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Dear Parent/Carer

I wanted to take this opportunity to thank you for your support over the first half-term. As ever, this has been a particularly busy time, but I wanted to highlight a number of points.

Homework, knowledge folders and flashcards

We have been delighted with the way in which our strategies to help students learn important knowledge have been adopted. Any new approach takes time to develop but we have tried to share our new methods with students and parents as often and as widely as possible, including during our new induction week and at our Parents' Information Evenings. Here are a few reminders to help you support your child. The homework expectations for each year group are set out below.

HOMEWORK



Years 7 and 8



Promoting a love of **reading for pleasure** (40 minutes per day – logged in planner), **knowledge retrieval** practice and **skills** practice

Years 9 & 10



Establishing a **knowledge base** through **rehearsal and retrieval** practice (every subject, 1 set piece per week), **skills** practice and **coursework** (if applicable)

Year 11



Establishing a **knowledge base** through **rehearsal and retrieval practice**, **independent revision** and **coursework** (guideline = 15 hours per week)

Years 12 & 13



Independent learning, wider reading, rehearsal and revision, exam questions, coursework, note taking (1 hour study per 1 hour of lesson time)

You can support your child by:

- Helping them with their regular retrieval practice. We have found that the majority of students are completing flash cards using their knowledge folder, but this is only half the story. To be effective, students need to test themselves regularly using the flashcards, going back regularly over old topics. This is where you come in. Even 10 minutes per night, reading out one side of the card while your child tries to remember the other side, will make a huge difference to their ability to retain this information in the long term, even if it is slow at first.
- Taking an interest in what they are reading. There is also strong evidence that reading aloud to children (even at this age) exposes them to sophisticated language and has added benefits for their progress, especially if the books and text are challenging.

Uniform

After half term the sleeveless pullover or a long-sleeved jumper will be compulsory for students in years 7-10 (year 11 students are currently wearing a mix of the old and new uniforms so will be exempt from this until next year). The temperature has dropped considerably, and students are moving between buildings, so it is important that they are warm and dressed correctly, rather than wearing tops of their choice. Students are of course free to ask permission to remove these in class, should they feel too warm, but they must be put back on before moving to the next lesson. May we also take this opportunity to remind you that hoodies or hooded tops are not part of our school uniform, and if an outdoor coat is worn, this is not an alternative to wearing a pullover.

Attendance

Attendance to school is very important and is monitored every day. For some parents, 90% attendance may seem like an acceptable level, but this equates to nearly four weeks of learning lost each year. If your child's absence falls to 90% or below, this is considered by the government to be **persistent absence (PA)**. Research also suggests that 17 missed school days a year can equate to a GCSE grade drop in achievement. We would therefore ask for your support in ensuring that wherever possible medical appointments are made outside of school or if this is not possible, that your child returns to school at the earliest opportunity. We would also ask parents to demonstrate their commitment to their child's education by not taking holidays in term time. Holidays taken during term time will be categorised as an unauthorised absence. Last year, we were aware of a few parents taking their children abroad but telephoning in to say they were ill. Please be aware that as we will be making daily phone calls home, we are aware of when there is an international dialling tone and fines will be issued when we believe an unauthorised holiday has been taken.

Changes for this half term Years 7-11

After half term we are implementing some new procedures to assist and support you with attendance issues. Please expect a daily phone call home when a student is absent. This phone call will be made by one of our Pastoral Managers or Attendance Officer who will discuss the reasons for absence and supportive options available to ensure that your child can continue to attend school, even if they are a little under the weather or have any particular ailments or injuries. School is well equipped to support students remaining in school with colds/headaches/bugs and other day to day ailments. This may involve if necessary, a different working environment that is well ventilated, quiet and allows for hydration and easy access to toilets. Please also be aware that there is no "24-48 hour rule" for absence in the case of certain ailments. With regard to physical injuries, support can consist of students being able to leave lessons early, having a lunch pass etc.

Parents or carers will continue to be informed of their child's attendance in a half termly letter home (this is also available to view on Parent app) and we will now initiate a **two** staged process of attendance in the future. Any parent whose child's attendance falls below 96% will receive a stage 1 letter. This may be coupled with a supportive conversation from the pastoral team. Any parent whose child's attendance falls below 94% will receive a stage 2 letter. This stage 2 letter will indicate that for any further absences to be authorised the school will require some supporting evidence of your child's illness (This could be in the form of an appointment card for the doctor's surgery or medication given by the doctor). **Without evidence, all further absences will be unauthorised.** If attendance continues to drop, the school may make a referral to the local authority's Attendance Improvement Team who may also wish to meet with you to issue a formal warning, which could possibly lead to court proceedings.

Sixth Form Attendance

100 % Attendance in the Sixth Form is vitally important, and you will continue to receive truancy texts when a student is absent from a lesson. Please expect a phone call home when a student is absent without reason or is having multiple lessons absent. This phone call will be made by our Sixth Form Pastoral Manager who will discuss the reasons for absence and supportive options available to ensure that your child can continue to attend school, even if they are a little under the weather or have any particular ailments or injuries.

Parents or carers will continue to be informed of their child's attendance in a half termly letter home and we will initiate the Sixth Form attendance policy and its staged process for any student whose attendance falls below that the expectations. **Without evidence, all reoccurring absences will be unauthorised.** We expect any absence to be formally recorded through the absence line. You can monitor student's attendance through the parent app.

Remembrance Day

As you will be aware from previous correspondence, we will be marking Remembrance Day (11th November) a little differently this year, and we hope to make this an annual tradition. During the day, all our students (Years 7-13) will have a Remembrance assembly. This will be an opportunity for them to reflect on the sacrifices that those in the forces made for others; both in history and those who continue to do so today. Following the assembly, all students will then 'plant' a small memorial cross in what is to become a school memorial garden. During History lessons and STEP during the week prior to this, students will have time to reflect upon a message of either thanks or remembrance that they would like to write on their cross. If you have any family connections, it would be a great opportunity to talk to your child about this and allow them to use their cross to remember a relative/loved one. They could bring in a photo to place on the cross if they wish. For those members of our school community for whom it is not appropriate to use a cross, we have a number of other religious and non-religious symbols which can be used as an alternative. (All major faiths represented). This planting ceremony will take place in silence, with only the 'Last post' being played by one of our musicians. We expect this to be a very powerful experience for students and staff.

The Royal British Legion are kindly providing us with the crosses to create this ceremony and memorial garden. We, of course, would like to support them with a financial donation to go towards the excellent work that they do. The recommended donation for the crosses is £2 each and it would be great if students were able to 'buy' their cross but this is an inclusive remembrance service and all students will be included regardless of whether they are able to make a donation. **There is a facility on ParentPay for those who are able to support this which will allow you to make a donation of your choosing.**

Breakfast Service

We are delighted with the uptake of our breakfast service which takes place in Einstein's every morning from 8am-8.20am. After a slow start, we are now seeing increasing numbers of students coming in early to buy toast and a hot drink. Please remember that for students eligible for Free School Meals, this service is free of charge. Many students use this time to chat to friends or to test each other using their flashcards. There is a lot of evidence that having a proper breakfast helps students to be more effective learners and concentrate during the day, so if you are in a rush in the mornings, this is a good option to consider.

Extra-Curricular Activities

Our extra-curricular activities programme is shown on our website

<https://www.framdurham.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Extra-Curricular-Winter-Term-2019.pdf> These activities offer our students a great opportunity to make friends, develop their

interests and passions, and get involved in wider school life. There has been an excellent uptake since September, but it is not too late to join in so please encourage your child to do so. We are also very excited that Miss Bell is launching the first school production for a number of years. We are sure that Seussical the Musical will be a great success when it is performed in March, but we have been really impressed with the students who auditioned for roles.

Finally

Students return to school on **Tuesday 5th November**. In the meantime, I hope that you have a lovely holiday. Thank you again for your support over the first half-term

Yours faithfully,



Andy Byers
Headteacher