



Dear Parents and Carers,

Welcome back to the new school year! I hope you have all managed to spend some quality time with your children during the summer break and have a rest of some kind too! A special and very warm welcome to our new children and families who join Team Dowson this year. We hope you will be very happy here and look forward to working with you from the very start of your child's journey through the crucial Primary School years with us.

As always, the children have got off to a flying start enjoying some lessons which serve as a taste of the year to come as well as a reminder of the school expectations. They will have revisited our PACT values, behaviour systems and all about what it takes to be an effective and successful learner. They will also have had some introductions to new or improved systems and I would like to take this opportunity to share some of these with you too! There's lots to explain so here goes...

You may have noticed that we have had lots of building and site work and renovations completed over the summer holidays, including security gates around school to make the site more secure, a remodelled reading space in Upper School, after the success of the Lower School one, the Foundation Stage covered area being converted to create a greater indoor learning environment and the Lower School Hall and Kitchen being renovated to restructure lunchtimes and serve all school dinners through one dining space. With this in mind, there are some things you need to know...

## **Gates**

We now have security gates around school, including remote access to staff car parks.

The pedestrian gates will be open between the hours of 7.20am until 9.00am and then from 3.00pm to 3.30pm. At other times of the day, you will need to press the bell on the intercom to gain entry and one of the offices will let you in. If you could look at the key pad when ringing the bell, your image will appear on our handset to help us to identify you.

## **Electronic Gate (between Upper School and Lower School)**

Please be aware that where there is an electronic gate these should NOT be touched, pulled or pushed as this will damage the hydraulics and prevent the gate doing what it should do. The gate will open automatically once the staff member has pressed for you to gain access. If you see that the gate is half open and not closed properly can you just press the "Press for Exit Button" on the wall and it will reset the gate to close.

## **Dowson's Den Pickup**

We are awaiting a handset in Dowson's Den room to receive the intercom calls from gates across school for parents collecting children from our after school provision. Until then, you may ring the bell on the intercom for office staff to let you in until 4:30pm. After this time, as a temporary measure, the only gate available for pickup is the pedestrian gate on our Lower School (Gloucester Road) which will be open from 4.30pm until 6.00pm. Sorry for any inconvenience caused; we hope to have the additional handset in place as soon as possible.



## Dinners

Our new dinner hall and systems are up and running after a kitchen and hall renovation in Lower School. All school dinners are served through one hall now and this is working well with FSU and Lower School running as per usual and Upper School lunchtimes being changed to an 'all out and then all in' system where the first part of lunchtime is them all playing together, followed by everyone eating at the same time before returning to class so no one misses out on their recreational time together from this building as a result of the changes.

Please can I remind you that you must notify school of any changes to your child's lunchtime arrangements two weeks prior to changing them over from packed lunches to school dinners or vice versa.

I'd also like to take the opportunity to remind you of our guidance from the well-being policy that packed lunches should contained a healthy and balanced meal which contains only one small sweet treat and that drinks should be sugar free juice, milk (not milkshakes) or water – no energy drinks or fizzy drinks are permitted. Upper school approved snacks consist of any fruit or vegetables, cheese with or without plain crackers, breadsticks or rice cakes.

## Reading and Homework

As you know from my consultation during transition evening and by letter for those of you that couldn't make this, we have changed our homework system this year and the outline below is a summary of what you can expect for your children depending on the stage they are at in school. You can find the full revised homework policy on our website.

Challenge cards will continue for children in Reception onwards and we will endeavour to test and change these once a week as a minimum. When children have completed the set of cards that is expected of their year group, they will continue to be tested on a random mix of the ones they have had to ensure the spellings / maths facts have transferred to long term memory and will be sent home with any they need to revisit as a result of our checks so please don't think they have 'gone backwards'.

Importantly, Reading is the most vital part of homework we send and all children should be reading as often as they can and for increasing amounts of time as they move through school in order to build the stamina and skills they will need to be successful in the next stage of their education. The expectations set out here are also taken from the homework policy:

Children of all ages are expected to read daily. Younger children should be supported by reading aloud to and discussing their books with an adult. Older children should still have opportunities to read aloud to an adult regularly but they are also expected to read silently for sustained periods of time independently and with longer texts.

Nursery will bring home a book to share and enjoy with an adult.

In Reception and Key Stage 1 the minimum expectation for children's reading time is 10 minutes, building to 15 minutes by the end of Key Stage 1 as they become more fluent. This should be daily, with a minimum expectation of 5 times a week.





In Key Stage 2, the minimum expectation for children's reading time is 20 minutes, building to 30 minutes by the end of Key Stage 2 in preparation to build sufficient stamina to access and comprehend age-appropriate texts in preparation for High School. This should be daily, with a minimum expectation of 3 times a week.

All children have a reading record to complete each time they read and an adult should sign this to show they have read for the expected time and occasions. Children who have been unable to complete their reading practice at home will be given the opportunity to do so in their free time in school in order to sustain a good rate of progress.

Finally, our first talk homework of the year will be sent this Friday and we hope you enjoy sharing this as a family. Where the whole school theme seems to look different in different age children's books, this is where the wording / explanation of the task has been adapted to the age of children accessing it – you can have one discussion as a family, this will just help all children to understand what it is about.

## After school clubs

I know there has been some concern about the increase to the price of our after school clubs for this year. The decision to increase the after school clubs to £1.50 from £1.00 per session was not taken lightly. As you know, school provides a wide range of these opportunities, many of which are bought in services and schools are facing ever changing and challenging budgets as well as households. School pays for Mr Allen's contract to extend to all the clubs he provides and also pays for the services that provide cheerleading, clubercise and chess. In addition, all of the resources and materials that go into the clubs such as eco, photography, craft, science, choir, cooking have continued to rise in price over the period of time we have tried to hold the clubs at £1.00 – which has been 8 years. The simple fact is, school budget cannot continue to sustain all of these opportunities at that price and rather than cancel them, which would also greatly disappoint many parents, I decided to make them £1.50 so that children could still experience them for those families who wanted to continue contributing to the facilities.

If you have any further concerns regarding this, please come and see me to discuss further.

## Dates for the diary

In response to parent feedback, we have created a dates for your diary overview of the whole year in attempt to share with you all of the things you may need to or be invited to attend so that you are better placed to make choices about what you come to / need to make work arrangements for etc. This is the first time we have done this, having given you dates in termly instalments instead in the past. Please be aware, as the document says, that in a busy school, there may be occasions when these dates have to change. In these circumstances, we will always notify you as soon as we have had to make a change. We will also still send reminders of the dates termly in the way we have done in the past. I hope this helps to make family life run more smoothly!





## Parent Code of Conduct

Finally, the Enquire Learning Trust have established a Parent Code of Conduct and have asked that Principals in all of their academies issue this to their parents. This sets out the Trust and the School's expectations of adult conduct that is in the best interests of school and families working together for the good of the children in order that relationships remain positive and pupils thrive. This will accompany this letter and also be on our website, replacing Dowson's 'Acceptable Adult Behaviour Policy'. Please ensure you note the information set out in the document and do come and speak to me about this should you wish to.

I know there is a lot of information here – indicative of a busy and ever evolving school, always seeking to make improvements for our pupils and their families and to provide the best possible education!

Happy new school year!

Thank you as always for your continued support,

Kind Regards,

Mrs Kathryn Thornburn

Principal.

