**Newsletter number 8**

**7th February 2020**

**The lost sheep**

Some parents have noticed the small pot sheep that has appeared in our front playground and have been asking why it is there.

In the last few weeks in RE lessons children have looked at two bible stories: The Lost Sheep and the Prodigal Son. Both are parables that teach us about God’s love. We are working to ensure that we have no lost sheep in our school and that all feel very valued and have a feeling of belonging. I put it there for the First Communion children and have enjoyed seeing it each morning as I arrive into school as a reminder of our focus in school to work to ensure that every child can flourish.

**Respect**

As part of our work to achieve the Unicef Rights Respect Silver Award we have been focusing on what respect looks like in our school. This week our oldest pupils, as part of their work on World War II, have looked briefly at The Diary of Anne Frank and the messages from survivors of the holocaust. Their messages are easy to say: seek hope even in the darkest of time and respect each other. I did mention this to the whole school in today’s celebration assembly.

It can be difficult to talk about aspects of the war, and particularly how Jewish people were treated simply for what they believed. We have worked to be positive and focus on the learning. Your child may have questions about this over the next few days.

**Congratulations to St Mary’s**

On Wednesday 27th January we received a letter from the government to congratulate pupils and staff on achieving 100% in the maths tests in July 2019. It stated that this puts St Mary’s in the top 2% of schools in the country.

It was positive to have this hard work acknowledged. It does not make us complacent but motivates us to continue to do better. Throughout 2018 to 2019 Mrs Gill, Mrs Burrough and myself worked with an outstanding school in Plymouth and took part in extended development work in maths.

To build on this Mrs Gill and Mrs Fudger are working as leaders in our school with the Jurassic Maths Hub (part of the National Centre of Excellence in the teaching of Maths) on a one year development programme. This will be followed by a whole school programme for the next two years. Through this training and ongoing professional dialogue in school we are working to ensure that we embed the best approaches for maths teaching to maintain the high standards we have set for all pupils.

**The New Ofsted Framework**

In September 2019 we started the school year with a new inspection framework. Giving more time and focus to learning in every subject whilst maintaining high standards in children’s achievements in reading, writing and maths is an expectation for all schools. For us that is very exciting as it has always been our focus to develop all aspects of school life but now the timetabling of a wide curriculum is expected and valued.

Schools have until September 2020 to ensure that this is fully in place. For us having the same level of written work in all subjects as we currently have in children’s English books is a shift. We have traditionally prioritised the learning of skills and knowledge in all areas of the curriculum. This remains the most significant focus but at the same time there is now an expectation that children have opportunities for time to create extended written work in all areas of the curriculum. We are working over this year to create the right balance between experience, learning and recording in all subjects.

**Reading and vocabulary at the heart of the curriculum**



Research continues to show that children who develop a love of reading will have a rich vocabulary and reading skills which will give them a huge advantage over those that do not access reading. This advantage will remain through each child’s school life and beyond.

If you find yourself with time or can make time then invest in reading with and to your child, visit the library, talk about books, talk together. This is true when your child is small and as they are developing through primary and secondary school. Please give your child a head start by continuing to make reading a priority.

If you have any questions or concerns about your child’s reading please let their teacher know.

**Expansion Update**

We are now a very popular local school. Whilst some schools in Devon and beyond are concerned about falling pupil numbers we have waiting lists for many of our year groups.

Some parents and local residents understand that the reason the local authority is looking to expand us is because of the local interest in our school. In fact, the expansion plans are part of a much wider Axminster Plan; with possible local housing developments being agreed alongside a by-pass to ensure that there is sufficient infrastructure to support the increased road usage. Local schooling needs have been considered in this wider plan and our school is part of that conversation. When we started that conversation it was expected that the expansion would happen by the start of the academic year 2020 – 21.

To date none of that development has been finalised.

It is true that we have worked with the local authority on a possible expansion plan and this will likely go to planning but building work at St Mary’s will not happen if the housing developments do not happen so we expect to continue as a school with an agreed admission of 20 pupils per year group.

I will keep you updated if there are any changes to this but please be reassured that we will continue to make decisions that have the best opportunity to benefit all pupils and to work to ensure that they continue to flourish.

**Diocesan Inspection**

On Thursday 30th January we welcomed two inspectors from Nottingham Diocese who came to look at Catholic life in our school. It was a very busy day as they looked at evidence across the school and spoke to many people and pupils. Thank you very much to those parents who returned questionnaires.

I started teaching in Catholic schools 20 years ago and for me it is an essential part of school life. We are taught that each one of us is unique and that we are here to find our gifts and talents. We are also taught that we are always loved. Catholic life extends far beyond the services, masses and assemblies we share together; it genuinely shapes every aspect of our school life. It is an aspect of the school for which we are greatly valued and does add much to the values and relationships that children experience.

As with all inspections final outcomes will not be available for a few weeks but as soon as the information is available we will share it with you.

**Music Trio**

On Monday 27th January we welcomed a trio of musicians to school to share their culture and music with us. We were introduced to some Portuguese phrases and songs. We also learned about the instruments being played: three different types of flute, an electric acoustic guitar and a range of percussion instruments including ways to make music using the body. There was much signing and clapping. It really was a great way to start the week and to enrich the children’s experience.

**Parents, Teachers, Friends Association (PTFA )**

We continue to be extremely grateful to St Mary’s PTFA who work to give children experiences and opportunities that we would not otherwise have. Since September as a school we have been reviewing and developing reading across St Mary’s and we are so delighted that the PTFA have agreed to support the purchase of a scheme that will give us high quality electronic texts and teaching resources that will really develop the opportunities in Robin, Woodpecker and Owl Class to develop all children’s reading skills.

In addition to support this resource the PTFA will part fund home reading books for children that will better match the sound and tricky word developments we teach.

We are very grateful to all parents for their ongoing support of PTFA events and of course, huge thanks to all who contribute directly to PTFA. This small team of parents make a significant contribution to school life. If you would like to consider being part of this team then please do speak to one of the team members directly or give your name to the school office.

**PTFA Dates for the diary**

**Friday 14th February** children’s disco. Robin, Woodpecker and Owl Class-3.45pm-4.45pm

Kestrel and Eagle Class- 5pm-6pm. There will be a £2.50 entry charge (please give your child the money in a named envelope in their book bag).

**PTFA Cake sales after school dates**

Friday 28th February-St David’s House

Thursday 19th March-St Patrick’s House

Friday 24th April-St George’s House

Friday 3rd July-St Andrew’s House

**Monday 16th March**-Easter Garden competition

**Friday 20th March**- Easter Bingo. Non school uniform day in return for a chocolate donation for the hamper prizes

**Friday 22nd May**-PTFA sponsored event (details to follow closer to the time)

**Friday 19th June**-Party in the field after school. Non school uniform day in return for a bottle for the tombola.

**Friday 10th July**-Summer Fayre after school

**British Heart Foundation Skip a Thon Friday 14th February**

This week the skipping ropes have been out at St Mary’s and Eagle Class have had extra time with Mr Munane to prepare as leaders for next week’s Skip-a- thon. Skipping is a great skill bring many health benefits but you will know that we are raising awareness and thanks for the work that The British Heart Foundation does. We are all especially grateful to them for the specialist medical support that Poppy has had since she was born and send our very best wishes to her for her on going treatment.

Please encourage family and friends to sponsor your child for next week’s event and if you can get the skipping ropes out and have a skip yourselves.

Thank you in advance for your support with this event.

**Hilary’s Lunch – Wednesday 19th February at 12pm**

A lovely opportunity to gather and share a simple meal, a chat and a play during the holidays. From 12.00 until 2.00pm children will be able to make their own sandwiches and a catch up with friends. There is no cost and no catch. It really is a community event for everyone to enjoy. Please join us if you can.

**Caretaking at St Mary’s**

At the end of last term we said goodbye to Mr Wilson, our school care taker and cleaner, who was employed through Devon Norse. For this term we have maintained the cleaning part of the contract but we are working with a local company to undertake all school repairs. In addition we employ a local firm to cut the school field and the hedges to the rear of the school. We do not have anyone to look after the grounds at the front of the school or to sweep and clear the pathways at the rear of the school. For the time being I am undertaking this myself before and after school. If you are anyone you know would be interested to undertake this role, on a voluntary or paid basis for the rest of this term please leave name and contact details with the office.

Over the last six terms we have undertaken lots of work to improve the security, safety and the appearance of the school with very little funding. We are very appreciative of the work of the Central Trust Team for access to advise, specialist services and repair work in and around the school.

**Brexit and school lunches**

Our catering providers Devon Norse have contacted us to reassure all parents that their supply changes will be unaffected by any Brexit actions.

**Coronovirus**

Governments and local authorities are monitoring this situation and currently advise that the risk is very low for local people. They advise that we follow all practice relating to limiting the spreading of cold and flu virus by ensuring that good hygiene is maintained if you do have a cold; watching hands and surfaces, putting used tissues straight into the bin and ensuring that hands are washed and surfaces cleaned.



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**An event that may be of interest to you.**

<https://www.chsw.org.uk/event/rainbow-run-exeter-2020>

Exeter’s brightest sponsored 5K

Walk, run or jog your way through vibrant colour stations of powder paint, enjoy the colourful festival vibe in the event village all whilst raising money for local children not expected to reach adulthood. Anyone aged 5 years and over can take part, so gather friends and family or get colleagues together to enter a team… and help to make it a day to remember.

What's included?

* Participation and finishers medal
* Your participation helps to support local families
* Big smiles and a colourful day you'll remember!

All monies raised are for Children’s Hospice South West.

Not keen on taking part then perhaps being a volunteer on the day will be of interest to you?



**School dates for your diary**

Monday 10th February- Year 6 parents evening

Friday 14th February- PTFA school disco

Friday 14th February-BHF jump for rope event in school

Monday 17th February-Friday 22nd February-Half Term

Monday 24th February-**INSET day** school closed to children

Tuesday 25th February-Kestrel Class last swimming session

Tuesday 3rd March-Woodpeckers first swimming session (letter closer to the time with details)

Monday 9th March-Wednesday 11th March-Year 5 Bikeability

Friday 13th March during the school day-Choir to attend Devon Performing Arts Festival in Exeter (letter with details closer to the time)

Friday 27th March-Last day of Spring Term. Celebration Assembly will be at 3.00pm today rather than 9.00am

Wednesday 15th April- Children return to school. Start of Summer Term.