

**December 2023**

Dear Parents & Carers,

I hope this half-termly update letter finds you and your families well.

**Mock Exams**

Our Year 11s have now completed their mock examinations and have impressed everyone with their focus and commitment. Thank you to all of our parents and carers who attended our revision strategy information evening last month; we are using your feedback to inform the next session on Wednesday 24th January. More details about the schedule for this second revision session will follow shortly. Year 11 will receive their mock exam results on Thursday 14th December and these will also be sent home before the Christmas break. We are holding a drop in session on Monday 18th December when you can come in to discuss concerns about your Year 11 child’s progress. Year 13 have also been completing mock exams in lessons this half term as well completing their UCAS applications. Congratulations to those who have already received university offers for next year.

**Staffing**

We have had several staffing changes recently and some forthcoming at the end of this term. Andrew Grainger (Science) left us at October half term. At the end of this term we are also due to say farewell to Allison Phillips (Attendance Officer), Frazer Vodden (Pastoral Manager) and Katie Stark (Office Admin) who are moving on to new posts; we wish them all well. There is some medium term staffing absence currently in science and maths but I would like to reassure parents that we have subject specialists in these gaps. We have some new appointments: Amy Blackburn (currently Year 7 Pastoral Manager) has been promoted to the position of Deputy SENCO alongside Joanne Walton. Laura Green will be taking over the Attendance Officer role from mid-December. We currently have several vacancies for non-teaching positions which you can find [here](#). Please share with friends and colleagues who might be interested. We will be advertising some additional teaching posts to reflect our school growth in January.

**Attendance**

Our 2022 Ofsted report highlighted punctuality and attendance as an issue (“...a significant number of pupils do not arrive to school on time...”) It is great to see some positive punctuality and attendance gains since then. However, as a whole it is still a worrying picture; we should be seeing cumulative attendance of 95%+ (well done Year 7!) and still have a significant minority who are not arriving on time (by 8.45am). Attendance should be much higher in Year 11 and Year 13 at this crucial stage; we know there is a direct line between good attendance and good progress. We really need parental support to make improvements. If you need a conversation or help in supporting your child with punctuality and attendance, please get in touch with your child’s tutor/RSL/PM.

Year group	Attendance since September	Overall school attendance
Year 7	95%	91%
Year 8	90%	



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Year 9	89%	
Year 10	90%	
Year 11	91%	
Year 12	97%	
Year 13	90%	

### Catering

You may have seen in the press or heard locally that North Tyneside Catering Services announced recently that they are removing their service from schools. I wanted to assure you that we are already ahead of the curve on this and served notice to terminate our contract ahead of this announcement. We are in the second stage of our tender and procurement process and are due to sign a contract with a new provider in January (Mellors), which will be operational from April 2024. I will keep you informed of progress.

### The Big Ambition

All schools have been asked to encourage parents, carers and school staff to take part in a national survey, created by Dame Rachel De Souza, Children's Commissioner for England. It is certainly worth giving up a few minutes to contribute towards a better understanding of the national picture for young people. You can find the survey [here](#); this [flyer](#) provides more information.

### Anti Bullying Week / Social media

Thank you to those students who supported this by wearing their odd socks. We were keen to explore the differences between bullying and 'just having a laugh' with our school community. Too often, 'it was just a bit of banter' is used to defend or explain poor choices. Unfortunately the vast majority of the bullying issues we deal with in school start online via messaging apps or online groups. Children have always 'fallen out' with friends, but social media can make those arguments or fallouts more 'catastrophic' for the victim, with longer term impact. We do not - and cannot - deal with every incident of negative online communication. However, where a child is in distress or an issue is preventing them from learning, we will of course investigate. Please refer to the [Anti Bullying](#) policy for further information.

As a school we currently do the following:

- We have a mobile phone ban in Y7-11. Phones should not be seen; they should be off and away. This is to provide screen breaks as much as anything else. Students should not use cameras on smartphones or make any recordings; this is deemed to be a serious abuse of our behaviour policy. Please do not try to contact your child via their mobile between 8.45-3.15pm.
- We take steps to remove phones (ie have them handed in each day) when repeatedly seen or misused.
- We have a robust searching and screening policy; no member of staff will look at a student's phone content without their consent; a member of the senior leadership team is always present.
- We educate our students about the educational and legal aspects around the misuse of social media.
- We issue appropriate sanctions if behaviour outside school has an impact on students in school (this does not mean we permanently exclude every child who uses social media to upset others).



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- When a student misuses social media we engage the parents or carers to ensure they also take positive steps to help protect their own child (and others' children) from further misuse of technology and apps. This challenge from us can sometimes be difficult but we really need parental support to limit the level of social media abuse that is happening each day.

Parents can continue to support us by carefully monitoring online activity and talking to your child about the conversations they are having with others. I have shared this before, but some useful sources of information for parents are: [NSPCC Young Minds](#) [Recent news article on screen time/Tik Tok](#)

### Connect Mental Health Support Team

As you may be aware, we have worked in partnership with Connect MHST for the past two years. So far they have supported staff in school through regular consultations and the signposting to appropriate services. In addition to this they have delivered 1:1 support for identified students in school. Connect are keen to extend their offer even further. This will include parent workshops which will focus on dealing with a range of issues which may negatively affect students, such as low mood, sleep and anxiety issues. Workshops of this nature have been trialled with other schools and have received positive feedback, demonstrating that working together with parents, school and the Connect team can be hugely beneficial for students' well being. The aim is for a Wellbeing Support Network to be established, which will include other schools in our local area, both primary and secondary. **The first meeting for the group is scheduled to take place on Wednesday 13th December.** Please follow the [link](#) to register your interest and to find out more information. If you have any queries regarding this, please contact Mrs Short in school.

### Christmas

We will be holding our annual **Christmas concert in school on Monday 18th December** and are delighted to invite all parents and carers to this event to see our talented students from Junior and Senior Choir, Orchestra, Guitar Legends, Drama Club and bands. This begins at 6.30pm (duration is approx. 1 hour 15 minutes). The performance will include music and drama from a range of styles and of course will feature some festive favourites! Tickets are priced £3 (no charge for children under 18) and are available to buy on the door.

A reminder that the **last day of this term is Friday 22nd December.** There are reward assemblies happening across the last week of term, so Period 5 will be slightly shorter each day (but with the same school finish time of 3.15pm). We will **finish slightly earlier on Friday 22nd at 2.30pm.**

Yours faithfully

Kelly Holbrook

Headteacher



*Merry Christmas*  
*from all the students and staff at*

