

**Welcome back
mini newsletter
September 2023**

Welcome back

Welcome back and for many new families a huge welcome to Dame Catherine's. We've had a great first day. Here are a few photos.



Of course, many of the staff have seen you and the children at some point, whether through an activity day or during the art show week. On that note, we want to say a massive thank you to those who joined staff and trustees in volunteering to ensure this event could continue into its 30th year! Looking out over the village hall green during that week, watching the children play (and Chris getting more tired) and having time to socialise whilst chatting reminded me (Lorna) about how valuable coming together like that is. The teamwork between our trustees, staff, fundraising group and parent volunteers is very special.

Our superhero challenge

Please don't forget next Wednesday 13th September is our Superhero challenge on the Grange (from 2.30pm) and picnic in the garden after school for those who wish to join in. Younger siblings are welcome. The older children will be helping out at the activity. We will resend the original information from before the event was postponed (and the Just Giving link) but remember that all children from Squirrels and Rabbits are welcome to join on that afternoon.

Our day and pre-school / school routines

For the majority of children little will alter this term as they will be in the same groups, but it is always worth reminding everyone about our school day (and especially for the few new families joining us. Below is an outline of what we work to as a general timetable. However, as a small school, we have the opportunity to be flexible with our day ie. if something exciting is happening,

there is no set expectation that this has to stop, just so that break can start on time. Staff frequently discuss timings and shift things slightly in order to best support the learning and the well-being of the children.

8.55am – 9.00am Children arrive

Squirrels and Squabbits (older Squirrels) use the front entrance

Rabbits use the door in the corner of the fenced outdoors area (which leads into the inside wet area)

Wildcats use their cloakroom door

9.00am – 9.10am Registration

10.45am – 11.15am Morning break/ play

(3-7 year olds to have a more formal snack-time ahead of going outside)

12.00pm – 1.20pm school lunchtime period (eating time then outdoor play)

Children to get ready to go outside at 12.40pm. Groups begin their lunchtime according to time needed to eat. Notionally:

12.00pm: Squirrels 12.10pm: Rabbits 12.20pm: Wildcats

1.20pm – 4.00pm Afternoon session

This will include an afternoon play / break, organised flexibly according to the activity and needs of the children, which can differ day to day.

4.00pm Collection time

Children will, weather permitting, be in the front playground before 4.00pm ready for parents to collect. In the case of bad weather, children will be released from the front door / cloakroom door.

NB Our collection time is not flexible unless there is a specifically agreed need eg. a medical appointment. If we are outside for a play before 4pm parents are welcome to take their child a few minutes early (after checking with staff,) however, we cannot guarantee this. We have to prioritise the children and cannot be answering the door every few minutes, which is why we cannot offer flexible pick-up times.

There won't be any big changes, but there will be a slight change in how we welcome in our Rabbits children as we have created a new space for them to use as a cloakroom. Details for each group are below.

Squirrels (and Squabbits) 3-4 year olds

These children will continue to come in through our front door and hang their things up in the front cloakroom. There is a lunchbox trolley for them by the door. Parents are welcome to help children in initially if needed.

Unless it is one of their first sessions or there are specific issues which have been discussed with Fay, we would like parents to leave their child by 9.05am as we need to ensure that the door is

secure. Adults who have arranged to spend longer inside for any reason, will need to sign in as a visitor.

Rabbits group (5-7 year olds)

We are asking children to come in through the door inside the blue fenced area which leads into the wet area where they keep their indoor shoes.

Parents are welcome to take them to the door, and Elly or Maddie (or another member of staff if not) will stand outside for a while to enable parents to give them any messages and help the children inside if needed. However, over time, and especially for the older children in this group, we would like parents to encourage them to come down the path from the front playground themselves and say goodbye to parents at the end of the path. This will get them ready for when they join the Wildcats group.



Children will be asked to change their shoes straight away and put their things in the right places. Coats can now go in the new cloakroom area and for the first week or two an adult will help them to sort themselves out with this. This isn't a big space so parents are asked not to try to follow their child in to carry their things. Each child can use a hook of their own to hang up their coat and a small bag. The space won't accommodate large wide bags so please just send a small bag with essentials (like a mini rucksack.) Lunch boxes and water bottles will be kept separately so it is far better to carry the lunchbox rather than have a big bag just so that a lunch box fits inside.

The side gate will be locked at 9.05am so parents are asked not to open the gate after this time and leave time to say goodbye before it is locked. Whilst it should be so much better for the children coming through this door, we are doing this on the understanding that the gate remains secure once locked.

Wildcats

This group should say goodbye to parents in the playground and come down the path. The saying goodbye to parents isn't the issue, but sometimes they like to take a short cut, using the front door to see what is happening in the other groups or avoid the rain! We will be asking them not to do this as we are trying to keep the Squirrels / Squabbits area free of any additional children and adults so they have space to settle and play.

Our curriculum

We are really excited about the term ahead. Back in July we decided to have a common theme across the school so that we have chance for lots of collaboration. Staff have enjoyed being creative together in planning ideas this week. Our theme will focus around 'elements' and start the week beginning 17th September This is to allow us to gather together wider ideas and resources from children and parents too – so please let us know over the coming week. It is more ideas at

this stage. If your child has something specific they wish to bring in or some learning they wish to share with others, we can build this in and make sure that we make the most of this.

Obviously, resources and activities will differ according to age, but some areas of focus will be:

The elements: what a stroke of luck that Disney chose to base their latest film on our theme for the term – honestly we didn't know that when we chose it! We will use the story, books and film Elemental as a basis to explore the elements, especially including lots of art and design. Glass making will link particularly well (and we have a couple of artists we can explore from our art show.)

Outdoor learning focusing on the 4 elements: we are planning a whole range of forest school activities linked to the 4 elements. Our plan is to focus on each of the 4 elements for a few weeks and run weekly sessions with activities split into 2 age groups. We will attempt to change the day of the week after each element so that as many children can access some activities as possible. Ensuring that children have a balanced curriculum is a clear focus in our school. We will send out information to remind parents which days to make sure children have waterproofs in school. Some of the ones they have in school are getting a bit tight now, so we will get them back to you and maybe between parents there will be some hand me downs available. Please make sure that your child has a pair of wellies that they keep in school.

Science and STEM activities eg. flood defences, engineering projects, elements and the mystery of how everything came to exist, making charcoal,

Rivers: we will be linking up with the local community to learn about and promote clean rivers for people and wildlife. The Women's Institute have planned various activities and we hope to feed into these.

Mystery stories, crimes etc. This will be according to age, but for older ones we will be including Sherlock Holmes, true crimes, maybe planning a murder mystery or two!

East Asia (Korea and Japan): Avatar and the Airbenders, Manga and anime, gachapon (and making our own machine) historic periods such as Edo period, festivals. Noodle day, lots of food ideas (obviously)

Plenty of language learning and music ideas too of course (from Boogie Wonderland to BTS and K pop)

Each group will be creating their own curriculum overview with more detail for each subject and we will send these out over the next couple of weeks.

PE will continue to be on Wednesdays for all groups. For our 5-11 year olds, wider curriculum subjects won't necessarily be on specific days throughout the whole year, as rotating supports families who flexi school and also allows us to be more creative and adaptable. This is why we don't send an actual timetable out.

School models

We find that the start of the year is a good time to remind families of the differences in our school models, especially our part-time options. We recognise that these can be a lot to get your head around due to the legalities. We value the many ways of educating a child, but as a school we have to work within certain statutory regulations and evidence this. We try to work to the limits of our flexibility, rather than take the easy path. However, on occasions we will need parents to appreciate that we can't do whatever we like. Although it might seem simple to think that children can shift between two models and retain certain days, changing the model makes a difference to both parties. Whilst we treat children in the same way whether they are home-educated or on roll, as a school we have specific numbers to work within which is a delicate balance and the school model does have a bearing on how we are able to piece things together. We ask parents to be mindful of this in providing the appropriate notice should, any changes be required. Changing models is a re-application in some ways, so whilst we try, we can't always guarantee specific days where changes are requested.

Many of our families flexi-school and this requires the school to be responsible for their children in the same way as full-time children. We can therefore only agree cases where the parent is educating their child and is with them for the days when they are not with us. These days cannot be outsourced to other settings unless it is part of a provision where the parent remains with their child.

We welcome feedback on our school models and regularly review procedures as a board of trustees. The trustees create our policies, but these are within a framework of independent school standards and codes of practice from the DfE.

If you are thinking about any sort of change in the near or medium term, please let Jane know, so that we can have a chat with you and look at the pros and cons of different models together.

We know there will be lots more information over the coming week or two, but hopefully this will be helpful in the meantime.

Staff at Dame Catherine's