

16th September, 2022

Newsletter 1-1

Dear Parents

National Mourning

I know much of the country and many of our children have been greatly touched by the death of Queen Elizabeth II and the various ceremonies and rituals taking place during the period of national mourning. Coming so soon after the pandemic, it seems to have taken on even more significance, as those of us who suffered bereavement during that time when families could not come together to share their grief, are taking this moment of national mourning to remember and grieve their loss. I hope Monday's Bank Holiday to mark the funeral of the Queen, will provide time to share in this national moment but also to spend time as a family and value your time together. Truly, we should make the most of every day, because no one knows how many more they will have.

Cost of living crisis

I am very conscious of the increasing cost of basic-necessities and the additional expense that young children can add to the family budget. I appreciate that there is very little we in school can do and indeed in some ways we add to the cost of living. However, I hope you all know, we are part of the **National Breakfast Scheme**, which means every child in school is offered breakfast of either a toasted-bagel or portion of cereal each morning. As you know the doors open at 8.45am and during the 15 minutes before lessons begin, children have time to have their breakfast. If they prefer cereal, they do need to arrive closer to 8.45 than 9.00 am as it takes a little more time to serve and eat.

Another of the costs that schooling adds to family expenses is uniform. I appreciate that some parents like to have a school photograph with the school badge on sweatshirt or polo-shirt. (The dates this year are: Thursday 22nd, September for Nursery, Reception and Year 6 class photographs; then Thursday, 6th October for individual and families across the whole setting.) As I've said before, a badge is not necessary, these days good quality smart school clothing in our school-colours is available from supermarkets and department stores. And, I have been very impressed this year, by how smart our children look coming back. However, children grow so quickly, often they have grown out of the clothes long before they are worn out. Sometimes these can be passed down the family, but if not please make use of our **Uniform exchange**. We will arrange times throughout the year for uniform to be donated and follow this with a viewing afternoon. In connection to uniform, children keep their PE kits in school for use each week, and will bring them home if wet or dirty. Please try to return them ready for the next lesson. Due to very limited room in classrooms - as you know our school does not have cloak areas - can I ask children to bring their kit in a small draw-string bag and try to use their book bags for readers and home learning, as anything bigger becomes a trip hazard in the room. I am conscious that a few children are now wearing 'smart' watches. While, we are happy for children to wear a watch, the other functions of such devices can interfere with learning and lessons. Please either keep for home or disable notifications and messaging functions or they will be confiscated if disturbing lessons and parents will need to attend school to collect.

Obviously, the services we offer for Daycare & Out of school-hour care are expensive, as there is no subsidies offered by government other than through tax-free child-care or targeted provision, such as for 2 year-olds or working parents of 3-year-olds. As ever, the prices reflect only the cost to us of running this service and we never have a surplus. We have minimised and in some cases not increased the costs of this provision, again to help as best we can with the cost of living. **The new prices are shown on our website.** However, if you need child-care provision in a different pattern or are struggling with costs, please speak with myself or our Early Years Manager to see how we can support you.

During the pandemic, as a grace, we added a '**golden hour**' offer to facilitate early drop-off and pick-up for key workers. Now the pandemic has passed, we considered removing this offer, returning to normal, however, having consulted on need, it seems an adjustment, rather than a withdrawal would be helpful for parents. This year as a trial, we will keep the 'golden hour' but adjust the timing **to allow early drop-off from 8.30am and pick-up until 3.30pm**, which hopefully will also solve the problem of children being left unsupervised at the gates in the morning. Again during the pandemic we facilitated very early supervision to minimise contact between households, but as we return to normal the duties on staff mean, like myself, we are not available to be out on the playground so early. Thus, parents need to stay with children until they enter school.

Curriculum

I have been struck at the start of this academic year, by how quickly the children have settled back into the routines of the setting. It feels much more learning focused and purposeful than it has since the beginning of the pandemic. The pace and rigour that we used to see has returned and this increased level of challenge, while demanding of the children, does seem to be engaging them in their learning.

The pandemic did give us the opportunity to think about different parts of our curriculum and make some changes. The one that parents might notice most is a new approach to learning spellings. In the past children received their weekly spellings and a few days later their recall was tested in school. Then a few days later they were soon forgotten and the effort to learn them was wasted. Our new approach is to issue the spelling list one day, talking through patterns with the children, and then test the next. This should reveal those children who learn the rule, recognising the repeating pattern and listening out for the letter sounds around the pattern, which should help teachers to better support children who struggle to see this 'trick' and in the past have learnt by memorising each word.

This need to remember what has already been learnt is key to progress and such recall and memory skills need to be learnt and play a significant part in success in education. Success by repetitive playing of memory games, automatic recall of recognising and then writing own name, independently remembering the words of nursery rhymes, gaining early immediate recall of number bonds to 20 and then tables facts to 12 x 12 as well as remembering the letter patterns of spelling rules are all indicators not of a good memory but rather of effort put into learning and are indicative of success in education.

As you know we adopted the Diocesan Policy and Scheme of Work for Relationships and Health Education. I have recently worked with parents and other agencies, such as the school nurse, developing different aspects of its content in school, we have added to this curriculum with a programme helping the children to consider the equality act and address the protected characteristics it contains and inclusion. This will be available during parent consultations later this half-term for you to review, question and make comment.

After our taster sessions for after-school learning and activity clubs in the Summer, we are ready to launch our programme and children will be receiving invites next week with the clubs starting from then.

Holidays & attendance

Remember, that our pattern of holidays has changed now that we are part of the Bishop Hogarth Catholic Education Trust. The holidays for all our schools are set by the Trust, which means we finish earlier than we would normally for Christmas, returning earlier too in the new year. We now have a two week break



around Easter and only one week at the May half term break. Our full calendar is on the website and on the Trust website. Be aware however, we still do not match the Hartlepool LA calendar so do not look at the Hartlepool Borough Council website for our holidays.

School attendance, after the pandemic, has become a national priority. The Department for Education is increasing pressure on local authorities, schools and trusts to ensure they use all powers at their disposal to reduce absence. I have noticed a marked increase in fines being issues across the region and our trust will have no option but to follow suit.

Once again, we will be supporting the cancer charity by hosting a Macmillan Coffee Morning on Friday 30th September. We would be grateful for any contributions of cakes, but essentially whether dropping in during the morning for coffee and cake or buying it on your way to work or when collecting your children at the end of the afternoon, the money raised goes to a cause close to many people.

Our Friday gathering for Liturgical Prayer followed by handing out certificates and celebrating effort and success, are once again open to parents, friends and parishioners. We are also hoping to offer these on Teams, when children lead, so that parents who in the past were unable to join can at least take part virtually.

As you can see, our setting is returning to something like normal, but it is hard to remember what we used to do, so there are many changes that seem to me quite normal, washing hands on arrival and before leaving, serving breakfast to the whole school..., but to you will be changes. Having parents back into school will soon make our eccentricities seem perfectly normal to you too. To help this process, we have chosen this year's Annual Aim: to be agents of positive change, so that children will understand this new world, and seek to make it their own and better than it was before. I look forward to seeing you over the next few months and talking further about this new world.

Yours sincerely,

John Hardy
Head Teacher

