



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

Happy New Year, and a heartfelt welcome back to school!

I hope you and your families enjoyed a peaceful and restorative Christmas break. It has been a real pleasure to see our pupils return this week with such energy and enthusiasm. As we embark on the new year ahead, I am confident that 2026 will bring many opportunities for growth, success and celebration for every member of our school family. Thank you for ensuring your child is in school promptly each day; regular attendance and punctuality are key for their learning and growth, and we want all our pupils to benefit from everything that school has to offer each and every day.

The beginning of a new term naturally brings with it a few important reminders, which – as ever – you will find in our weekly News Bulletin. Staying up to date with school communications helps us work effectively together; if at any point you have concerns or questions, please do contact us through the usual channels so we can respond promptly and helpfully. We were incredibly proud of the way pupils conducted themselves throughout the Autumn Term—their behaviour, commitment to learning and contribution to school life were exceptional. Your continued support at home plays a key role in this, and we are deeply grateful for all you do. Of course, the journey of a school year rarely runs completely smoothly, and it is natural for challenges to arise from time to time. Please be assured that we are here to listen, support and work alongside you. The most effective solutions come when home and school come together with a shared commitment to helping each child thrive.

This weekend, we celebrate the Feast of the Baptism of Our Lord: the end of the season of Christmas, and a reminder of our call to live as God's beloved children—people who listen, respond and grow in faith each day. As we move forth from our Jubilee Year, we reflect on what it means to live with hope in our daily lives and to carry the light of Christ into the world around us. In his recent homily on the Feast of the Epiphany, Pope Leo reminded us that our Jubilee celebrations over the past year have been *"a powerful sign of God's plan of hope for humanity"*. Reflecting on the story of the Magi—travellers who kept searching for the light even when their journey was difficult – our Holy Father encouraged us to look for Jesus' light in our world looking beyond the 'consumerist' messages that so often surround us, focusing instead on the dignity and worth of every individual person. This is a beautiful message for our children: that each day is a chance to seek goodness; to notice the "light" in others; a call to kindness. As we start this new term, may the spirit of the Jubilee inspire our pupils to walk forward with hope, curiosity and courage, and as a school community, we pray that we may continue to nurture them with the same warmth and welcome.

I am very much looking forward to the term ahead and the many moments of achievement, joy and togetherness it will undoubtedly bring. Thank you, as always, for your continued trust and partnership. It is wonderful to have everyone back.

Yours in Faithful Optimism,

Mr J Wheatley
Headteacher

IMPORTANT DATES/TASKS THIS WEEK:

- Please continue to direct queries through the school office (info@stmw.bwcet.com / 0191 4205828). School office hours are 8:30am – 3:30pm.
 - A full list of term dates will be issued in next week's News Bulletin.
 - A reminder that the deadline for **Reception 2026 admissions** is **Thursday 15.1.26**.
 - All pupils are invited to have a **FREE** school meal on Thursday 15.1.26. Parents/carers do not need to do anything in advance of this to communicate if your child will be taking up this offer. The theme for the meal will be Ristorante Pasta and Pizza.
 - Mrs Cuggy will return to school on Monday 12th January. Please remember to bring your instruments to school if you are currently having lessons. Invoices for pupils receiving small group violin tuition will be sent out at the start of next week.
 - All after school clubs will run as normal next week.
 - Please be reminded that pupils should bring a change of footwear, and can bring a change of clothing, when we experience adverse weather.
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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. The meeting will take place in school at 5pm on Wednesday 21st January 2026.

ATTENDANCE MONITORING:

We will be writing to all parents and carers next week with an update on pupils' attendance. As you know, we routinely monitor the attendance of all pupils whose attendance falls below 97% at any point during the year.

For many children whose attendance is currently below 97% due to illness, there is absolutely nothing that could have been done differently. Please be assured that the standard letter you will receive is not intended to suggest that you have made the wrong decision by keeping your child at home when unwell. In a small number of cases, some pupils may find it difficult to achieve 97% attendance across the year because of more significant health needs; in these instances, home and school will continue to work together closely to support the child's learning and wellbeing.

If at any point we have more serious concerns about your child's attendance, we will contact you directly to explore how we can best support you and your child in improving it. The routine termly letters are simply there to keep you informed as the year progresses and, in the vast majority of cases, will acknowledge and celebrate excellent attendance and commitment.

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>.