

Welcome Back

It has been lovely to see the children return to school today, we have been really impressed with the new reception class children.

We are planning another year with lots of educational visits and activities for the children to look forward to. The development of forest school provision is a really exciting project. The staff who are training to deliver it have now spent several weekends deep in the woods at Doddington Hall learning new skills.

There is a lot to do before they qualify, and one of the biggest jobs this autumn and winter in developing the woodland areas to use. The two sites need quite different work but we really do need some help. We are looking for parent volunteers who can perhaps spare some weekend afternoons doing jobs such as digging over ground, planting shrubs, trimming and tidying existing vegetation, creating new paths. If you would like to help please let me know.

You will no doubt have seen that school attendance has been in the news again this week. In recent years Walcott has gone from having some of the poorest attendance in the country to being in the top 10%. Mrs Mary King's attendance has not been far behind. This is down to parents working hard to support their children.

Right up to early summer it looked like we could have had the best attendance yet. However there was a huge drop in attendance at both sites and this was almost entirely due to term time holiday. We had an unprecedented amount of families out of school.

This causes staff large amounts of extra work and can undo work that has taken years. For example both schools have spent tens of thousands of pounds, staff have undertaken hundreds of hours of training to try and raise standards in areas such as phonics and reading.

Absences this summer during the assessment period has meant that a key measure of one of the schools is significantly lower than we had been looking forward to. We had been working to meet a certain target for the last five years and were going to meet it for the first time this summer; this was missed. This is really demoralising to staff and places more external pressure on the school.

Some families have now taken two term time holidays since the law changed and this means they are facing a court order and criminal record if they take a third holiday in the coming year. The thought that we are being expected to initiate these proceedings against families who we want to have good relations with,

gives the leadership team real anxiety.

Please, please think about the consequences of term time holidays. Stressed, pressurised staff cannot make classrooms the enjoyable places they should be.

Over the summer a lot of work has been done to care for the sites. At Walcott we have had more of the brickwork repaired by our builder Darren. Look out for two new door mice peeping out their houses in the brickwork. We have had to remove the sink from Class Two so that damp in the walls could be treated. Mr Leggett will be replacing the sink area shortly.

Mr Leggett has repaired the large play equipment at Martin and renovated the hall floor.

A new version of the school website will be launched in the next few days. The updated version has more of a focus on sharing news and upcoming events and should work better alongside the Facebook and OurSchoolsApp.

## Online Safety

Please take time to think about the safeguarding measures you have in place such as parental controls. The key risks are:

- Children being exposed to inappropriate conversations and grooming during game play.
- Having risky and abusive conversations with friends in class WhatsApp groups leading to bullying.
- Being coerced into sharing nude pictures and being blackmailed.
- Children being exposed to adult content that gives children damaging views about relationship.

Sadly we have come across all of these issues in recent years. These things happen in small village schools. Advice can be found at: <https://www.internetmatters.org/parental-controls/>

If you have any safeguarding concerns you should contact one of the safeguarding officers:

Mr Sewell

Mrs Wheatley

Mr Churchward

Mrs Miller

Miss Edwards