




09 November 2011

Middleton's Lane, Hellesdon, NORWICH, NR6 5NF

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Headteacher: Mr S. J. Fisher

deputy Head: Mrs R. Robinson

Dear Parent,

We are pleased to be back and hope everyone had an enjoyable time over the autumn half-term break. We also hope that everyone was able to keep up with daily reading and mathematics! As you know from the recent progress meetings, we have been encouraging *everyone* to keep reading with, and to, your child. It may not seem the most important thing during a holiday but please believe us when we tell you that the difference it makes is very noticeable in school.

We were delighted to see that Hellesdon High School has achieved record breaking results for the second successive year with 67% of students achieving 5A\*-C including English and Maths and 84 % achieving 5 A\*-C. The results at A Level are equally impressive. On some measurements the school is rated in the top four in the county. As Mr Batty, their Headteacher says "This is not just a celebration for the High School but of all the wonderful work that goes on in our cluster from reception to year 13."

The second half of the autumn term always whips past in no time at all with so many activities going on. Year 6 had a Victorian day at Gressenhall museum earlier in the week and the other year groups have equally exciting plans in store. Naturally, the school play is the one item that is generating most interest amongst the children. Every child has the opportunity to take part in some way and we are all looking forward to another stunning production.

### Pirates of the Curry Bean

It is now a few days after the cast list for 'The Pirates of the Curry Bean' went up and our playground is still buzzing with talk of who got which part and anticipation of the first cast meeting.

Over the past few years, the Firside Christmas production has become a hugely popular and much-anticipated event in the school calendar. Everyone is involved – this year we have a cast of eighty-four actors, a troop of twenty-five dancers and a chorus of more than one hundred and fifty singers and story-tellers. Soon the older children will be invited to apply for jobs as backstage crew, sound and lighting technicians, front of house staff, administrators and designers.

Drama is an important part of our curriculum all year round and is used in a range of subjects. Teachers use it to bring creativity, originality, spontaneity and fun into the classroom.

It can make difficult subjects feel more relevant and accessible. It flourishes where there is an ethos of strong teamwork and positive relationships and it enables all children to participate.



But Christmas is different... It's the sheer pleasure of being involved in an event that includes every member of our school community. It's the fantastic support the children receive from their families with line-learning and costumes. It's the child who delivers a show-stopping performance you weren't expecting and it's that wonderful moment when you realise that the show is in full-swing and that the children are in control of every aspect of the production!

So, here we go – six weeks of pirates, parrots, corny jokes, mop dances and treasure chests. We can't wait!

### Anti-Bullying Week

As usual we will be taking an active part in anti-bullying week (14<sup>th</sup> November). The theme this year is "Stop and think – words can hurt". During this period the children will work on a number of activities, all designed to involve them in building a 'no bully' culture. Our approach has already been seen to be successful and two pupil surveys last year showed that bullying incidents at Firside are very rare. In the anonymous surveys children reported significantly fewer incidents and said they felt far safer here than is the case in other Norfolk

schools. We are extremely pleased that the work we do throughout the year has had such positive outcomes.

The Norfolk anti-bullying survey is about to run again and we plan to take part again. This survey is open to Year 5 as well as Year 6 children and we intend to encourage all those children to take part. We are sure you would support us in this but if you have concerns and would rather your child did not take part in the (anonymous) survey, please let us know.

## Attendance Matters

**Punctuality:** The school day starts at 8:45! Children may arrive at school from 8:30 to be ready for the start of the school day at quarter to nine. Early work starts *as soon as they come into the classroom* – and this often includes specific programmes to support children who are at risk of falling behind. If children are late they not only miss important lessons but they also disrupt the learning of all the other children. If a child is late they have to register and give the reason at the office. If this happens too frequently or if the reason is not valid, the school will write to you with their concerns.

**Holidays in term-time:** Good attendance really does make a huge difference to a child's learning. A two week holiday would mean missing the equivalent of 10 hours of literacy, 10 hours numeracy, around 4 hours of science not to mention all the other lessons! Also, by the time they return to school, the class will have moved on to new topics and will not be revisiting the missed areas for some time! At school we question whether any child can really afford a holiday in term-time.

We are great supporters of the value of the annual family holiday and appreciate that sometimes it is simply not possible for the family holiday to be taken during school breaks. The notion that parents are entitled to take their child for a holiday in term-time however is a misconception. Parents may of course request a leave of absence but the school has to decide whether to authorise an absence or not. We are expected to take into account the reason given, the time of year and past attendance record. In fact there are only a few, limited reasons we are allowed to accept (cost is not one of them). No more than 10 school days can be authorised apart for rare and exceptional circumstances. Holidays in September and the test week in May (for Year 6) are not authorised.

If authorisation has been refused and the child is still taken out of school, the school has to refer the absence to the Attendance Improvement team who may decide to take further sanctions. Obviously we would wish this situation to be avoided and so we strongly recommend parents sound out the school before booking a holiday.

We hope this information is helpful.

## School Visits

At our school we have a planned programme of off-site visits and also visitors coming into the school. These events are hugely beneficial, making a unique contribution to a child's education. They offer many benefits, not least developing a sense of place and wonder for the world around them. They broaden children's outlooks, and improve personal and interpersonal skills. They are also very enjoyable ways to learn!

You recently had letters about the residential trips with information about the costs. It may be helpful to know several things about these trips. Firstly, the costs are always kept to a minimum. Families facing real hardship may be able to get financial help from a local charity or from the school's (rather small) hardship fund. The trips run at cost and any shortfall has to be found by the school (non-payers are not subsidised by other parents and are asked to pay off any debts before being accepted for any subsequent trip).

The trips that parents contribute to are only a small part of the programme. The bigger picture includes: clubs (music, drama, art, science, sport, homework etc.); sporting fixtures; nearby visits (libraries, shops, woodlands, place of worship, farms etc.); day visits (river studies, museums etc.); living history events and visits by real explorers, visiting theatre groups (Grassroots, anti-bullying TIE group, the 'Railway Children'); visiting musical ensembles (Norfolk Peripatetic Jazz band etc.) and the Family Challenge Days (nRich maths day, the ancient Egypt day). We also enable every child in Year 4 to have music tuition in either a brass instrument or a clarinet. Unlike many schools, our school pays for a great many of these in full and subsidises the remainder. We are pleased to continue to provide your child with such a broad and rich programme and thank you for the support you give to make it possible.

## Diary

<b>November</b>	Mon. 7 <sup>th</sup>	Y4 visit to Theatre Royal
	Thurs. 10 <sup>th</sup>	'Be Seen Be Safe' assembly with CPSO Rolfe (Yr3&4)
		Whole School Disco 5-7pm
	Fri. 18 <sup>th</sup>	Non-Uniform day (in return for items for the Christmas Hampers – details to follow)
		Y6 visit to the Sainsbury Centre, UEA
	Tues. 22 <sup>nd</sup>	Anti-Bullying Theatre company in school
	Wed. 23 <sup>rd</sup>	Y6 Newspaper Day
	Sat. 26 <sup>th</sup>	Winter Fayre
<b>December</b>	Tues. 6 <sup>th</sup>	Christmas Production 1.30pm & 6.30pm with Y3 & Y5 choir
	Wed. 7 <sup>th</sup>	Christmas Production 1.30pm & 6.30pm with Y4 & Y6 choir