



September 2023

Dear Parent/Carer

It is lovely to see children and young people returning to school this week ready for another busy year.

I want to start by reassuring parents that the school building does not contain RAAC concrete and is not one of the schools identified as being structurally unsafe. Our Site Team work tirelessly to ensure Appleton remains in good condition and is a safe environment for your children. Exceed Academies Trust also audit our site safety throughout the year and during the last academic year conducted tests across all schools within the trust for RAAC concrete. It is hard to believe that some schools will have yet another school year of disruption and I am thankful that Appleton is not one of them.

There are several updates within this letter and further information will also follow with important dates and events for both primary and secondary.

Attendance

Improving attendance is continuing to be a significant priority for us as there are still too many children with poor and intermittent school attendance. Regular school attendance is essential for your children if they are to maintain and develop their friendship groups, and to leave school with good qualifications.

It is unfortunately the case that if your child is not in school, they struggle to keep up with friendships when they return, which often leads to social problems. It is a common factor in every case where parents raise concerns about their child and their social times.

The curriculum and academic expectations for children have increased over the years and there is a lot to learn. If your child is regularly absent, it has a negative impact on every part of their academic development, from learning to read, improving handwriting, learning their times tables through to the learning required to pass GCSEs. If your child is not in school, they will miss important milestones. When we analyse how well children have done at every statutory assessment, from Early Years to phonics to Key Stage 2 SATs and GCSEs, we find that the children who attend school at least 95% of the time do well. When attendance slips below 92%, the number of children who reach their targets falls significantly to the point that very few of these pupils do so. We need to work together to improve attendance and give your children the very best chance in the future.

Mrs France has now left Appleton and Ms Earl will take on responsibility for monitoring and improving attendance and will soon begin to send information to parents, and work with families to this end.

Please remember that children and young people should not be attending doctors, dentists or optician's appointments during school time wherever possible. If it is unavoidable, pupils should only be out of school for the short period of time necessary for the appointment. We need to know in advance of the appointment.



Please note that there is absolutely no need for young people to be absent if they are on their period, as we have extensive support and resources available in school to help them manage this when it does occur.

If your child is going to be absent for unavoidable reasons, please follow the absence reporting procedures we have in place, details of which are available on the school website.

Holidays during term time will be unauthorised, and we will refer these to Bradford Council who will seek to prosecute and have fixed penalty notices issued to parents in those cases. Whilst there are some very rare occasions when we do accept a circumstance is exceptional, this is extremely unusual. We review all requests and let you know whether we accept the reason as being exceptional. Airport anxiety, not having had a holiday for a while, or going to see family abroad are not acceptable circumstances. We do not accept appeals and the decision to issue fixed penalties is taken by the Council, therefore, we would politely ask that you do not waste anyone's time with complaints about decisions not to authorise holidays in term time. Every year, we have at least one Year 11 pupil who misses exams or the lead up to GCSEs as they are on holiday. Your child cannot take their exam on any day other than that which has been scheduled, which means that the missed exam will lead to your child failing the course and being unable to pass the exam that year.

Staffing Update

There have been a number of teaching staff changes as we start the year. As you will be aware, teaching has become increasingly challenging, and teachers are making decisions for their wellbeing. At the end of last year, we saw teachers leave the profession, move areas for personal reasons and some being promoted to positions in other schools or move schools for different challenges.

In primary we said goodbye to Mrs Hughes who has moved areas and also Mrs Thornton who has an exciting job as a teacher of the deaf at another school. Mrs Britton retired after many, many years as a teaching assistant and she will be missed by all of us who worked with her.

In secondary, Mr Ayres left in June for a promotion in another school. Not only was Mr Ayres a fantastic Maths and Music teacher but he has played a major part in the improvements achieved at Appleton Academy. Mr Ayres is enjoying his new role and his new school will improve with his support.

Many of the teachers who are moving on from Appleton started as new teachers with us. This includes Mr Paton, who has been a fantastic history teacher and is now teaching in Abu Dhabi, Mrs France who we mentioned earlier in this letter and has moved to Wales with her family and Miss Bottomley who has decided to leave teaching. We very much hope to welcome Mr Greening back to Appleton at some point but for the moment he is enjoying travelling the World. Mrs Von Bredow has returned to London and Mr Slade has returned to be with his family in Somerset.

I also want to mention Mr Kitson, who has been an associate with both Wyke Manor and Appleton for a long time. Mr Kitson has decided to retire so he can spend more time with his grandchildren and he is also hoping to now spend his days looking after a new dog. Mr Kitson has worked at Appleton since the school opened but he has been involved for so much longer, as his children have all also attended the school. I'm sure Mr Kitson will enjoy a long and happy retirement.



Recruitment is incredibly challenging in all posts, from teaching to pastoral to admin and site posts. It is taking a lot of time for leaders across school to recruit the right people, but in the case of teachers, we have recruited some fantastic members of staff. However, we need to recruit further to continue the improvements we have made in the last number of years. Our recruitment processes do mean that we are able to have Appleton teachers teaching all lessons without gaps in the timetable. This may sound like a basic and obvious thing, but significant recruitment issues are affecting all schools and many are already relying on supply staff to start the new school year.

Mrs Garlick will introduce new staff in more detail later in the week but I will mention a few in this letter.

- Mr Wraith is the new Deputy Head responsible for Curriculum, Teaching and Learning. Mr Wraith is very experienced and is also a fantastic science teacher.
- Recruitment to the Performing Arts faculty means this is now a very strong department led by Mrs Jowett alongside Mr Harley, who started in June, and also Ms Earl who leads on attendance but is an enthusiastic music teacher who will also work in primary as well as reviving our singing assemblies.
- We are delighted to have appointed Mr Pianigiani who is Italian but will teach Spanish. Mr Pianigiani is a highly respected author of language teaching materials and trains other teachers in an engaging approach to learning language teaching. Excitingly he will also teach Spanish in primary.

In news on support staffing, we have also strengthened the admin and site teams and will provide further information shortly.

Communication

We very much value the partnership between parents and school in the difficult role of developing children and young people as they grow from joining us at a very young age through to leaving us as young adults. Our children are being brought up in a challenging world and need our support more than ever.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have concerns about your children's wellbeing or education. The first point of contact is the school office, and we would encourage you to get in touch via an email to info@appletonacademy.co.uk in the first instance. This allows us to prioritise contact and assign it to the correct member of staff for them to get back to you quickly.

Most concerns can be addressed by your child's class or form teacher too when they relate to your child's education or pastoral needs in school. Although you will want to speak to someone straight away, it is likely that members of staff you need to speak to will also be teaching, so please be patient.

If you are unhappy about something that has happened with your child, please calmly ask or inform us of what has taken place and we will investigate and get back to you. We can address concerns positively with this approach. Please remember what you were like at school; quite often a child will tell you of something that has happened, but this might not always be as it first seems and may require further investigation or discussion. If you have a concern, we will investigate and make every effort to resolve issues, but this may take some time.



Unfortunately, in recent times, we have had to make the very difficult and regrettable decision to ban a small number of parents from site due to the inappropriate nature of their communication or interaction with staff. We would always seek to avoid this and want to work with parents in a cooperative and transparent way.

You can contact the Academy in the following ways:

The quickest, and preferable way is to contact us by email. This will be addressed by Mrs Francis, my PA, who will refer your query to the relevant staff member and keep track of how this has been resolved: info@appletonacademy.co.uk.

Alternatively, you can call the office on 01274 600550 but please be aware that the lines are always extremely busy. However, staff will attempt to answer calls as quickly as possible.

If you have tried to resolve concerns in this way but remain dissatisfied, please follow the complaints procedure, which is available on the school website.

Mobile Phones

As you all know, we do have a policy of not allowing pupils to use their mobile phone at any time within the school building. Unfortunately, this became a growing problem during the last academic year. Increasingly schools are moving to systems that involve pupils handing in their phone at the start of the day before collecting them as they leave. We would seek to avoid this at all costs, but we need to work together to prevent having to implement something similar at Appleton.

The expectation is that young people leave their phone in their pocket or bag all day, keeping it on silent or powered off. If they do not do so, their phone will be confiscated and can only be collected at the end of the day by a parent. We will be rigorously enforcing this expectation during this academic year and we are asking you to support this. All too often parents call their child or accept a call from their child during the school day. Please do not challenge staff who follow our rules, and do not contact your child on their phone during school hours. It is totally unnecessary as you can use the contact details above if you need to get a message to your child. If you take a call from your child, or call them during school hours, then this adds to the problem and may mean that children face additional sanctions due to taking these calls. Thank you in advance for your support with this.

Guest Visitors and Speakers

We do have an exciting school year planned, with Chris Mould engaging with the Academy as our artist in residence, and Nik Perring as our author in residence. Both are very successful in their field and have a lot of new and exciting work ahead of them, but they really enjoy working with our children. Chris is also a former pupil of Wyke Manor school, who has gone to acclaimed international success as an illustrator. We look forward to seeing how our partnership with them both develops throughout the year. We will also be introducing a 'Scholars Programme' for some of our pupils, which will also involve working with their families too.



Local Advisory Board

Sally Wike has been the Chair of Governors at Appleton Academy since we joined Exceed Academies Trust and has worked tirelessly and enthusiastically to support our work during her term of office. Sally has now taken the decision to step down as Chair of Governors and pass on the reigns to a new Chair. We would like to sincerely thank Sally for all of her support and wish her well for the future. Casandra Doyle has been nominated by the Exceed Trustees as the new Chair of Governors and takes up office at the start of the academic year.

The world can be a difficult place for all of us at the moment, and I know that many of you will be facing challenges, especially due to the increasing cost of living. We are here to support where we can, so please do not hesitate to contact us if you need help. If we can't help directly, we may be able to refer you to other agencies who can through our excellent networks with local and national charities and support organisations.

We are a community, and as a community we will work together for the wellbeing of our children.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Helen Jones."

Helen Jones
Executive Headteacher