



# Head's Up!

Dear Parents and Carers,

We have been working hard this term on a whole range of things, including better communication. With that in mind, I thought I would reinstate the newsletter on a fortnightly basis, to let you know what your children have been doing and what we, as a school community have been focusing on. So, if you are ready, I shall begin.

## Stay Safe, Feel Well

As you know, we have prioritised mental health and well-being over the last two years. This is in response to the rising number of young people we see struggling with the demands of modern life; unable to filter social media, questioning their identity or friendships and the pressures of exams and what the future might hold. Our main work has been in the normal working day. In assemblies we have covered the theme of 'Diversity' and considering the language we choose when talking with each other, Ace Manthey has led assemblies about his battle with Cancer to show our community why the whole school Race for Life is so important. This event has been quite remarkable, a wonderful display of friendship and community, with a good sum of money raised so far. We will keep the donation page open until the end of February, so if you can donate and support our children raise this crucial money, please do.

We have also raised awareness about safer use of the internet, followed up in computing lessons, as part of the national week. In addition, our inclusion area of the school has been developed to allow for key zones to support children that struggle or who have experienced grief or trauma. Our therapy dogs, blue rooms, art therapy room, learning zone and nurture zone are well used. These spaces have expert adults in that support our young people, sometimes for a short session or over a longer sustained period to help children better understand their feelings and behaviours. This is having a very good impact on attendance and helping children get back into learning. This work is supported by our student managers, counsellor, health nurse and the pastoral team, including student services and form tutors. If your child has accessed any of these services and found them useful, please let us know; we want to get better, we want to ensure every child knows they are safe and valued as part of our community.

## Learning

In the classroom we have spent the last year working on how our children recall and retain knowledge, and considering how teachers plan, sequence and interleave this knowledge. As a school with a research and innovation hub, we have been developing teacher pedagogy using research; what works in the best schools and why. This has led to a real culture of development amongst our teacher team, and we can see the impact in the classroom. Learning shouldn't be easy, and yet our children need to understand why they are learning and how it connects. If we share this with them they can contextualise the content and make connections which secure the knowledge in long term memory.

The Senior Leadership Team and I have spent two weeks monitoring the impact of this in Year 8 and Year 10 lessons. As part of this scrutiny (we call it 'Triangulation Week'), governors have visited, we have interviewed students about their learning with their exercise books and had our findings validated by external visitors. I will send a full report of the findings in the next newsletter. What is clear is that the quality of education is strong, underpinned by high expectations by teachers and students. This work has given us a clear focus for next term where we will drive 'Ready, Respectful and Safe', an approach to secure common language for expectations for all at John Mason School. Mr. Davies, Assistant Headteacher for Student Ethos will let you know how we get on.

Obviously at this time of year, our examination classes in Year 10 (English Literature), Year 11 (GCSEs) and Year 13 (A Levels) are preparing for the final push. Revision classes, careers interviews, Easter revision masterclasses are all planned and being delivered to help boost students' confidence and knowledge. They have excellent habits for learning. At this stage it is about keeping routines – for homework, eating and bedtime and ensuring they still do things that help them relax and have fun. They are not alone; we've got them.

## And in other news...

Year 7 have been working on the most beautiful Charter Day projects and were very proud to invite the Mayor of Abingdon to see their finished articles this week in a special assembly. The creativity, effort and information that went into their artefacts was incredible. Well done to all.



Well done also to Hudson Baker, who won first place in the St. Johns College competition this week, with his submission about Trade in Rome. This was a terrific achievement for Hudson – we are extremely proud of him.

Our sports teams have been busy with basketball, netball, cross country, football and rugby matches. I am always so proud of their sportsmanship; win or lose, the children are always a credit to us, often remarked on by our opposing teams.

John Mason has been selected to sing at 'Voice in a Million' in March, with a solo and group spot on stage. This is a tremendous achievement for our young singers, out of hundreds of entries. I can't wait to hear the final recording at Wembley Arena and see our brilliant children soak up the event and their surroundings.

Our Year 12 students have been taking part in a university experience called, 'Being Human' where they have taken part in lectures and had a taste of university life. The sixth form debates are also going from strength to strength and draw quite a crowd on a Friday DEAR time.

## And finally....

Each term we have staffing changes, for a variety of reasons. In January we welcomed Ms. Robertson in English, a very experienced teacher and school leader, who joins our formidable team. We said goodbye to Mr. Lammin, student manager and Ms. Amos in English, and thank them both for their commitment to the well-being and education of our students. Harry Strachan has joined us as our new student manager and Mr. Hamilton is temporarily taking Ms. Amos' classes until our permanent English teacher starts in July.

You will also have read about my changing role. From Easter I take up my post as Executive Headteacher at Abingdon Learning Trust. This means that I will strategically lead John Mason and Fitzharrys Schools, which will be fronted by Mr. Adrian Rees at JMS and Mr. Will Speke at Fitzharrys, as Heads of School. This change allows me to stay in school, but also to develop the teams in both schools, so that our children succeed. Exciting times.

That's all from me. I hope you have a good half term.

Sarah Brinkley

---

