



June 2020

Dear New Starter,

I'd like to welcome you to the Durham Johnston Comprehensive School community. You're going to have a great experience with us, and this letter is a chance for me to introduce myself and to explain in a little more detail about life at our school.

You've already had some general information from our Headteacher, Mr. O'Sullivan. You've filled in admissions forms and have been checking the website for information; you may have seen the videos we've produced to give you a taste of life at Durham Johnston and you might have also had a chance to look over the interactive map of the school. If you haven't had the opportunity to do this yet, it is a really good starting point.

My main reason for writing is to explain how we will help you, as a new student in Year 7, to make the best possible start to your time with us. My role as a Head of Year, or Year Leader, is to support and lead your year group. This means I have an overview of each pupil's learning and look for the best ways to support you as an individual. I've often explained to new pupils and parents that it's very much like being a "headteacher" for an individual year group. We will be together for 5 years and it is really important that we get to know each other quickly so that you know what is expected of you, and I know how to help you succeed.

It's an unusual time locally, nationally, and globally at the moment and that has had a big impact on how schools are working. Normally, we would have a special day for you in school this term to get a sense of what life is like at Durham Johnston, and there would also be opportunities for you to come to a presentation with your family, meet your form tutor and to ask questions. That isn't possible at the moment, but we are putting things in place to help you be as ready as possible for your step up to Year 7. Schools call this transition because you change from being a primary school student to being at a larger secondary school.

We have a team that plans for that step up and we've been spending a lot of time making sure that you feel confident and get to know people from a variety of other schools. We are proud to be a comprehensive school and you will work with pupils from a range of different schools in your form class, from different areas of Durham and with a range of different experiences. This might sound a little daunting, but when the new term begins for Year 7, form tutors and teachers will be making it a priority to enable Year 7 to focus on getting to know each other and seeing your new school as a place to build new friendships as well as keeping older ones. People are sometimes worried about this in Year 6, but soon get used to a new way of doing things at secondary school. We make sure that each form class reflects the range of students that we have at Durham Johnston.

We have 9 forms in each year group, and each form's "name" consists of their year group and one of the letters DURHAMJCS. So in year 7 pupils will be part of 7D, 7U, 7R and so on. Each form is part of one of our four houses; Wakenshaw, Kenny, Heaviside, and Annand. I'll give you more details about how the house system operates when you settle into your first term, but I think it's important for you to know that the names of the houses are taken from four soldiers from the Durham Light Infantry who were awarded the Victoria Cross during World Wars One and Two. Our house system is used for in-school and community activities, such as competitions and charity fundraising events. You will have a chance to be involved and possibly take on leadership roles in due course and I would encourage you to see Year 7 as a chance to try new things.

You'll find out who your form tutor will be before the end of this term and they will write to you to introduce themselves and to explain how you will work together as a group. The Form Tutor is a crucial link between home and school, and the best person to contact with any queries you might have once Year 7 begins. We use the pupil planner, which is similar to a diary, as the best means of communication. Planners are checked regularly and are essential to success at the school; they are as important as having correct uniform and we encourage your parents or carers to check your planner regularly

Each morning's form period is very important. You need to be in school at 8:20 a.m. to allow a smooth beginning to the day. Form time begins at 8:25 a.m. and ends at 8:45 a.m. and is your first opportunity of the day to learn and work with others. There will be team building activities, notices about opportunities at school, pastoral learning tasks to complete, planner and equipment checks and a variety of other types of activity. These are all designed to help pupils make a positive start to their day. The pastoral learning tasks follow a programme to support pupils in developing good habits for life and learning, and tutors will keep their work as teachers would for any other lesson.

To help your Form Tutor get to know you, I'd be grateful if you could complete an online survey. The link to the survey is below and the deadline for all students is 26<sup>th</sup> June. However, the earlier you complete the survey, the quicker your Form Tutor can get to know you.

[www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/5VCKNFT](http://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/5VCKNFT)

Finally, I wish you well and look forward to meeting you in person soon.

Stay safe.

Yours sincerely,

**Mr. Michael Simpson**

Head of Year 7

*On behalf of the Transition Team.*



**Headteacher:** A J O'Sullivan BA, MA  
**Deputy Head:** R McFadden MEng  
**Director of Resources:** H Charlton BA, MBA

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