

St Martin and St Mary Church of England Primary School

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11th September 2024

Dear parents and families,

We have really enjoyed welcoming your children back in to school and they have settled brilliantly into their new classes and routines. It is amazing how resilient and flexible children are; how they respond so enthusiastically to new experiences, people and places. Well done to all of them.

I hope you have been able to settle back into the routines of term time too. I know that many of you will have been working all through the summer. I hope the return to school life will make things a little bit more straightforward for you as well.



Green Flag Award – well done to our brilliant team of Eco Warriors, supported by Miss Galloway, Mrs Greenall and Mrs Foster. This group, working collaboratively with all of us in school, have managed to achieve the Eco Schools Green Flag Award with 'Merit'. This is a 'big deal' and the most challenging to achieve. What an amazing achievement for this group and our school. We will display our certificate and flag with pride, understanding that this represents our commitment to making small differences in our lives that will make a big difference for our planet. I wonder if anyone in the community could help us getting our flag up the flag pole.

Attendance – there is lots of information and commentary in the news about families being fined for holidays in term time. Personally, I am very frustrated that this is being tackled in this manner. Fining will inevitably cause disputes between school and families and not tackle the root cause of the problem. However, something does need to change as so many children are missing important learning.

Previously, despite the national framework being in place, Cumbria did not routinely fine families for unauthorised absence unless there was a significant problem. The guidance has now become statutory and therefore the Local Authority is obliged to be compliant and match the approach of all councils across England.

Attitudes about the importance of schooling have changed. During the pandemic, we were instructed to stay at home, to stay safe, to take fewer risks, to avoid any illness. These attitudes appear to have been retained, and whilst staying at home is the right course of action if ill with something like a stomach bug (48 hours please, to reduce the spread of a D&V virus), keeping children away from school for slight illness or tiredness is detrimental to their education and immune systems.

It is important that children are in school every day, when well enough to be. I am very worried about the children who are missing a day here and a day there for a minor illness. We all need to encourage healthier lifestyles and healthier diets so that children can repel these minor bugs more easily and stop them interfering with their development.

Holidays during term time will continue to be 'unauthorised'. Whilst we understand the frustration and financial implications this brings, we are not in a position to authorise term-time holidays. The Local Authority and Government have established new remote processes to monitor absence.

Friendship Love Forgiveness Trust Honesty Faith

If you would like more information about this, please get in touch and we will refer you to the person responsible at Westmorland & Furness Council.

It is very difficult to achieve 100% attendance; children miss school for lots of reasons including illness and appointments. However, in a bid to promote better attendance we are trialling an idea that other schools have used that we hope will help encourage children to be in school when they can be.

For every school week that your child attends school every day (last week was easy, only 3 days) their name will be entered into a raffle. Each 100% week equals another entry in the raffle. At the end of this term, some children will have managed to be here every day and therefore will have 15 tickets in the raffle, some might have missed a day or two here and there, so might have less tickets in the raffle but will still have decent odds of winning a prize. If a child has had lots of broken weeks, they might have fewer. In the week before Christmas, we'll draw the raffle and hand out prizes in school.

As you can understand, this is all in a bid to try and encourage good attendance and give children a little bit more motivation to be in school.

School meals - If your child is having a school meal, please can I remind parents to go on to SchoolGrid and order by **8.55am** each day. A number of children are coming in to school without lunch and no school meal ordered. From this week, apart from our very youngest pupils, we will not be printing off lunch registers to check if your child has a meal ordered. We will never leave a child without a lunch but if they do not have an order placed then they will be given whatever is available and this may result in your child being given something they do not want. We want to avoid this happening and ensure that all children enjoy their lunch.

In addition, please can I ask that if your child is absent from school that you go on to SchoolGrid and cancel your child's lunch by **8.55am**.

Swimming Pool – As you know, school had a very busy year last year with re-organisation and inspections. This year, I would like to refocus our efforts on establishing a long term plan for the pool with the help of our community. We are close to resolving the electrical issues around the installation of the Air Source Heat Pump. We have a small amount of funding left from our Opening Schools Grant (overseen by Active Cumbria) and a small amount of money available through our GoFund me pool campaign.

However, my hope is to establish a voluntary pool management group that meet routinely to achieve the following;

- Develop and oversee a long term strategy plan for the pool (operational and fundraising)
- Oversee (market and organise) community use of the pool
- Oversee fundraising and additional income streams to cover all operational costs
- To establish a substantial contingency to protect the pool (and school) from future crises

In order to get things started, I am arranging a meeting for interested parties here in school on Thursday 26th September at 3.30pm.

If you are someone, or you know someone, who is in a position to actively volunteer their time to support this project, or you are someone who has access to and links to charitable organisations who could support us, it would be lovely if you could attend. However, we do need to recruit people who are willing to commit time and energy to this group, as we have limited capacity in school, and will rely on them to deliver this ambitious project.

I am looking forward to the term ahead, working with everybody in partnership, to achieve the very best we can for your children.

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Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Matthew Towe". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent 'M'.

Matthew Towe
Head teacher

'Life in all its fullness' John 10.10