



Explore, Learn and Grow Together

Brewery Road
Wooler
Northumberland
NE71 6QF

Wednesday 17th January 2024

Dear Parents/Carers

Welcome to the start of 2024 & Happy New Year. The new school term has started well and I would like to start this letter with a quick thank you to everyone who was able to attend our various festive events at the end of last term. It was truly wonderful to be able to share these events with so many parents, carers and extended family members across our schools. You will all have received start of term emails from teachers sharing curriculum information and start of term bits & bobs. We have two relatively short half terms through to Easter full of lots of learning to cram in. I would also like to take this opportunity to welcome Amy Moore to the team here at school. Amy has joined us in the Early Years team in our Nursery. I am sure you will all join with me to give her a warm welcome. Below are a few items of note for the start of term for your attention and an update on the changes coming over the next few years.

Attendance & Punctuality

School attendance and punctuality are back on the national agenda and I am happy to report that attendance across our schools is currently better than the national average. This is good news but even though we are better than many schools we are still not back to pre-covid levels of attendance. I sent out general information to all families last week and this was followed by individual letters to those whose attendance was below 90% last term. School attendance below 90% is considered to be persistent absenteeism and requires action from schools and parents to improve. I am very much aware that absence from school can be down to various reasons which are sometimes out of any of our control – particularly where illness is concerned. However, absence from school is still absence and learning is interrupted and missed. Our current attendance at both schools is around 93% and focus will be given to raising this figure further as the school year progresses. Particular attention will be given to those falling below 90% with regular reviews planned. We have excellent punctuality across our schools with the vast majority of children getting to school on time every day. This is really important as arriving late impacts negatively on start of the day activities (particularly phonics for our younger children and interventions for our older children) and on how children are prepared for their day ahead. Thank you all in advance for your continued support with attendance and getting your children to school on time. Let's see how close to 100% attendance we can get at each school this term!

Uniform

I am really pleased to report that observance of our uniform policy is very good at our schools. I did however note an increase in children wearing trainers for school towards the end of last term. We have also had some conversations with children about having their hair tied back for school and false nails!! This was a new issue for 2024 – they really are inappropriate for school activities. My colleagues and I will continue to have high expectations for all pupils regarding uniform and presentation at school. All children also need to have their full P.E. kit in school for their P.E. lessons, particularly in the winter months so that if they get a wet and soggy (particularly socks) they have a dry set to change into after their lesson. An extra layer is handy in the colder weeks of winter.

Reading Diaries & Planners

With the distractions of the festive season over it is essential that daily reading/recording is getting done. Reading books, reading diaries (and planners at GMS) are needed in school each and every day. Reading is a common theme in our weekly Snack & Chat sessions and I always ask the children to share with me what they have been reading and recording when we meet. While younger children need more support for this as the children get older they can take more responsibility and can start to make entries in their diaries themselves. Along with some excellent home reading we have noted, particularly at Wooller First School, that some children are sadly not regularly reading at home. This is so important to children gaining effective reading skills and becoming fluent, confident readers. Children should be reading at least 5 times each week at home with parents and carers.

Berwick Partnership Changes

The change from a 3-tier educational system to a 2-tier system for all schools in the Berwick Partnership is now becoming a reality. As with any changes this brings challenges and opportunities – on a personal note it also brings sadness that the middle school that I love and has served our community so well for decades will not be here in a few years' time. This means that our schools will change significantly over the next two and half years. The change of system means that the 3 middle schools; Glendale Middle, Berwick Middle & Tweedmouth Middle will all close in August 2026 and the First Schools across the partnership will expand to become primary schools across 2025 and 2026. Berwick Academy will also expand to become a secondary school from September 2026 (in a new building). The local authority has now appointed project leads and architects to work on how school buildings will need to be changed to accommodate the change in system (expansion of First Schools to accommodate Year 5 & Year 6 and a new building for Berwick Academy as it expands to accommodate Year 7 & Year 8 as a secondary school from September 2026). Extensive work is also underway looking at how the changes will impact on people working across the schools in the partnership – particularly colleagues at risk in the 3 middle schools. Work has also commenced to review the curriculum in response to these coming changes. The local authority has stated that the primary school here in Wooler will be a 1 form entry school. This means we are planning for having a single class in each year group across the school. Below I have attempted to summarise the key aspects of the changes:

Timeline for change:

2023-2024 academic year – no changes across our schools this year (September 2023 to July 2024)

2024-2025 academic year – no changes across our schools next year (September 2024 to July 2025)

2025-2026 academic year – changes start to happen as First Schools across the partnership will retain their Year 4 children as they move up to be in Year 5 in September 2025. The 3 middle schools will not admit any Year 5 pupils in September 2025 and will operate with children in Year 6, Year 7 and Year 8 only.

2026-2027 academic year – First Schools across the partnership will retain their Year 5 children as they move up to be in Year 6 in September 2026. The 3 middle schools close in July 2026 and all children across the 3 middle schools in the partnership will transfer to become Year 7, Year 8 and Year 9 at secondary school in September 2026.

This means that our current Year 3 cohort will be the group who will stay at Wooler First School through to Year 6 before moving to secondary school in September 2027. All year groups below our current Year 3 will be part of the primary school in Wooler. The year groups above the current Year 4 will continue to progress through Glendale Middle school transferring to high/secondary school as they currently do. The exception to this will be the Yr6 to Yr8 groups in the 2025-2026 academic year as with Glendale closing they will all transition together into secondary school in September 2026.

Staffing:

This is a particularly difficult and sensitive aspect of the changes as with the closure of the middle schools all of the staff across those schools become 'at risk' including colleagues here at Glendale. All schools across the partnership have agreed and signed up to a staffing protocol that seeks to redeploy these colleagues into suitable roles across the new organisational structure retaining their skills, knowledge and experience. This is a very, very difficult time for our fantastic colleagues at Glendale whose future is uncertain. It has been agreed as part of the staffing protocol that any roles/vacancies at the primary school in Wooler will be ringfenced in the first instance for staff at risk in Glendale Middle School. It is sadly clear however that there will not be sufficient roles for all staff who want to stay and become part of the primary school here in Wooler as there will be two year groups less in the new structure without the children in Year 7 and Year 8. This is very hard for Glendale colleagues who work tirelessly for the children here at school. The draft timetable given to us from the Local Authority indicates that much of this redeployment work should be completed in 2024 meaning that staff will have some clarity of where they might be over the coming couple of years. The weeks and month ahead however will still be hard.

Buildings and facilities:

We enjoy fantastic facilities here in our schools but we do live in a building built in 1952 as a secondary school. Much was adapted and changed when the schools started to share the site in 2015 but this presents challenges for maintenance and management of our buildings. The change from being 2 schools on one site plus the nursery to being a single primary school plus the nursery will be tricky. Having less children from 2026 and only one school budget means that our buildings will need to change and adapt to be fit for purpose and affordable to operate. You may have seen surveyors on site this week as part of that process. They have been busy surveying our grounds and buildings so that the appointed architects are able to draw up plans for how a primary school with nursery could work here. Adapting and modifying our buildings also presents both challenge and opportunity and the Local

Authority has committed to invest £2.8 million to make this happen. There will be lots of buildings activity over the coming months in terms of planning and engagement with us by the project managers, local authority and architects. I will share what I know when I know it including plans (promised for later this summer) and timetables of works when they are agreed. We are looking closely at making sure the changes work for our children and staff to ensure high quality education is maintained. This includes considering how our nursery and Early Years currently operates and how this important facility is integrated into the primary school here moving forwards. The Local Authority are also strongly committed to seeing how the planned Wooler Family Hub could be located here on our site (which makes a lot of senses). I also understand that funding may have been allocated for a MUGA (multi use games area) in Wooler and our large site has been identified as a possible location for that as well. This is also an opportunity to review and discuss how the school buildings are used by the wider community moving forwards. I don't envision any actual physical changes commencing until next year but I will update as I know more.

Curriculum and Transition:

As part of the work ahead we will be reviewing our curriculum to ensure that it is fit for purpose in a 2-tier structure. This will involve working with schools across the partnership to align key learning steps and to ensure that children are well prepared for the changing transition points moving forwards. I have also been in communication with the headteachers at Berwick and Tweedmouth Middle Schools to start to develop plans for bringing together the children from the three schools in 2025-2026 so that they become cohesive groups before they arrive at secondary school together in September 2026. We will also be looking at the traditions from both Wooler First School and Glendale Middle School to ensure that we retain the very best of both schools in the future.

As you can appreciate all of this presents a lot of work for us all (which has already started) alongside all that the schools do day-in and day-out. Support from parents, carers, our governors and wider community will be vital as this work progresses and the changes become reality. As I noted at the start of this item everyone at Glendale, and more widely across our two schools, is saddened by the impending closure of the school and we are all finding this difficult to manage. However, the decision has now been made and we must make the very best of the changes to come ensuring we work tirelessly to secure the very best for our children, and generations to come, in terms of educational provision here in our community.

I will end this letter with a reminder to First School parents/carers/grandparents that we are trying something new this term by opening up our Friday celebrations assemblies. As shared in my recent texts I will open the doors at the back of the hall at 2:55pm on Friday afternoons (this is because the hall is used in the afternoons and to keep the heat in!). The assembly is about 15 minutes long where achievement and Headteacher Awards are presented, notices given, reminders reminded and events celebrated. We also try to squeeze in a song before the children then head back to their classrooms, starting with Reception, ready for home time. Children will be collected in the usual way via handover from staff at the front of the school...we will see how this works over the next couple of weeks! And finally...below is a reminder of the safeguarding leads across our schools (Mrs Moscrop will be back with us later in the year from her maternity leave) and a plea from the office team for parents & carers to respond promptly to requests for consent for trips, visit and events. They are having to send quite a few reminders and without your consent your children can not attend these activities – thank you.

M.Deane-Hall
Executive Headteacher

Safeguarding

This school is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and expects all staff and volunteers to share this commitment. We are committed to safeguarding and have a culture of 'it could happen here' in all aspects of safeguarding and child protection. **Any of our staff can listen and act appropriately on your concerns.** We have specially trained safeguarding leads in our schools - these are our safeguarding team.

Our safeguarding team



Mike Deane-Hall
Headteacher and
Designated
Safeguarding
Lead (DSL)



Victoria Symons
Deputy
Headteacher and
Deputy DSL



Geoff Tong
Deputy
Headteacher and
Deputy DSL



Jennie Dunn
SENDCo and
Deputy DSL



Rachel Moscrop
SENDCo and
Deputy DSL



Sarah Milner
Designated
Teacher for LAC
and Deputy DSL

If you are worried about a child you can:

- Contact our safeguarding team via the usual school contact channels including our main phone number 01668 281 470
- Talk to the local safeguarding team 01670 622 720 or One Call, the Local Authority's single point of access on 01670 536400
- If you believe a child is in immediate danger you should call 999 and report your concern immediately to the police.

More information and our policy on safeguarding and child protection can be found on our website.

The following organisations websites can also provide information and their helplines can listen if you have concerns:

- NSPCC 0800 800 500
- CEOP
- Childline 0800 1111