



17th December 2019

Dear Parents and Carers,

As the Autumn term draws to a close and we head into the Christmas holidays, we reflect on what has been another very busy term in school.

Christmas Activities

Christmas is always a very special time for us as a Church of England School. The children start to become aware of Christmas on the horizon around the middle of November, and from that point onwards, it is often at the forefront of their minds! We held our Christmas Disco, organised by the Friends of Castor C of E School, on Friday 29th November. The Friends committee and the many parents involved did a wonderful job in organising a wide range of activities that the children thoroughly enjoyed. Each child received a reading book from Santa, with some children even seen taking time out from the disco to read it there and then! Thank you to each of you who were involved in this.

Our Reception and Key Stage 1 children really shone in their performance of 'Mary, Mary!', and considering some of these children have been in school just a few months, they really are incredible. I wouldn't be in the least bit surprised if the odd kazoo makes its way onto the list for Santa this year! I know I have one on my list! I have now been at the school long enough to have seen our Year 2 children as they joined us at the age of 4 years old in Reception in the September of 2017, and in this time they have just flourished. Their acting and singing was a fine example of this.

Our children in Key Stage 2 will take to the stage for their Christmas Concert this evening, with a full array of musical talents on display. Add into the mix our Christmas dinner, Snowman Drive and our Carol Service in Church this morning, and I think it's fair to say the children will be well and truly prepared for Christmas when we break up tomorrow!

Pupil Attainment and Progress

Pupil attainment and progress scores for all primary schools across the country at the end of Key Stage 2 (2018-19) have now been made public and can be found here: <https://www.compare-school-performance.service.gov.uk/compare-schools>. We are delighted that not only are we above the national average in most aspects, we are also the 3rd highest performing school in Peterborough in terms of the percentage of children who achieved the national expected standard in reading, writing and maths. This is quite a turnaround for us, and one that everybody should be proud of! Thank you for your hard work in supporting your children to achieve this. An overview of these pupil outcomes can also be found on our school website by clicking [here](#). The children in our school work hard and do well, as do the staff throughout the school to make sure that this happens.



"We have faith in God, ourselves and everyone around us"

Letter of Congratulations

Based upon these strong pupil outcomes, we were very pleased to receive a letter of congratulations from Jonathan Lewis (Service Director for Education – Peterborough and Cambridgeshire). This letter recognised that for the ‘first time since the introduction of the more demanding tests in 2016, our Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2 progress outcomes are above those nationally in each of reading, writing and maths’. It was also recognised that there is a ‘rising trend in the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in reading, writing and maths, with particularly high standards in maths’. The letter referred to the strong outcomes being a reflection of the hard work of pupils, parents, teachers, support staff, governors and those with leadership roles within the school. It was noted that these outcomes ‘provide good evidence of the quality of pupils’ learning and progress in the school and the effectiveness of leadership and management in bringing about improvement’. The school is a very positive place to be at the moment, and we give our thanks to each of you who contribute in any way.

Peterborough Year of Reading

We are currently mid-way through the ‘Peterborough Year of Reading’, which is a year long celebration of reading organised by Peterborough City Council, the National Literacy Trust, Vivacity and City College Peterborough. The aim of it is to get children interested in books and more parents engaged in reading to and with their children from a young age. We have been working hard in school to support this, and to generate a real love of reading within the children. Reading is one of the first skills that children learn when they start in Reception, and this is through our phonics lessons. As the children become more able to decode words, they begin to widen their comprehension and understanding of books, and we teach this through a scheme called ‘Reading for Inference’. We regularly recommend books to read to the children and have recently purchased new stock for our library. The Friends of the School have pledged their support in our development of reading by donating £100 each half term for updating books in the library. We will soon be holding a whole school ‘reading quiz’, and some of our Year 6 children entered the Peterborough English Challenge and finished in a very credible 3rd place in their heat. We will continue our focus on reading into the New Year.

A few weeks ago, you would have received via ParentMail, a leaflet that we have created to help support parents reading and sharing books with their children. It explains how our book banding system works and offers some ideas of ways to support comprehension and the enjoyment of reading. This follows on from phonics and reading sessions shared when children start school and their reading journey.

Also attached was a list of recommended reads for each year group. There is a mixture of well-loved classics and newer, good quality fiction and non-fiction to promote reading for pleasure.

Across the whole school, as our homework grids point out, we value the support from parents to help children learn to read and build comprehension skills. We hope that every parent will engage with their child reading in some form on a daily basis and ask that children have their reading diaries signed regularly. Attached to this Newsletter is another copy of the leaflet and the recommended reads list.

Dreams and Aspirations

It has often struck me what a varied range of professions and experiences we have within our parent community, and it is something that you often offer to share with the children in school. We would love to hold a ‘Dreams and Aspirations’ day, and we are asking parents to come in and lead a short 10-15 presentation or workshop that demonstrates and explains a little about their profession. This isn’t about a child committing to becoming a firefighter at the age of 6 years old, but more about us trying to spark that little bit of interest in a child that gives them something to aspire to – something that allows them to finish the sentence ‘When I grow up I’d love to be...’. There are no professions excluded from this, and the more variety we have the better. In terms of sparking the children’s interest, it would be good to have something tangible e.g. a prop, a piece of equipment. We plan on running the day by splitting the children into smaller groups across school, and then rotating the groups around each

profession. Many employers are keen for their employees to engage with the community and schools to support the education of children, and may well encourage you to join us for this. The day that we have set for this is Tuesday 4th February.

If you think you might be able to join us for this, please could we ask that you send Mrs Baxter-Edwards an email (secretary@castor.peterborough.sch.uk) registering your availability, along with a short explanation of what you would plan to talk about and bring. We will confirm arrangements back to you in the New Year.

School Attendance

In order for the children to succeed in school, it is important that they are here as often as they possibly can be. We have had a great start to the year in terms of attendance, with an overall whole school attendance figure of 97.44%. This compares favourably to the 97.14% for the same period last year. We have also given out 72 certificates for 100% attendance, which is fantastic! We do know that for some children, 100% attendance is just not possible, which is why we also try and reward attendance in other ways e.g. weekly attendance pencils, Castor Bear's race around the village.

School Governors

Our Chair of Governors, Elaine McMillan, will be resigning from her role and from the governing body at the end of this term. Elaine has shown a great deal of commitment and dedication to her role as both Chair of Governors and, prior to this, as Chair of our Resources committee. Her skillset, knowledge and wisdom has been central to the strong governance of our school, and her overall input very much valued. I am sure you will join me in thanking Elaine and wishing her the very best for the future.

We have also said farewell to two of our parent governors this term – Nick Stephenson and Dino Leo. Both Nick and Dino have brought their expertise in their own fields to the governing body of our school and have contributed towards the school's success. In a world where budgets seem to be getting tighter and tighter, Dino's leadership as Chair of our Resources committee was invaluable. I'm sure you will also join me in thanking Nick and Dino for their hard work.

Chris Murrell will be stepping up to the Chair of Governors role from her role of Vice Chair, and Claire Drake will be stepping into the Vice Chair role. Following the recent call for nominations for parent governors, I am delighted to confirm that our two new parent governors are Julie Berry and Jonathan Hunt. Congratulations to Julie and Jonathan. We are very pleased that Chris and Claire are able to step into these roles and look forward to welcoming Julie and Jonathan to their new roles too.

Friends of Castor C of E School

Friends continue to work tirelessly to raise money for the school with various fundraising initiatives and ideas. The Dare to be Different day raised £230, as well as helping children to understand that we should celebrate anything that is different between us. The tote bags raised £320, and loose change collection has been very popular and successful, with the final amount raised still to come. The Christmas Disco alone raised £812, which is an incredible amount! Through photograph sales, the raffle, drinks and the donations basket, over £700 was also raised at Reception and Key Stage 1 performances.

We try and use these funds to not only support our school improvement priorities (e.g. reading this year), but also to fund the 'extras' that we are just not able to squeeze into the school budget. A typical example of this is the recent purchase and installation of the new stage lights that were used for the Reception and Key stage 1 Nativity – what a difference they have made! All of the children in school will benefit from these at some point, and without the work of Friends and your ongoing support and donations, this would not be possible. Thank you.

Learning Cafés

Attendance at our curriculum 'pop-in' sessions has slowly declined, to the stage where it is not uncommon for a teacher to be delivering a presentation on how parents can support their child's learning to just one or two parents. This is particularly the case as the children move into Key Stage 2. Whilst this is great for those parents, we are not reaching as many parents as we would like to. We want to be able to help you support your child's learning.

We have had some success (and lots of positive feedback) in our Reception class with 'learning cafés', and I have also heard of them working successfully in other schools across all year groups. A learning café involves parents learning alongside their child in a 'real life' school lesson. As well as having the opportunity to see first-hand the work that your child produces in school, the aim is also to help parents feel better equipped to support their child at home using the same methodology that we use in school e.g. the same way of explaining how to do long multiplication, the same approach to teaching your child to infer meaning when reading. We are therefore going to move away from our 'pop-ins' and invite you in to attend a learning café in your child's class instead. The first of these will be Wednesday 15th January and will have a reading focus. We would love as many of you to attend as possible.

And finally...

Thank you for your continued support of your child's education and the school. We hope you and your families have a lovely Christmas and New year and we look forward to welcoming you back to school on Monday 6th January. If all goes to plan, there will be nice surprise for the children on the playground when they walk through the gates!

Yours sincerely



Mr N Brompton
Headteacher

