

Education Department

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Mearns Castle High School

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Our Ref: DS/AB

Your Ref:

Date: August 2014

Dear Parent/Carer

I trust that you and your family have had an enjoyable summer and that the start of the new school session has gone well.

Traditionally our first Parents' Newsletter is published in mid September and this will continue to be the case. There are, however, a number of matters that I would like to share with you that require more immediate attention. I have detailed these below and in the attached documentation.

Pupil Information

To ensure an effective home/school partnership it is essential that we have full and accurate details about your child. To this end please find attached the annual data check form and emergency contact form. These should be checked, corrected if necessary, and returned signed to the school office no later than Friday 5 September 2014. It would be very helpful if your emergency contact could be someone who lives and/or works near the school.

I would also ask you to check any medical information noted on the Annual Data Check form and update this as required. Medical information will be shared with staff, if this causes you any concern please contact the school office.

Communication with Parents

We continue to review our strategies for communicating with you to ensure that they are as effective as possible. You will be aware that we have already introduced some communications by text and email. Following positive feedback from parents it is our intention to continue to use these electronic media for much of our communication.

It would be very helpful, therefore, if on the annual data check form you could supply us with a current mobile phone number on which you could receive texts and a current email address.

We are also making increasing use of our school website as a means of communication. Regular use of the website would be another way of accessing up-to-date information about the school. The website address is www.ea.e-renfrew.sch.uk/mearnscastle

Pupil Photographs

As a mechanism for recording and celebrating achievement pupils are regularly photographed or filmed in the school. These images are often displayed on our website. If you do not want your child to participate in photographs or films of pupil activities in school please convey this request to me, in writing, at your earliest convenience.

School Calendar

I published a Parents' Calendar for session 2014-2015 with Newsletter 4 in June. This calendar is also available to download from the school's website. Please note the **additional In Service Day**, relating to the ongoing development of Curriculum for Excellence **on Thursday 5 February 2015**, is not included in your child's planner, as this In Service Day was agreed after the planners had gone to print.

Timekeeping

Teaching begins at 8.45 am each morning. Pupils should, therefore, arrive in school before the first bell at 8.43 am. Latecomers must report to the main office to collect a blue late slip, which is given to the class teacher. Please make every effort to ensure that your child arrives at school on time as latecoming is disruptive to the learning and teaching process.

Pupil Absence

If your child is absent from school please call the school office at the start of each day of the absence so that the correct absence code can be assigned. We regularly use texts and letters to keep you informed of any unexplained absence from school. Your phone calls or emails to explain absence allow us to ensure records are accurate and also prevent further unnecessary communication. Your cooperation in keeping us informed of absence is very much appreciated.

Permission to be Absent

Pupils are entitled to permission to be absent from school if they are attending a doctor, dentist or hospital appointment. If possible, please schedule such appointments outwith the school day. Please inform the school in writing, in advance of these appointments and your child will be recorded with *Permission* rather than *Absent*.

If you are unable to inform the school in advance, please inform the school office immediately by telephoning and send a letter on your child's return from the appointment. Your child's attendance record will be not be amended to *Permission* until a note is received.

Religious Observance

Your child will be given authorised permission to be absent on days recognised to be for Religious Observance only if you advise the school by letter of your intention on these days. You may wish to list in one letter all days during the school year that your child will be absent for this reason. If you have more than one child at this school then one letter will suffice for all. Without written notification your child will be marked as "unauthorised absence"

Picking up and Dropping off pupils by car

For Health & Safety reasons please use the lay-bys identified for these purposes. It is not appropriate for parents to use the car parks as a drop off point. The car parks are for staff and visitors only.

Medication

The office staff will distribute any medication which is required to be taken during the school day. In order for this to be administered, a parental consent form, which is available from the school office, must be completed stating the amount and the times that the medication is taken. Please label all medication with the pupil's name and ensure that it is within the expiry date and replaced as necessary. Please also note that if you are picking your child up from the medical room you must come to the window of the school office. We will not allow a sick child to leave school unaccompanied.

Mobile Phones, iPods etc

I feel it would be helpful to reiterate our policy on pupils using electronic communication devices in school. Devices such as these are not banned in the school, for educational reasons their use, however, is restricted. To ensure that there is no disruption to learning we currently insist that these electronic devices are switched off during class time and on the journey to and from class. Other than before and after school devices such as mobile phones should only be switched on at the morning interval or at lunchtime.

When pupils do not adhere to these guidelines the device will be confiscated by staff and secured in the School Office. The device will not then be returned to the pupil. It will only be returned when a parent collects it in person from the School Office.

We are satisfied that these arrangements keep the disruption to the work of the school by the use of such devices to an absolute minimum. I would welcome your support in ensuring that, for everyone's benefit, your child adheres to the guidelines described above.

Online Payments

East Renfrewshire Council provides an online payment facility to make it easier for parents to pay for school meals, school trips etc. The 'Payments 4 Schools' service is part of the council's wider public service excellence programme aimed at offering an increasing range of services online. With the new 'Payments 4 Schools' service, you will be able to pay online via the school or council website instead of sending your child to school with cash or cheques. To make a payment you will need to know your child's Scottish Candidate Number. If you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact the school office.

Should you wish to use the online payment facility, visit the council or school website and click on the 'Pay' icon. The system will then take you through the payment process. All major credit and debit cards are accepted, with the exception of American Express (AMEX) and Diners (DINE) cards. **NOTE: A 2% bank administration charge will be added to all payments made by credit card, no charge for debit cards.**

Lunch Vouchers

If your child has no money on their cashless catering account they can go to the school office where an electronic voucher can be issued - £2.05 will be credited to your child's account to enable them to purchase lunch. This money must be paid back onto your child's account the following day. The school office will then redeem the amount owed. Failure to do so could result in no further advances being made.

Senior Awards Ceremony

The Senior Awards Ceremony for pupils in S4-S6 last session is scheduled to take place in the school theatre on Wednesday, 3 September, at 7.00 pm. More details on the precise arrangements for the Awards Ceremony will be published by Mr Sorley in the near future.

Your assistance in the above matters is greatly appreciated and contributes to an effective and safe administrative system within Mearns Castle.

As I stated earlier a full Newsletter will be published in September. In the meantime I hope you find this information helpful. If you wish to discuss any matter further please contact us.

Yours faithfully

Dean Smith
Head Teacher