items and forthcoming events, read the school's weekly Friday Bulletin and check term and holiday dates. Once you have downloaded the app, don't forget to enable notifications on your device to ensure that you receive updates as they are published.

## Keeping in touch

Tel: 0191 384 3887

Email: [school@durhamjohnston.org.uk](mailto:school@durhamjohnston.org.uk)

Web: [www.durhamjohnston.org.uk](http://www.durhamjohnston.org.uk)