

Our Ref: BSN/KON

January 2018

ALL PARENTS/CARERS

Dear Parent/Carer

It seems incredible that we are at the beginning of another calendar year. New Year can be a very positive time to both reflect on what is going well in our lives and to consider what we might do to improve further. Certainly, as a school this is what we aim to do again this year.

Attendance is never far from my mind. The more a pupil comes to school the more they learn. It also tells me a lot about how staff and pupils feel about school; whether they value it and want to make the most of it. The Autumn Term was a great success with record attendance of over 96%. It would have been even higher but for snow days and their aftermath. If we can keep up this level for the rest of the year we will be in the Top 20% nationally, as opposed to the Bottom 10% five years ago. However, we could still do better. The very best schools achieve over 97% and this must be our target. Clearly, parents/carers have a pivotal role to play (and are playing it well) but if we are to get to 97% we all have to do a bit more. Those conversations about the importance of education, commitment and a bit of tough love matter, and are what makes the difference. Let us see where a little more discussion and effort from all sides can take us this year.

Happily, we are significantly oversubscribed again for September 2018. As part of the transition process we conduct school tours over a number of weeks. I do a lot of them myself because I love showing people round our school. The parents are amazed at the attitude of our pupils in lessons and during lesson changeovers. They get excited when they imagine their child being taught by one of our great teachers. The pupils at our school don't just behave very well, they now learn very well. This means that they are desperate to achieve because they can see the glittering and happy futures that await them. One of the things that I am delighted about now is just how many parents and carers get in touch or ask at Parents' Evening how they can help their child do even better. The impact of this cannot be overestimated. It means that support for our young people is coming from all sides and that we are verbalising and acknowledging our shared belief that the pupils of Dormston can do anything. Since the day I started I have never doubted for a moment that we all want the best for our young people, but now we are all confident to say it as one united voice. That is an unbelievably powerful force.

Through our questionnaire I know that parents/carers think that we are managing homework better than was previously the case, which is great. At the same time, it can be improved

further by ensuring that what we do is as purposeful as possible. To that end, staff will be working together to spread best practice. My staff are great because they want to do better so that the pupils do better. As a Head teacher, to have that level of commitment and desire from staff is brilliant. I am constantly amazed and grateful for their efforts. We are currently looking very closely at the quality of professional development that we offer to all colleagues to ensure that we all have the chance to improve. We do this because we know that the only way the pupils' experience can improve is if the adults in school improve. We will not lose sight of the fact that the quality of the teaching and the curriculum are the most significant factors in improving the life chances of our pupils.

The school environment is once again at the forefront of our thinking. We are in the great position of having money available to spend. The start of term has seen the opening of the new MFL Block and the addition of social spaces around it. We are also in the process of deciding what is next. As part of the process we are taking on board the comments and suggestions of our House Councils. We are determined that when the pupils return in September they will see more dramatic changes.

At the start of the year I was concerned that our Extra-Curricular provision was not as good as it might be. I have discussed this with staff and they have responded magnificently. The number of opportunities now is immense. In the coming weeks we have the School Production (Chicago), the House Rowing Competition, The Debating Competition and many, many more events to look forward to. As you know, taking part in extra-curricular activities is a big part of our philosophy. For the first time this year we held an Extra-Curricular Fair for Year 7 with incredible results. An example being that we now regularly have over 40 pupils who are learning British Sign Language. I do not know of a single other school that could say this. If your child does not already take part please encourage them to do so. They will enjoy it and you never know where it might lead.

As you can see, we have big plans again for the rest of the year. One thing that I want to convey is that we will be working just as hard now as we ever have before to ensure that every child who comes to the school gets the very best opportunities. That will never change.

As always, thank you for your continuing support.

Yours sincerely

Mr B A Stitchman
Head Teacher