

Friday 11th September 2026

Parent Bulletin

Dear families,

As we begin a new academic year, we do so with our eyes firmly fixed on a longer-term vision for John Mason School. Our ambition is to become an exceptional school in every sense of the word: a school of choice for families, a school where talented staff want to work and develop their careers, and a school that others look to for inspiration and collaboration. Most importantly, we want to be known for developing exceptional young people; young people who achieve highly, demonstrate strong character, and make a positive contribution to the communities they serve.

We recognise that achieving such a vision takes time. Exceptional schools are not built in a day, a term, or even a year. They are built through thousands of small actions, habits and interactions that, over time, become the foundations of something remarkable. Encouragingly, during my visits around the school this week, I have already seen many signs of the exceptional school we are striving to become.

In lessons, I have been struck by the focus and purpose shown by our students. They are responding quickly to teachers' instructions, without hesitation or delay, demonstrating trust in their teachers and allowing themselves to be guided towards ever greater learning. The rewards are already visible. Across the school, students have begun new topics in crisp exercise books and, within only a few lessons, their learning is evident on the pages they have produced. There is a real sense of momentum and purpose in classrooms.

Around the school site, our morning roll call has become an incredible sight. More than 800 students gather together each morning and, often before the bell has even rung, the entire school falls silent. Students are now so well practised in this routine that they require very little instruction. It gives us a valuable moment to come together as a community before everyone moves off once more, to tutor time, lessons and the busy day ahead.

Students have also started the year looking incredibly smart and well prepared. They have arrived fully equipped, wearing their uniforms with pride, and have quickly settled into the routines of using their planners and timetables. Throughout the week, assemblies have focused on one of the most important tools students bring to school each day: their brains.

With new teachers, new classmates and new experiences, we recognised that many students may experience moments of uncertainty, stress or anxiety as they settle into the year ahead. Drawing upon ideas from *The Invisible Lion* by mental health expert Benjamin Fry, we explored how the brain has developed a series of responses over millions of years to help us navigate challenge and uncertainty. We learned that when faced with difficulty, our first instinct is often to seek connection. If we do not feel connected, we may become increasingly vigilant before eventually reaching the well-known fight, flight or freeze responses.

This understanding reinforces something that sits at the heart of our vision for John Mason School. If young people are to thrive academically, socially and emotionally, they must first feel connected: connected to their peers, connected to their teachers and connected to the wider school community. Over the coming weeks, we will continue to prioritise these relationships because we know they provide the secure foundation on which confidence, wellbeing and academic success are built. I am delighted to see so many students already making a tremendous effort to build those connections.

We finished the week by coming together once again as a whole school community for the launch of our 2026-27 House Competition. With all houses starting the year on a level playing field, it is impossible to predict who will be victorious next July. What we do know however, is that the true value of the House system lies not simply in winning, but in participating. Through competitions, challenges, fundraising, leadership opportunities and shared experiences, students develop friendships, resilience, teamwork and a sense of belonging. These are precisely the qualities that help build strong character and a strong community.

As we look ahead to the year before us, I am excited by what I have already seen. The habits, routines and relationships being established now are the building blocks of our long-term vision. If this first full week is anything to go by, our students have made an excellent start.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Al West". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly informal style.

Alastair West
Headteacher

ALT Trust Vacancy

We would like to make parents and carers aware of this job vacancy at ALT Trust for a Chief Financial Officer (part time). The closing date is 5:00pm, Wed 23rd September. Full details in this link:

[Chief Financial Officer \(Part Time\) at Abingdon Learning Trust, Oxford, Oxfordshire | MyNewTerm](#)



LUNCHTIME SKETCHBOOKING CLUB

Grab your sketchbook and your lunch — Sketchbook Club is your creative break in the middle of the day. Each session introduces a new idea or technique to try, with plenty of freedom to make it your own. Whether you love art or are just giving it a go, this is a space to relax, experiment, and let your creative voice grow. All sketchbooks and materials will be provided

**FREE TRIAL SESSION ON
THURSDAY, 17TH SEPTEMBER**

WILL TAKE PLACE IN G08

**THURSDAYS
1.15 PM – 2:10 PM**

**STARTING :
1ST OCTOBER**

**4 WEEKS
£28**



Email: arielsartcollective@gmail.com

Students can sign up for the **free** taster session **next week**.

Using an external arts provider, the club is about exploring creative practise, colour, pattern and medias, rather than a formal drawing class so is open to anyone with an interest in art, crafts and making things.

Students taking part would qualify for an early lunch pass and the session is 1 hr, so would continue through DEAR time.

Please sign up if interested on the email: arielsartcollective@gmail.com

Upcoming Important Dates:	
Thursday 24 th September	School closes at 1.10pm - Open Evening Preparation
Thursday 24 th September	Open Evening 5.00-8.00 pm
Friday 25 th September	Inset Day – Staff Training
Monday 26 th - Friday 30 th October	Half term

For a complete list of upcoming events please view the school calendar on our website here:
[Calendar - John Mason School](#)

Term dates for the academic year are on our website here:
[Term Dates - John Mason School](#)

Facebook page link here: [Facebook page](#)



John Mason School
 OPPORTUNITY | RESPECT | DETERMINATION




OPEN EVENING

Thursday 24th September 2026

5.00pm - 8.00pm (No booking required)

With an address from the Headteacher at 5.15pm, 6.15pm & 7.15pm

Open Mornings Wednesday 7th October - Tuesday 13th October from 9.15am

To book an appointment for Open Mornings email: events@johnmason.school



Committed to improving the life chances of every learner we serve