



25 September 2023

13,500 hours

Dear Parent/Carer,

I hope your child has settled back into school well. Over the last two weeks it has been a pleasure to see so many happy faces, looking smart, attending on time and ready and keen to learn.

We have already held several events this year including Sunderland University visiting our performing arts department and our first information evening for Year 11 parents, giving information to parents and students about the year ahead. This was very well attended so thank you to all the parents who came. Please keep an eye out on our website and Parentmail for the upcoming information evenings for other year groups.



Performing Arts students taking part in a Sunderland University workshop

In this newsletter I would like to talk about the importance of attendance. A recent [report](#) about school attendance has shown how this has fallen since the pandemic and it is really important that we continue to do all we can to ensure that our children return to the habits, routines and structure of attending school. The messages of the importance of school and attitudes have shifted in some areas, and we need to build up that resilience and determination again. Many students have bounced back, however, we are aware of others that still need support and we will do all we can to help them.

We have a dedicated attendance team who work with families, and we continue to invest in mental health support, however we must be honest and accept that poor attendance will impact both on your child's enjoyment of school but also their success. We want to be as ambitious as possible for all our young people and simply can't achieve this if they are not here.

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The figure at the top of this page is the amount of time a student spends in school before sitting their GCSE exams. If they miss 10% of their education this equates to 1,350 hours of learning and we really don't want students to fall at the final hurdle.

It is important to get this right from the start of the school year as studies show that around 60% of Year 7-11 pupils who missed just some school at the start of the year went on to miss at least 10% of sessions across the whole academic year.

The table below shows that students are likely to achieve on average half a grade higher if they have 98% attendance but two thirds of a grade lower than they should if their attendance is below 92%.

Attendance	Average GCSE Grade	Average Progress 8
Above 98 %	5.7	+0.47
95% to 98%	5.4	+0.25
92% to 95%	5.3	+0.14
Below 92%	3.8	-0.65

If we want to continue to build on our standards and ensure our students achieve to their full potential, giving them the best start in life beyond school, we need to have the students in front of us and we need your help with this.

To support attendance, we also continue to strengthen our work with students to support their mental health and are proud to say that we are now a Thrive school.



Thrive promotes students' positive mental health by helping teaching staff know how to be and what to do in response to their differing and sometimes distressing behaviour. Thrive is based on established neuroscience, attachment theory and child development. It gives staff the knowledge, skills, insights, and resources to develop trusted relationships that help our students to flourish. It allows us to support the emotional well-being of our students as we all have a shared responsibility to ensure that our students are ready to learn.

Positive relationships with dedicated staff are at the heart of Thrive. We use these relationships, together with creative activities, to give students positive experiences. Repetition of these activities supports students to; increase their self-esteem and confidence to learn, learn to recognise and regulate their feelings and learn to think before behaving in a certain way.

We use a screening tool and activity planning resource called Thrive-Online. This allows us to assess students and to develop individual action plans with specific strategies and activities to ensure that they are as emotionally and socially supported in school through one-to-one and small groupwork. Thrive profiles will be shared with staff members so they can use the strategies to support the young person in the best way possible in the classroom. Thrive profiles are developed by our Registered Thrive Practitioners and a parental drop-in session is also planned for the end of each term to support parents to discuss how we use Thrive in school.

We continue to enrich the curriculum and last week we launched our “Engage” programme, offering a wide variety of extra-curricular activities. Once again, I would encourage your child to sign up for at least one of these. Please see our current offer [here](#) which will be added to and update as the year progresses.

Having survived both the heat at the start and the biblical rain at the end of the Great North Run it reminded me of the fact that no matter how much you prepare there will always be something unexpected to deal with. That is true of life in general and schools are no different, however it also highlights the importance of a positive attitude and having the support of others. We have a great team of staff and governors, fantastic students, and supportive parents. This makes having ambitious goals, and overcoming the challenges to achieve them, our mission and is what makes us proud to be part of the George Stephenson Community.

Wishing you all the best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Douthwaite', with a light blue circular stamp or watermark behind it.

Mr. P. Douthwaite
Headteacher