

9th September 2016

Dear Parent,

Welcome to the new School Year.

Earlier this week I met with all Darland students in a series of welcome assemblies and I feel I must congratulate parents on ensuring that your children arrived on time, well dressed and well equipped. We are already attracting praise from visitors and parents for how smart our girls look in the new skirts. I am sure that you will have read in the local press of the success of our students in their GCSE exams, where we achieved the best results in the history of the school; results that were significantly above local and national averages. Further details on these exam results together with a round up of achievements over the last year, will be available in the Governors' Report to Parents, published before half term.

This term we welcome several new members of staff to our busy school:

Mr G Seller	Teacher of Science
Mr D Reeves	Teacher of Science (Covering for Mrs N Jones, on secondment with the advisory service)
Miss R Banham	Teacher of Science (Covering for Mrs Owen, on maternity leave)
Mr S O'Hagan	Teacher of English (Covering for Mrs Tate, on maternity leave)
Mrs K Smith	Teacher of French
Mr A Newland	Teacher of PE
Mr D Jones	Teacher of History
Mr M Higgins	Teacher of Geography
Mrs M Goldberg	Teaching Assistant
Miss R Dunnington	Teaching Assistant
Miss L Jones	Teaching Assistant
Miss M Phoenix	Teaching Assistant
Miss M Jones	Teaching Assistant
Miss S Fairfield	Teaching Assistant
Mr M Williams	Caretaker

May I take this opportunity to remind you of some of the ways you can help us maintain our high standards and bring the best out of your child.

Contact Numbers

Please check that the school has emergency contact details for your child. We need at least one mobile phone number to put in our database, in case we have to get hold of you in an emergency

Free School Meals.

Are you aware that your child may be eligible for free school meals at school? We are launching a campaign to make sure that every pupil who is entitled to free school meals, receives a healthy and tasty meal in the middle of the day. Applying for free school meals could not be simpler. If you are in receipt of any of the following benefits: Income Support, Income Based Job Seekers Allowance, Guarantee Element of Pension Credit, Child Tax Credit with income below the set limit (£16,190), you will be eligible. Application is very simple and involves filling out the form attached to this letter. Alternatively you can apply over the 'phone, (01978298991) or call in at the Contact Wrexham office in Lord Street. We are conscious that the decision to claim free school meals can be a sensitive one for some parents and wish to assure all parents that all free school meal information is treated confidentially. Children on free school meals will not only enjoy a free meal every day, but will be eligible for a host of other benefits, including a uniform grant, substantial reductions on school trips, free stationery, extra study support and more.

Homework

All students have now had their new school planners for the year. These are smaller than last year's, since with our new electronic system for logging homework tasks, it is no longer compulsory for students to use their planners to write in homework tasks. It is therefore very important that both parents and their children make use of the SHOW MY HOMEWORK system and ideally, download the Show My Homework App onto their mobile phones. A timetable showing the days on which subjects set homework is attached to this letter. No matter how old your child is, please help us improve their attainment, by checking the on-line system against our timetable and encouraging the completion of

homework. If you are a parent of a Year 7 pupil, a letter giving you the logon and password for your child's account is attached. If you are a parent of a child in another year and still do not have the access codes, please email Mrs Helen Holland on HollandH5@hwb.net

The Darland App

Our records show that there are still a number of parents who have not accessed the Darland App on their mobile phones. Please note that the App, which links directly with the website, is the main system that we use to contact parents with important information and to remind them when a letter is being sent home. The App can be downloaded in a few seconds from the Darland website: www.darland.wrexham.sch.uk or direct from the App developer <http://schoolsays.co.uk/darland/>

Collecting your child

Now the school is close to capacity, it is becoming increasingly difficult to collect children from the main car park by car at the end of the day. Obviously for safety reasons, we would prefer you to collect from the school yard rather from the main Chester Road, but we urge parents to use the back entrance (Darland Lane), which is a quiet street with ample parking. On no account should parents park or collect children from the bus park, or wait in the clearly marked taxi bays at the end of afternoon school. Please also do not park in front of the shops adjacent to the school.

Teaching sets

At the end of last term, I wrote to all parents with an overview of the setting arrangements in Years 7, 8 and 9. Since there have been several enquiries this term about our setting policy, I thought it useful to outline the system.

Year 7.

Pupils are taught in mixed ability form groups for all subjects except for Maths (ability sets), PE (mixed ability gender sets) and Design Technology (smaller mixed ability groups)

Year 8.

Pupils do not have any lessons in their form group, apart from half termly Personal and Social Education sessions. All pupils have maths at the same time and are taught in one of 7 ability sets. There are two top sets in English, with the remainder of pupils taught in mixed ability groups..

There are sets for PE (mixed ability gender sets) and Design Technology (smaller mixed ability groups).

For the subjects of Welsh, French, History, Geography, Religious Education, IT, Art, Music and Science, pupils are taught in banded groups. There are two large groups in the Conwy band, containing our most able students (identified from their performance in Year 7). The Dyfi band is made up of 5 smaller mixed ability groups. Both the Dyfi and the Conwy bands follow the same curriculum in each subject and complete the same assessments in each subject. Each pupil is set challenging targets and there is subject to the same high expectations regardless of the band they are in. The only difference is the pace of learning, which is understandably more intense in the Conwy band. On a half termly basis, we review the composition of the Conwy and Dyfi bands and can move pupils dependent on their level of achievement.

Year 9

The grouping arrangements in Year 9 are identical to those in Year 8, with the following exceptions. Maths and English are taught at the same time in half year blocks made up of a total of 7 ability sets. In English, there is one top set, 5 mixed ability groups and one supported group with a focus on accelerating literacy progress. Pupils all receive maths lessons at the same time in 7 ability sets. Similarly, pupils all receive science lessons at the same time in 7 ability sets.

Assessment and monitoring this year.

The main change this year is that we are tracking pupils every half term and sharing the progress with parents. Therefore, instead of once a term, parents will receive a Progress Review containing target grades/ levels, current performance grades and an 'Attitude to Learning' grade at the end of every half term. Reports will be issued for each year group at different times throughout the year. Unlike previous years, the parents evening for each year group will not necessarily coincide with the issuing of the report.

Sponsored walk 2016

On Thursday October 13th, students will take part in a sponsored walk to raise money for a school we are twinned with in Uganda, Africa. More details will be provided soon, but we hope the day will provide opportunities for students to develop their resilience and become increasingly aware of the challenges faced by other young people to gain an education.

Key dates this year.

AUTUMN TERM 2016

8th September – Year 7 photographs

28th September – Year 7 wellbeing morning.

6th October – Open Day

12th October 4.00pm – 6.30pm Year 7 settling in evening.

13th October Sponsored Walk and Charity focus day.

17th October. Resilience training sessions for all Year Groups.
20th October 6.30pm – 8.00pm Halloween Disco
21st October – Progress Review issued. School closes for half term.

31st October – school opens after half term
9th November – Numeracy in the workplace day for Year 8.
10th November – 7pm Parent Forum
23rd November – Year 8 Parents Evening
24th November – Year 11 Reports issued
25th November – Staff training day.
8th December – Performing Arts evening.
12th December – School Carol Service.
15th December – Progress Review issued. Governors' Annual Report to Parents published.
16th December – Whole school cinema trip and Christmas assembly.

SPRING TERM 2017

3rd January – Staff training day.
4th January – school opens for pupils.
12th January – Crucial Crew (safety training) for Year 7.
19th January – Year 11 Parents evening.
1st February – Year 9 Pathways (Options) evening.
2nd February – 7pm Parent Forum
8th February – Year 10 Parents evening
9th February – Year 9 Health and wellbeing morning
17th February – Progress Review issued. School closes for half term.

27th February – school reopens after half term.
3rd March – Year 9 Reports issued.
8th March – Year 9 parents evening
13th March – Year 7 exam week.
4th April – Year 7 Parents evening
7th April – Eisteddfod for Years 7 and 8. Progress Review issued. School closes.

SUMMER TERM 2017

24th April – Staff training day
25th April – school opens for pupils.
28th April – Year 8 reports issued
2nd – 4th May – National literacy and numeracy tests.
11th May – 7pm Parents Forum.
26th May – Progress Review. School closes for half term.

5th June – school reopens after half term
8th June – Year 7 parents evening. (reports issued)
15th June – School Awards evening
20th June – Year 7 exam week starts
21st June – Sports day
27th June – Year 8 exams start
30th June – Year 7 Reports issued.
3rd July – Year 8 exam week starts.
14th July – Year 10 Reports issued.
19th & 20th July - Activities days.
21st July – school closes for end of term.

Yours sincerely

P Agnew Headteacher.