WEST HILL SCHOOL

Aiming High since 1927

Headteacher: **Ms C Cronin (MA)**

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Tuesday 20th October 2026

Dear families,

Many thanks for a great first half-term at West Hill; for our new families, at the end of each half-term and term I send an overview letter including key dates for the half-term ahead to try and help communication between families and school as we know families have busy lives. This half-term has seen wonderful opportunities for our boys from visiting the Hallé Orchestra, MP Jonathan Reynolds visiting school with the 'Be Internet Citizens' workshop to Amazon Fulfilment Centre careers trips. In-school opportunities from European Day of Languages, partaking in our Open Evening in the student team, the Scholastic Book Fair, the form group attendance rewards, the 110 families who joined us for Year 11 GCSE Success Evening to the many student-led opportunities in school, notably the money raised for World Mental Health Day with Back and Forth charity for men's mental health (we are still counting the monetary payments to reach the total but it's surpassed our target). All of this in addition to our range of co-curricular clubs at lunch and after school. Next half-term sees more opportunities for student-led fundraising with our Office for Community and Charity leading student assemblies, our annual Houses of Parliament London trip for selected boys and the highly anticipated Christmas Carol performances in December to showcase their musical talents.

Key Dates Ahead
Monday 26th October-Friday 30th October: Half-term break.
Monday 2nd November: students return to school, normal timetable day **and** Year 11 in-class assessment week.
Wednesday 11th November: Remembrance Day and 11am silence. *Any students with a uniformed organisation may wear these uniforms for the day such as Cadets, Scouts and St John's to reflect with Ms Cronin in the Quad at 11am.*
Friday 20th November: Odd Socks Day (Run by the Office for Anti-Bullying).
Wednesday 25th November: Off timetable day (students in school and uniform as normal).
Monday 30th November and Tuesday 1st December: Year 11 Design and Technology NEA practice days.
Thursday 3rd December: Year 11 progress evening, 3:30pm-6:30pm online only.
Monday 7th December: KS3 (Year 7, 8 and 9) in-class CORE assessment week.
Tuesday 8th and Wednesday 9th December: Students' Christmas Carol performance, St Paul's Church, 7:30pm.
Friday 11th December: Non-uniform for Foodbank donations (Run by the Office for Community and Charity).
Wednesday 16th December: Christmas lunch available during our lunch service.
Thursday 17th December: Celebration Evening, by invitation only.
Friday 18th December: 12:30pm school closure for end of term.
Spring term: Early Dates
Monday 4th January 2027: Inset day for school staff, no students on site.
Tuesday 5th January 2027: all students return for a normal school day **and** Year 10 in-class assessment week.
W/C 4th January 2027: Year 7 progress report released for Thursday 14th January Year 7 progress evening, 3:30pm-6:30pm online only.

Attendance
Amongst flu and cold season, our whole-school attendance currently stands at 94% with our aim of 96% remaining unchanged for the end of the year. Statistically, students in school for 96-100% of the time achieve as they should in assessments, whilst attendance that falls below this can reduce final grades from half to whole grades based on the rate of absence, alongside reduced opportunities for pastoral and character-based wider support. We know that sometimes things happen that can make getting into school difficult, but our role is to support and help our families as best we can, whilst also increasing awareness of the occasional days off which can form a pattern over time. If you are noticing a pattern or change in your son, then please contact your son's Form Tutor and Head of Year in the first instance so that we can work together to identify potential barriers and work alongside families, and to reduce barriers, as best we can.

Mental Health in our Young Men

As a school, over recent years we have been partaking in the BeeWell survey from across Greater Manchester that creates data around our students' perceptions and experiences around mental health. Over the past two years, our data indicates that our boys feel well supported as we sit above the comparative data of other schools. This year, Years 7, 9 and 10 will be taking part in the BeeWell survey, which will help us better understand their wellbeing and inform how we continue to support them moving forward.

It is an opportune time to remind families that we have a full-time school counsellor in school who leads student 1-2-1 sessions for a range of reasons, with referrals led by our Heads of Year. In addition, we have an additional support from Holly Hines from the Mental Health Support Team (MHST) now in school one day a week for additional 1-2-1 support and small group work with our boys, helping them access support and normalise their experience whilst equipping boys with strategies to empower their decision-making and self-help in understanding themselves. If you feel your son is in need, who currently is not already in receipt, please contact your son's Head of Year to request a referral into this service alongside details to aid this process.

To end, our student leaders in the Office for Mental Health and Wellbeing led thought-provoking assemblies to all boys with the help of Mrs Taylor and Mrs McDougall, requiring our boys to take a step back, reflect and adopt the 'ask twice' principle of checking in with friends.

Mobile Phones

From previous writing, and national press coverage, you will be aware that from April 2026, the expectation from the Department for Education was that all schools implemented a clear policy on mobile phone-free schools across the UK. Our policy remains in place as it works for our school. From 8:40am all mobile phones are switched off (not on silent, but actively turned off) until 2:55pm each day. If students know of a family emergency or issue and approach a member of staff asking to quickly check an issue with home, we permit this, but only when actively asking a member of staff. This term, most of the requests of this nature from students are asking to liaise with parents/carers regarding 'topping up my account'. We know working life is busy, but we would ask for routine checks at home and organising this outside of the school hours as it helps to reduce tensions on duty staff when keeping an eye across the whole school. A reminder that whereby a student is actively on their mobile phone without permission, it is confiscated and kept securely in Student Reception. Whereby a student has multiple occurrences of confiscation, the phone needs a parent/carer to collect the phone as an escalated requirement. Why turned off and not on silent? As adults, having our smart watch buzz or feeling our phone buzz in our pocket is a distraction, myself included, as I start to wonder who is contacting me, what's needed, as we all do. Therefore, when a student has their pocket or watch buzzing throughout lessons it is a distraction in their thinking. I do not want to become a smart phone-free school or a school with bought pouches, as many have become, but we want boys to be disciplined in actively choosing to switch their phone off and learn the healthy balance of living without the mobile device. It allows for less distraction, better self-discipline, greater focus on mental health and awareness of over exposure on young minds and less opportunities for escalation of social media-related incidences too. We appreciate the backing from families supporting us with this.

Social Media: Language Prevention

In addition to the comment above on mobile phone use, we have been made aware through families and boys of some content currently available on social media following the Cornell University incident of young men using the word *'rape'* in flippant or inappropriate conversations. Please be vigilant on this. In school, as you would imagine, we have zero tolerance to the repetition of such derogatory language so will sanction it in accordance with our Behaviour Policy, alongside our restorative derogatory language intervention programme and partnership work with the Schools Police Liaison Team. I am making you aware as parents/carers of the content at present, for your vigilance and support in case any such phrasing is mentioned by your son. If you do have any wider concerns, please contact our safeguarding team safeguarding@westhillschool.co.uk

Start of GCSEs, Special Message to our Year 10 Families

Mr Evans, Head of Year 10, has asked for families to be informed that Year 10 have commenced their GCSE journey with much gusto and positivity. Boys are demonstrating our 3Rs in all lessons and working hard to push towards success in summer 2028. Attendance has been a massive strength across the year group with 85 boys having 100% so far. Across the year group, attendance is now at 94.2% which is improved and continuing to rise. As key GCSE content

is covered, it is vital boys are in lessons with our skilled staff who can help them. Year 10 are also the **only year group in school** to have two forms win the 100% weekly attendance prize, earning the opportunity to play table tennis and basketball during form along with some chocolatey treats; a big well done to Mr Garraway's 10T and Ms Mason's 10S for this! Achievements have continued with 22,500 achievement points logged across the year group. Mr Wilson's 10H continue to look favourites (as I write this) to be crowned achievement point champions for this half-term but 10W, and 10T are not far behind which will make for a competitive final week in school. Year 10 boys have also taken a shine to our new table tennis area, where many can be found after school improving their skills and competing well with each other even with their own equipment. I hope all the boys have an enjoyable rest over half-term (while still making sure they complete all home learning and necessary revision) and come back looking to continue all these early successes and build on them in the second half of term.

Final Reminders

This time of year, with the darker mornings and afternoons, it is vital that students think around road and bike safety. For boys travelling to school by bike, another reminder about helmets having to be worn alongside recommendation to parents and boys to ensure bike lights are on and visible on their cycle to school. Please ensure boys come with coats/waterproofs or umbrellas to take responsibility over their health and wellbeing in the colder months.

In the rare event of school closure due to extreme weather or circumstance, it is my annual signpost to the school procedure if this were to occur, which is found on our website under 'Parents, 'Extreme Weather Closure'. I do not anticipate this to occur, but for clarity on how remote learning would operate to minimise missed learning, we ask families to read the process as a precautionary measure.

Communication and setting of home learning alongside information around your son's performance in school is all housed in our West Hill app, free for families (parents and boys) to use. For those already signed up, we encourage checks once a week to review your child's home learning, attendance and overall performance data. A vast majority of families are signed up to allow for ease of sending key messages in such a large staff body, for any families yet to set this up, please email admin@westhillschool.co.uk FAO Miss Mayall, who can ensure support in getting you connected to the wider goings on of our school community.

Thank you to our Year 7 students and families who are completing their first voice surveys. For all other families, we have moved our family and student voice to the end of the academic year as a clear benchmark to perspectives and voice from the previous year. Every year, Year 7 families have the opportunity to complete a start of year and end of year voice too.

Finally, overleaf is additional clarity on home learning at West Hill, which we have updated in dialogue with boys and staff. Home learning, and its purpose, is all housed within the updated section of our website with a key summary overleaf to ensure scholarly, life-long habits continue for your son's overall success.

I hope it is a kind and restful half-term for our boys, families and staff.

Kind regards,

Ms C. Cronin
Headteacher

Home Learning at West Hill School

Link to our school vision: Everyone will experience a rich curriculum that expands beyond the classroom.

Purpose of Home Learning

The main purpose of home learning is to consolidate and extend what has been learned in class. Best practice includes structured overlearning, revision, retrieval and deliberate practice. Home learning can be useful to help absent students keep up with foundational knowledge they have missed from taught lessons.

Expectation

All home learning must closely align to the taught curriculum, cross-referenced with medium term plans that are centralised at departmental level for consistency across classes. Home learning is carefully designed and adapted to provide challenge but also accessibility for all students in accordance with our West Hill 3As Teacher Toolkit.*
Home learning should not depend on a student's resources at home, and departments should ensure there is free access to resources in school, for example, use of coloured pencils or computers in the library or laptop use.

At KS3, if a student has a subject at least twice per week, then a minimum of thirty minutes of home learning must be set per week. If a student has a subject once per week, then a minimum of thirty minutes of home learning must be set once per fortnight. There is no expectation to set home learning for KS3 IDP.

At KS4, a minimum of one hour must be set per subject, per week. There is no expectation to set home learning for IDP and Games and Well-being.

Students must be given time in lesson to record home learning tasks in their planners, and class teachers must also set via the West Hill app so parents/carers, as well as students, are aware of tasks set.

Where departments use e-learning platforms for home learning, log-in and functional support must be available to students and families. Support information is available on the West Hill School website.

*If Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) state or specify a need and/or an adaption (for example coloured paper) then home learning must be adapted accordingly.

Responsibility

Staff must check that home learning has been completed within one week after submission. 'Checked' means confirming the tasks are completed and the required effort has been made. If students do not submit home learning, then the class teacher must, in the first instance, have a conversation with the student about possible barriers, issue a behaviour point, and give a reasonable extension. If a student repeatedly fails* to submit home learning in a subject, the class teacher must contact home, inform the relevant Head of Year and the Curriculum Leader should arrange supportive interventions which may include meeting with student and parent/carers.

For patterns of failure to submit home learning across school then the Head of Year must arrange compulsory home learning club. For students with SEN, class teachers may refer to the LSU for after-school or lunch-time support.

Staff must actively recognise exemplary effort and quality of home learning and issue rewards in line with school policy. Examples include; 3R, 3R+, Student Shout Out, Department celebration, Headteacher recognition or spotlight in class.

**The definition of 'repeatedly fails' is on at least three occasions in quick succession.*