

16th December 2022

Dear Parent/Carer,

As we approach the end of term I am writing to update you regarding several issues, thank you for your support, and above all to wish you a Merry Christmas.

This has been a busy and challenging term for the school and especially for the community. The recent gas/water major incident proves to us all that we need to be prepared for the unexpected. As a school we did not have to think twice about stepping up to support the community and we have all been impressed with how the community has buoyed one another. I would like to thank everybody involved in enabling the school to provide hot showers, food and a warm space.

During the festive month, pupils have been filling food and gift hampers for vulnerable families. Again, this would not have been possible without your support. The outcome of our efforts is that the school donated Christmas hampers to the Stannington Foodbank, Wisewood Primary School and families in the community.

Before the half-term I was contacted by a small number of parents asking for clarification regarding the "school jumper". Our uniform policy states pupils should wear the branded school jumper. However, the school will not challenge any pupils who wear a plain black jumper. The school will, however challenge pupils wearing a fashion top that is not plain black. I hope this is a sensible adjustment in the context of a cost of living crisis. Any family struggling with the cost of uniform should contact me, confidentially, on dbarrowclough@forgevalley.sheffield.sch.uk. We will do all we can to help.

Unfortunately, I have to raise the topic of attendance and punctuality. I want to reach out to those parents whose child's attendance is below 95% and especially to those parents whose child is classed as persistently absent from school. This, alarmingly, is 25% of all pupils.

Firstly, I would like to thank the vast majority of parents who, day in, day out send their child to school, even with a sniffle or cough, in uniform and ready to enjoy school. The school is hoping to reward such pupils with a trip to Alton Towers in the summer. The attendance threshold for this will be 95%. This is our way of recognising the great approach to attendance and having the resilience to get into school even when pupils are feeling under the weather. We are also rewarding pupils who have improved their attendance this year after Christmas.

There are, however, too many parents who allow their child to stay at home for little reason. Our attendance level is now lower than the national average and also the Sheffield average. I do not believe that the conditions for good attendance are not to be found in our catchment area. Our closest secondary school is less than three miles away, but their attendance is significantly above ours. It is not coincidental, that the pupils in this school make much better academic progress. I find it impossible to believe that the conditions for good attendance stop when their catchment area finishes and ours starts.

Last year 85% of our Year 11 pupils with attendance above 95% made above expected progress. However, at the same time, 85% of our Year 11, who had attendance below 92%, made far less than expected progress. It saddens me to think there are parents who, despite frequent reminders, fail to understand the damage poor attendance has on their child's life chances.

In the new year I would like to meet a group of parents who would be willing to discuss their thoughts on what constitutes appropriate boundaries. In this session parents will produce a series of "advice to parents from parents" leaflets covering areas such as: social media, use of mobile phones, keeping your child safe, and promoting good mental health routines.

Snapchat, and other social media platforms, continues to affect the well-being of pupils outside of school hours. It is clear that Snapchat is a hostile virtual environment and it surprises me that parents allow their child to use it. Parents would surely not allow their child to attend an unsafe physical space where they think they could be subjected to abuse. So why would parents allow their child to go into to a hostile virtual space?

I would like to clarify the arrangements around pupils using the toilets at school. Pupils can use the toilets at the start of the school day, at break, lunch and the end of the school day. Pupils can also ask to go to the toilet during lessons. An issue facing us is when children go to the toilet in between lesson. As we all remember from our school days, the toilets in between lessons was a great place to meet up with friends and avoid the start of lessons etc. We have this issue at Forge Valley. Staff are on duty between lessons to help stop gatherings and also other unacceptable behaviour. This includes numerous girls going into the same cubicle for a chat and to eat their lunch. Yes, you did read that correctly! Such gatherings create a hostile environment especially for younger pupils.

We continue to enjoy success in many areas of school life. A number of our pupils in Year 7 are currently excelling on an outward-bound week in Snowdonia. Recent school events have included community cooking, BBC Share Your Story, Community Christmas Carols, Macmillan Bake sale, Y11 and Y13 Celebration Evenings, and guests from the Speakers for Schools project. Further, school trips this term have included Scholars' Programme visit to Sheffield University and a Spanish Exchange. But I especially thank and congratulate, our school choir for making their TV debut in ITV News on Tuesday!

Throughout this academic year teachers and subject leaders have been developing their taught curriculum. This is an ongoing process in school to support every child's learning.

To further support the connection between learning inside and outside of lessons, we are producing a handbook for all families of Key Stage Three pupils. This handbook shall contain information about

what each child is learning in all subjects, at all points of the academic year. This will help families in working collaboratively with school to improve their child's learning, helping to master key skills or imbed knowledge. This document shall be shared early in the new year.

In addition, we shall be continuing to share bespoke revision resources for Key Stage Four pupils and Key Stage Five students so that all continue to have access to high quality learning materials at all times, maximising the opportunity for outstanding progress and attainment.

I close by emphasising we are genuine in our pledge to reach out and work with families struggling with their child's attendance. We view good attendance at school as the means in providing your child with the social justice they deserve.

I hope you have a peaceful and relaxing break.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D Barrowclough', written over a white rectangular background.

Mr D Barrowclough
Headteacher