**12th March 2019**

**Newsletter**

Lenten promises

We had a very calm and reflective Ash Wednesday mass on 6th March to mark the start of Lent. At the same time we have all been thinking about what we might give up or take up for the fund raiser to help children and families across the world who have less than us.

Children have begun to develop their ideas. Please do share ideas with them and help them find something they could take up to make a difference at home and raise a little pocket money to give to Cafod at the end of this term.

Children have suggested giving time tidying their rooms, learning songs to sing with their best friends, extra homework practice for times tables….as well as giving up special treats and time on play stations / ipads so watch out for these at home and thank you in advance for any encouragement you can give them.

**World Book Day**

To celebrate children’s love of books and to develop our focus on writing, we welcomed three visitors to school for World Book Day. Throughout the day Jethro Wilson, illustrator, Katy Cawkwell, story teller and Rikey Austin a local author, spent the day working with classes of children to share skills and their own experiences of where ideas came from.

As the day developed excitement built as children met each of the talented authors in turn.

At the end of the day the whole school celebrated and shared their experiences.

**Why no dressing up** ? Many parents nationally communicate the stress and challenge of finding costumes that fit the books that their children love. Many, and I include myself in this, have chosen outfits and then found a book to go with this. At a time when for many monies and or time are in short supply, in September when we were planning the day, we felt that a focus on an exciting and inspiring school day with words and illustrations would have more impact on the children than an opportunity to dress up. It certainly was a very positive and memorable day.

I would be very grateful if as many parents as possible would let me know their honest opinions about dressing up for World Book Day in preparations for next year.

**Before school and after school timings**

I wanted to apologise for the late gate opening last week. As you know the gate should open at 8.45 and last week twice this happened after 8.45. To my knowledge that is the first time that has happened since I began at St Mary’s in Jan 2018. I apologise for this. I will work to ensure that it is not repeated. School gates should open at 8.45 with registration closing at 9.00am

**End of the day:** Parents have asked me what time the children should be out at the end of the day. The school teaching day ends at 3.30p.m. So reasonably children should be appearing between 3.31 and 3.35p.m.

A 3.30pm end of day means that we work to having everything sorted and completed for 3.30p.m. In younger classes because children take time and need support to gather their belongings these tasks are included in preparing for the end of the day. In older pupil classes it generally means work is completed and put away and that a final prayer concludes the day before children are sent out. In schools I have worked in previously older children (year 3 to 6 ) then go at 3.30 to collect belongings and coats before going independently to meet their adults on the playground.

At St Mary’s every class of children is walked out together to meet adults. Ensuring that all children are together, with all of their belongings, can create some delays.

On occasion due to special celebrations in the hall, or if pupils are giving out birthday treats or children misplace items, all and more of these reasons can cause delays. If you find that this is a concern or you feel it is consistently happening and is impacting negatively on you then please do let the class teacher or myselfknow,

**Before school and after school clubs :** I am aware that we have after school clubs every day and on some mornings but if you would like us to consider a breakfast school and after school club then please do let the office know. Generally these run from 8.00am and then 3.30 to 5.00p.m, with charges at about £3 per session with reductions for siblings. If this would be of value and genuine interest to you for the future then please let the office know.

**PE Kit-Every Thursday**

A reminder that on Thursday’s the whole school have PE. Last week a large number of children in Owls, Kestrels and Eagles came to school without the necessary equipment (gum shields and/ or shin pads). The office rang a large number of parents to ask that they bring the kit in. This can’t happen as it takes up a great deal of the office staff’s time. As such, if your child does not come to school with the correct items the office will not be ringing home to remind parents.

**Coats for outdoor play**

Please could you ensure that your child has a coat and that you speak to them about wearing it for breaktime. We try to ensure that children get some fresh air each day. In the past few weeks we have had lots of strong cold winds, often with some very light rain. The children are happy to be outdoors but it is helpful that they have an extra layer so that their school clothes remain dry.

**PTFA activities**

The daily Mile continues to be a focus across the school.

We are so grateful to all parents for their on going support in funding opportunities like this for the school through the PTFA. So many Easter eggs were offered for the Easter Bingo and it was a lovely event raising £400. Thank you to everyone who contributed in any way and many thanks to the PTFA team who make all events run so smoothly.

**Internet Safety**

A reminder that the internet offers us all many interesting and valuable learning opportunities. Children can meet the world in very real experiences; this can be good news or bring a range of challenges and safety issues. This technology changes so rapidly and adults can find themselves catching up with their children. Advice remains that you stay very aware of the time your children spend on activities and games on line and that you maintain a conversation about what they are seeing and how they can keep themselves safe.

In school we very actively promote the protective strategy of STOP and TELL and having safe people to share anything that makes them feel unsafe or worried. Children may refer to their ‘thumb person’ who is the key person that they feel they can tell anything and everything to keep them happy, safe and grounded. Our website references links to advice and support.

**Parking**

The white wooden poles in the car park have been introduced and chains will be added to cordon off areas of the car park for church access. Thank you to all of the parents who continue to walk their children into school in all weathers.

**Axminster Development Plan**

Some parents are aware that there is a planned housing development expansion on the outskirts of Axminster and that the local authority is looking at road developments, including a possible bypass, as well implications for school developments.

As part of this the local authority made the decision not to include a school in the housing development and look to existing schools for ways to the likely increase in pupil numbers.

Parents are aware from local council meetings that one of the options being looked at is for St Mary’s to become a one form entry school. This is part of an ongoing consultation but parents have been asking what the implications would be for St Marys.

One form entry means that we could offer 30 places each year where now we offer 20 and that the school would expand to have seven classes instead of five. Maintaining premises for Dragonflies remains part of any discussion. The current discussions are to make a plan from September 2020.

St Mary’s is the first school I have worked in to have 20 places. I can see that it can be a benefit to have options to regroup pupils from year to year but it is also a positive for groups of children to go through school without this change, which is what happens in a larger school. Experienced Head teachers and professionals I have spoken to tell me that if we do move to seven classes it will create further stability and if pupil numbers increase it does mean that we have more teachers, which brings the opportunity to add in more experience and skills as well as more adults to fulfil school responsibilities.

I see my role as being able to learn with and from teachers, pupils and parents about pupil needs and to find ways to work to meet these needs. I would like to reassure all that meeting pupil needs remains my priority whatever the decision made through this consultation.

Over the next two months there will be meetings on the school site with planning teams from the local authority and at some point something more definite will be shared with you.

If you have any concerns, thoughts, questions please do contact me.

**Easter Garden competition**

The children are invited to enter our Easter Garden competition! Last year we had some really lovely entries. Please bring your gardens into school on Wednesday 3rd April. They will be judged and the winners announced at our Easter Celebration assembly (parents welcome) This will be on the last day of term, Thursday 4th April at 9am.

**Parents evening**

We will be having parents evening on Tuesday 2nd April and Wednesday 3rd April. Letters will be out this week where you can book your slots.

