



2.10.15

Dear Parents and Carers,

First I'd like to thank the many parents who have volunteered to help this term - your support is greatly appreciated. I'm sorry that we have not been as communicative as usual and that there are a number of developments you'd like to understand. I hope that this letter will help to give you a better understanding of what's going on.

Strategic View

As you know, we are going through a period of significant changes, nationally, locally and some particular to our school.

Nationally, a new curriculum was introduced in September 2014 that has raised expectations for achievement and focusses on English and maths. Schools are required to teach this curriculum and have discretion to include additional subjects. For instance, we teach a modern foreign language, Spanish, to younger children than is required by the national curriculum.

Nationally, there is a greater focus on learning and pupil progress and less on assessment, but standardised primary assessments are required in Reception, Y1, Y2 and Y6. SATs will change this year.

Locally, we are in the second stage of consultation on options for the Alnwick Partnership. Our Governing Body's response states 'In line with our response submitted in March 2015, Hipsburn Governing Body supports the move to a 2 tier (primary/secondary) system in the Alnwick Partnership. The secondary school needs to be on one site as soon as possible.'

Families are welcome to respond individually before 22.10.15. There may be a third stage consultation before a final decision is reached in January 2016. If the option for Hipsburn to become a Primary is agreed, children in Y5 will stay at Hipsburn from September 2016.

In the interim, schools in the Alnwick Partnership are preparing for the possible changes in September 2016. This includes budgets, staffing and premises, and decisions need to be made by half term. As a result, many strategic tasks have been brought forward this term.



At Hipsburn we will continue to review and make changes to provide a rich and sustainable education.

In 2014-2015 the Governing body became responsible for Hipsburn Preschool, our staffing restructure resulted in a strong, sustainable team and we began the process of planning for growth. Our school grew unexpectedly and this term we have 10 more children than anticipated.

This term;

- Children register in classes that are balanced in size and organised by age
- Children in Years 1,2,3 and 4 are grouped for English and maths; these groups are flexible and are reviewed regularly. Teachers and experienced teaching assistants work with these groups, under the guidance of registration class teachers. Groups of children work on similar targets and there is often a mixture of ages in one learning group.
- Usually English and maths are taught each morning and other subjects during afternoons.
- Each year group is taught their appropriate curriculum so sometimes Y3 and Y4 are taught together e.g. science rocks and soils, and Y2 is taught separately e.g. science life processes. Sometimes children are taught as a whole class e.g. Spanish and PE.
- Enrichment projects this term have included the Tour of Britain, visits to Dunstanburgh Castle, Lindisfarne, Flodden and a commemoration for Piper Laidlaw.
- Projects planned before half term include a farm visit, an RE day to study Hinduism, Harvest Thanksgiving and a visit to Woodhorn.

We appreciate your patience while we've sorted the timetable details with our new staff team. It has taken a little time for all of us to adapt (children and adults), but there are very positive signs that children are making good progress.

Strategic Developments

On 1.9.15, the Governing Body spent a whole day with all of our staff. Together, we considered what is going well and where there are opportunities for development. As a result, four working groups were established to develop;

- The curriculum, including the core curriculum, enrichment projects, after school activities, residential visits, attendance and Early Years provision
- The premises, including urgent needs for additional learning space and long term aspirations
- Fundraising for aspirational projects, in partnership with local community groups where possible
- The website and communications

Consideration is being given to increasing the preschool provision. Watch this space.



Friends of Hipsburn First School

The Friends have decided to discontinue as it has been increasingly difficult to recruit a substantial team to run events, and we have relied heavily on a small number of people working extremely hard. However, we do have a small number of volunteers who are willing and able to set up a major fundraising project, when the time is right.

Homework

We are revising our homework guidelines and will have clearer information for parents very soon.

Staff Absence

Mrs Solomon, our Office Manager, will be absent for a planned operation from October 15th and Mrs East will be covering her essential work during the rest of the autumn term.

How Families Can Help

- Volunteer to help in school by completing a Volunteer Form. (DBS clearance is not usually needed when known volunteers are supervised by a member of staff, but clearance is needed if volunteers are willing and able to supervise small groups of children e.g. in the school grounds. There is an enormous range of jobs, from reading with a child to cleaning the pond.)
- Volunteer for a working group, and we'll contact you in due course when your area of interest crops up.
- Respond when working groups send out consultations
- Check the website regularly for information
- Help office staff by paying bills on time
- Be understanding if we can't answer a query immediately - we'll get back to you
- Continue to check that gates are always closed

Diary

- 9th - 15th Oct: parent meetings with teachers - please make an appointment by signing the lists in classroom foyers
- Friday 16th Oct: Harvest Thanksgiving. Families are invited to join our assembly at 2pm then enjoy coffee and apple cake before collecting children at 3.15pm. Children will bake cakes with the apples from our own apple trees. Volunteers to serve coffee will be very welcome.
- Tuesday 20th October: whole school visit to Woodhorn to see the poppies from the Tower of London (Details to follow).
- Friday 23rd October: school closes for half term
- Wednesday 9th Dec: school play performances at 2pm or 6pm. All children will be involved in both performances (Details to follow).

Kind regards,
Dot Charlton

