



WELCOME BACK:

Dear Parents, Carers and all members of the St Mary's family,

Happy New Year and welcome back!

I trust that each of you has enjoyed a restful and reinvigorating Christmas break. It has been wonderful to open our doors this week and welcome all our pupils back to school. I am expectant that 2025 will be a rewarding and fruitful year for us all, and as a year of Jubilee in the Catholic Church, that it will be one filled with joy and celebration.

At the start of a new term, there are always the usual pleas. We have had such a positive first term at school, with pupils' behaviour around school and attitudes to learning being exceptional as ever. Our parents and carers have also made huge efforts in supporting the aims and mission of the school which we – as a school team – appreciate wholeheartedly. Please continue to do all you can to ensure your child is in school, on time, each day as we know that this breeds success – socially, emotionally and academically. Please also continue to read and respond to the communications sent from school each week, and if you have any queries or concerns, communicate these with us via the prescribed channels as this is the best way to get the information or response that you will be looking for.

I am sure that, for some, there will be the usual bumps along the road – this is to be expected. Please know that we are always here and willing to listen and work with you whatever the issue, and the best way to work through any query or concern is for us to come together in partnership and a shared aspiration for your child to flourish.

I am delighted to say that the responses to our Autumn Term parent/carer voice survey were overwhelmingly positive in their praise for the school highlighting as significant strengths: pupils' safety, teaching and learning, behaviour management, positive communication, approachable and supportive staff and the community feel of the school. As ever, we will take our time to digest both the positives and suggestions for school improvement and will share with you our responses over the coming weeks. Thank you to those who took the time to share their views with us at such a busy time of year; it's greatly appreciated.

I look forward to sharing the journey of the year ahead with you all.

Thank you, as always, for your co-operation and support. It's great to be back!

Yours in Hope and Faith,

Mr J Wheatley
Headteacher

IMPORTANT DATES/TASKS THIS WEEK:

- We will celebrate Mass for the start of the Spring Term at 9:30am on Friday 17.1.25 at St Mary's RC Church – all welcome.
 - Please make sure all school uniform and other items coming into school are clearly labelled.
 - Please pay all lunch monies in advance via Arbor (<https://stmw-bwcet.uk.arbor.sc/?/home-ui/index>) – Years 3-6 only. Accounts should never be in a negative balance and parents/carers struggling with this must contact the school office in advance should they anticipate not being able to pay in advance.
 - All pupils are invited to have a FREE school meal on Thursday 16.1.25. Parents/carers do not need to do anything in advance of this to communicate if their child will be taking up this offer.
 - For one week only, Year 6 will be attending swimming (instead of Year 4) on Thursday 16.1.25. This is to monitor pupils' progress towards meeting National Curriculum expectations and to select our squad for the upcoming Gateshead schools' swimming gala.
Year 6 pupils will need to be in PE kit on Wednesday and Thursday this week.
Year 4 pupils should wear PE kit on Monday and Thursday as usual.
 - Routine PE days continue for the upcoming term (any variations will be communicated in advance via the weekly News Bulletin):
 - Reception – Friday
 - Year 1 – Thursday and Friday
 - Year 2 – Wednesday and Friday
 - Year 3 – Wednesday and Thursday
 - Year 4 – Monday and Thursday
 - Year 5 – Tuesday and Friday
 - Year 6 – Wednesday and Friday
 - Gymnastics will start on Friday.
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SCHOOL UPDATES & REMINDERS

SCHOOL CONTACT:

Please continue to direct queries through the school office (info@stmw.bwcet.com / 0191 4205828).
School office hours are 8:30am – 3:30pm.

ATTENDANCE MONITORING:

We will be writing to all parents/carers with an update on pupils' attendance this week. As you will be aware, we closely monitor the attendance of pupils whose attendance should – for whatever reason – fall below 97% at various points throughout the year. We will communicate the outcomes of our monitoring for such pupils this week as we had explained before the Christmas break.

Should we ever have significant concerns about your child's attendance at any point throughout the year, we would make contact to see how best to work with you to support your child to attain the best possible attendance.

KS2 HOMEWORK UPDATE:

Thank you to all parents/carers who responded to our question regarding the use of IXL for KS2 homework. We received 70 responses, with around 57% being in favour of its use.

As the response was not overwhelmingly in its outcome, we continue to review our current IXL subscription. We are looking at potential alternatives in comparison seeking to find a package which offers the best resource and value for money.

In the interim, teachers will continue to use a range of other resources to provide homework for pupils which will focus on key curriculum priorities. You will continue to receive a weekly email from your child's class teacher outlining the week's homework. Should you experience any issues receiving this, please get in contact with the school office (info@stmw.bwcet.com).

SACRAMENTAL PREPARATION:

There will be a meeting for parents/carers of pupils in Year 4 who are Baptised Catholic and would like to prepare to receive the Sacraments of first Reconciliation and Holy Communion this year at 5pm on Wednesday 22nd January 2025.

EXPLORE THE CURRICULUM:

The Explore the Curriculum sessions for the Spring Term will be as follows:

DATE	CLASS
Tuesday 4 th March 2025, 2:30pm	Y1 and Reception
Wednesday 5 th March 2025, 2:30pm	Y2
Friday 7 th March 2025, 9:15am	Y3
Tuesday 11 th March 2025, 9:15am	Y4
Tuesday 11 th March 2025, 2:30pm	Y6
Wednesday 12 th March 2025, 2:30pm	Y5

PARENTS' APPOINTMENTS:

Parents/carers will have the opportunity to come in to school to meet with their child's new class teacher this half term. The focus of the appointment will be:

- A brief pastoral update.
- Review of pupils' attainment and predictions for year-end outcomes (including any statutory assessment).
- How you can help your child's ongoing learning at home.

The dates for the Spring Term Parents' Appointments will be as follows (information regarding booking via Arbor will be sent in due course):

DATE	CLASS
Monday 10 th March 2025	Y1
Tuesday 11 th March 2025	Reception
Wednesday 12 th March 2025	Y2
Monday 17 th March 2025	Y3
Tuesday 18 th March 2025	Y4
Wednesday 19 th March 2025	Y6
Thursday 20 th March 2025	Y5

REQUESTING A LEAVE OF ABSENCE:

A polite reminder about requesting leave of absence for your child; any parent wishing to remove their child from school (for whatever reason) is asked to complete a request for absence form explaining the reasons for the leave of absence, and to return it to school at least 10 school days prior to any absence.

The school will respond with a response as to whether the leave has been authorised or not. Please remember, Governmental guidelines (updated in August 2024) are very clear that leave of absence may only be granted in very exceptional circumstances, and it is at the discretion of the Headteacher to consider each case on an individual basis.

Please continue to be aware that pupils with 5 or more days (10 sessions) of unauthorised absence within a rolling 10 school week must be referred to the Local Authority for a fixed penalty notice which will result in fines for each parent/carer per child.

More information can be found here: <https://www.gateshead.gov.uk/article/16654/School-attendance-legislation>.

SPORTS UPDATE:

A huge well done to our Y5/6 netball team who qualified through the first round of the Gateshead schools 'Bee Netball' competition. We look forward to hearing of their continued success in the tournament.