



July 2023

Dear Families and Carers,

Thank you, as always, for your continued support and patience during another challenging school year. It is greatly appreciated. Schools in the GST cannot do what we do without the support of our wonderful families.

Although for many the pandemic is over, for all our schools it still casts a very long shadow. Schools have been working on their Covid Recovery Plans to help support our children to catch up with important areas of learning. There are still many issues and post pandemic effects, especially around SEND. So many of our families were unable to access early intervention or packages of support during the pandemic that they needed. This has caused many issues for everyone. It continues to exercise our schools on how best to get support and advice to support children as quickly as possible.

Inevitably this has a budget impact. Schools budgets are determined in the autumn term and are based on the number of children a school has on its roll on an identified day. This sum is calculated and comes into schools the following April. There is some additional SEND money that can be accessed provided children have had the required assessments and reach a certain threshold. There is usually a waiting list for these assessments due to a backlog exacerbated by Covid. There are some mechanisms schools can access to release interim funding but it does require a lot of paperwork. It often feels from both the school and the families' point of view that there are a series of hoops everyone has to jump through and this takes time. And as we all know time is something that is not on our children's side. All the academic evidence states that early interventions are key. Of course everyone involved including the families are fighting for the resources each child needs to enable them to achieve their potential. But I thought I'd take a little time to explain how support and funding are linked and this can create a situation that can be stressful for everyone involved. I want to reassure you that our schools really are fighting for the needs of our children.

I know some of our families have been disappointed with the transition arrangements this year and last year. Newcastle LA has worked with all schools to identify dates for all schools in the city to carry out their transitions so that all transition takes place in one week. This has proved extremely useful in previous years. However, both this year and last year, Gosforth Academy have set different dates. I wrote to Gosforth Academy last year requesting that we work together for this year and use the LA agreed dates. Unfortunately, Gosforth Academy was unable to do so.

As the school year draws to a close we again look back on the achievements of all our schools. Our schools continue to provide a wonderful happy environment for all our children to thrive in, as well as providing an excellent standard of education. The fabric of our schools continues to be improved. Another new school, Regent Farm First, is planned to replace deteriorating buildings. Havannah First School have settled into their new school site. Other schools are refurbishing their sites as they expand. It cannot have escaped

anyone's notice that lives in Gosforth that new housing stock continues to be built. This brings constant pressure on existing school places and infrastructure. GST meet regularly with the LA to look at school places planning to ensure that there are sufficient places for children living in Gosforth. This can be a bit of a juggling act especially as the expansion of Gosforth Academy has been delayed due to issues with the builder. This has involved schools, especially our middle schools, having to be flexible as they support this process. We have so much to celebrate and shout about in our family of schools. The GST are so very grateful for the leadership of our schools during this year and for all the hard work that the head teachers, governors and the staff have done, often going above and beyond to support our children and families.

Of course with increasing numbers of houses come increased cars on our roads and this has caused many issues for our schools and families. We continue to work together and with the LA to trial new initiatives but I know the quality of air along roads with heavy traffic is of huge concern for all our families.

Well being of our children and staff remains central to all we do. Some of our schools have been working with Opal, on an outdoor play and learning programme which looks just the ticket to enable our children to develop their play and it is hoped it will give schools a way of developing well being in an action packed way. Children who are confident, happy and safe can face the challenges of school with greater resilience. They will also have fun! What could be better than that?

I would like to thank all our teachers, support staff, governors and head teachers for all their hard work over the year. Their continued dedication to their work is greatly appreciated. Sometimes we forget the simple things like saying thank you for a job well done. Of course they are just doing their job, but they do so much more than that. Their dedication is a strength of our schools and we should celebrate it, in these uncertain times. Good staff are hard to come by and I would like to thank them on behalf of the GST.

I hope that you will be able to enjoy some sort of break with family and friends and return refreshed for the new school year in September. There is something very special about this family of schools and it is something we should nurture and celebrate.

I look forward to working with you all next year and thank you for continued support.

Karen Elliott
Chair of the GST