



## SILVERHILL PRIMARY SCHOOL

Headteacher Mr Andrew Gallagher BEd  
Draycott Drive, Mickleover, Derby, DE3 0QE  
Tel 01332 511138

[admin@silverhill.derby.sch.uk](mailto:admin@silverhill.derby.sch.uk)

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Dear Parents/Carers,

Welcome back to the new term and I hope the festive period allowed you time for some fun, family time and hopefully much needed rest!

I refer to this term as '*the moving term*' where I would expect most children's academic progress to accelerate. Everyone has had a term to familiarise themselves with their new class, expectations have been established and targets will have been set and monitored over the autumn term.

Now is the time for children to really engage, be motivated and produce increasing amounts of work in line with their end of year targets. All year groups have clear priorities outlined in our Spring School Improvement Plan and we are determined to keep improving the school and all outcomes for our children.

### Homework v Gaming

We took the decision last term (excluding reading and times tables) to stop formal homework. This proved to be a popular decision for most parents as it reduced the pressure and workload for parents in busy homes. Equally we hoped as a school this would allow families to have more time to sit and talk, read, play games, and relax together. I do know from my own experience that this can sometimes be replaced by all family members spending more time on phones, tablets and gaming consoles. It is a constant challenge in many homes to get the right balance for our children. There are many benefits from gaming and internet use but please be mindful of the negative impact excessive 'screen time' can have on children's mood, anxiety levels and social skills.

The national multiplication times table check for Y4 pupils is trialled this June and becomes mandatory from 2020 (Our current Y3s). Regular work for children Y2 upwards would be highly recommended.

### Online safety

Whilst we are on the digital topic, can I please remind you, if you haven't already, to check the parental controls you have for your child's devices and keep regular checks on the interactions

they are having with others online. More and more children, including some at Silverhill are using social media platforms that they are too young for (Most are 13+, WhatsApp is 16+). Statistically 1 in 5 children using social media have faced online bullying. I have spoken to all KS1 & 2 children this week to be open and honest with their parents about their internet use and any worries they have, so please take time to talk to them about this and we can work together to keep our children safe. These are all highly recommended sites to visit for both children and adults.

[www.thinkuknow.co.uk](http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk), [www.saferinternet.org.uk](http://www.saferinternet.org.uk), [www.nspcc.org.uk](http://www.nspcc.org.uk) and [www.childnet.com](http://www.childnet.com).

### **Future@Silverhill**

Many thanks for your responses to my letter last term regarding our review of Silverhill. Staff and children will be contributing their ideas and opinions this half term. The next step will be to form the *Future@Silverhill* team who will collate, review and shape everyone's thoughts into ideas and actions. I will keep you posted of the developments.

### **Fundraising & School trips**

Thank you for your ongoing support with fundraising events at school. The Christmas fayre, Mad Head day and World Wildlife Fund (adopting polar bears & penguins) have been supported greatly and it is much appreciated. I do get regular requests from children to fundraise as there is a real altruistic culture at Silverhill with weekly suggestions from children to organise events!

I am, however, mindful of the pressure this puts on parents, particularly in the same year we are promoting experiential learning and improving the purpose, context and engagement through our *Sensational Starts & Fantastic Finishes*. I will endeavour to spread the fundraising events across the academic year but sometimes it's difficult to disappoint enthusiastic children who want to do something good for the world!

Mickleover schools are the worst funded schools in Derby and at Silverhill we rely heavily on monies from the PTFA. Without your continued support with trip costs we would not be able to provide the enriched curriculum that the children currently benefit from.

However, if you are having any difficulty paying for trips, particularly with multiple children in the school, then we are happy to set up a payment plan to break up the cost over a couple of months.

### **Contacting school**

I pride myself on our *customer service* and expect the highest standards from Silverhill staff when liaising with parents and dealing with queries and/or complaints. I do try to make myself regularly available to speak to parents if they are upset or worried about their child and that will not change.

However, we do have a staffing structure in place to ensure that channels of communication and accountability are clear to benefit staff and parents alike. Initial concerns should always go to the class teacher first, as most of the time they are the best person to deal with, as they know your child and the context of the class. Ongoing issues would then probably require the

assistance of the Phase Leader (Mrs Turner - Reception, Mrs Brundish - KS1, Mrs McBride - Y3/4 & Mrs Mitchell - Y5/6). The vast majority of problems would be dealt with at this stage. In occasional circumstances Mrs Turner & Mr Burley may need to assist the process and the final stage would be a meeting with myself. Mrs Freeston, our Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator, should be contacted similarly to a Phase Leader if your child has a SEN.

### **Attendance letters**

I have received a number of complaints about the impersonal nature of our attendance letters. Attendance targets for schools are necessary and policies must be adhered to but I do recognise at times this can put a strain on the relationship between school and parents. This is the last thing I want, particularly as positive parental engagement is so important for children's happiness and success. We don't mean to offend parents when we are challenging attendance levels below our target but we are held to account by the Local Authority & Ofsted and must be seen to be challenging absence even if the cause is genuine illness. I know it seems ridiculous that you may receive a letter because your child has fallen below 96% because they have had two days off due to a sickness bug!

I have spoken to Mrs Nevin, our attendance officer, and we will endeavour to look further into the personal circumstances of each child and tailor the letters so they are not so blunt and potentially upsetting. However, you can imagine this increases workload considerably instead of sending a generic letter but we will try and improve the process.

### **Parents & Carers of children with Special Educational Needs & Disabilities**

We will be holding a meeting for parents and carers of children with Special Educational Needs & Disabilities. This will be an informal session with coffee & biscuits at 2pm on 5<sup>th</sup> February. It will be facilitated by Mrs Freeston with the intention of giving parents and carers (and Grandparents!) the opportunity to share, offload and be proud of our children's differences. We hope it can be a useful session to learn from each other and help each other improve family life and hopefully give school a better insight into how we can support you and your children. Please come along and make it a success with the intention of the group meeting regularly.

### **Online communication to parents**

Following a parents meeting last summer, (I think it was the 'Meet Mr Gallagher coffee morning'!!) it was requested that we communicate to parents on all our *platforms* so parents didn't miss anything and could use their preferred platform (Website, Twitter, Class Dojo, Teachers2Parents). For some, this can seem a bit over the top if they are receiving the same message multiple times...sorry.

It is a deliberate strategy to be proactive in communication and we are particularly using Twitter to celebrate our successes to engage both parents and motivate our children. It also raises our profile in Derby and nationally so that we can liaise and form partnerships with other schools, educationalists and businesses. Not only does it boost the self-esteem of our children but it promotes our school and keeps us topical in the world of education. We believe it strengthens our reputation, attracts quality teachers to our school and helps future proof Silverhill so that we can continue to have a long and happy future.

(You can access our Twitter feed without your own account @SilverhillPrim).

Thank you for your continued support and I hope there are many blue skies ahead for us all this term.

Yours sincerely,

Andrew Gallagher  
Headteacher

