



Dates for the diary

11 th February	Year 1 led church service 2pm start – Year 1 parents welcome to attend
14 th February	INSET day
17 th February	Half term break
17 th March	Year 6 start bikeability
1 st April	Year 5 led church service 2pm – Year 5 parents welcome to attend
4 th April	Last day of term
7 th April	Easter holidays begin
22 nd April	First day of term (Tuesday)

Friday 24th January 2025

My Office 365 seems to have become self-aware, taken a dislike to me and decided to make my Friday afternoon a frustrating one. After spending an afternoon navigating the multiverse of alternative versions of the same newsletter at slightly different points in time and space, I have just clicked print and called it a day. Please accept my apology for any typos or omissions.

I hope your January is going well and that you are managing to keep your resolutions for 2025. This newsletter (hopefully) starts with an old person style rant, but then expands to encompass a range of school news guaranteed to open your minds, if not lead to a wider awakening and fundamental understanding of your place in this vast and varied ecosystem that we call Tunbridge Wells.

Giving children choices

Recently I have been considering the topic of children and choice. When I was growing up, choice did not really exist. For breakfast my brother and I had Weetabix with skimmed milk (shredded wheat as a treat) and at school we were handed a plate of food each day (which would not have looked out of place in the 1950s) and not allowed to get off our seat until we had consumed every last over-boiled carrot, and scraped every last scrap of tapioca pudding (topped with a dollop of jam) from our bowls. The “fussy eaters” were not shown mercy – the dinner lady just showed you the “holding your nose trick” to get the stuff down. We were force-fed warm milk every morning, slurped in silence. We had 3 channels (initially in black and white) from our rented TV set which stood on legs and had it’s own doors– you can only imagine my excitement (and subsequent disappointment) at the explosion of TV choice when Channel 4 launched. Our telephone sat in the hallway on it’s own little table and only made and received calls; phone numbers had only 4 digits (lucky considering the length of time it took to dial them in and wait for the dial to revolve back to the start). Choice did not really play a part in our day to day lives.

I am not writing to complain about hard done by I was. I had a happy childhood, and I firmly believe that life was better for children back then in many, many ways. Additionally, you cannot miss choices that you have never been offered.



However, this lack of choice is in sharp contrast to today, where there is an expectation of choice at every level; some of our children expect to choose from a selection of breakfast choices each morning and have the lunch choice of all-inclusive buffet. I am sure I am not the only parent to try lecturing their children with the phrase “in my day...”, after my children expect a choice of hot and cold breakfast options, or my 17-year-old furiously asks: “who’s had the last avocado?”.

I firmly believe that as choice increases, quality declines. In the same way that you cannot equate a bag full of plastic cutlery with a proper knife and fork, you cannot equate the value of proper children’s TV shows from the BBC with the acres of dross they find on online video channels. Children should be told what they are getting for supper and not asked (shame on me for giving that expectation). We parents know what’s best for a child; unfortunately, children often only know what they want.

Another consideration is cognitive load – or the overload point at which we have reached our capacity to perform any meaningful thinking. We need to think carefully about how to reduce that load, as every choice we make during the day adds to this load – for this reason I get all of my clothes ready for the following day the previous evening to avoid that decision each morning. In this spirit, perhaps we should reconsider our children’s expectations, as well as the menus we offer, the multiple options available and the bewildering availability of everything that we currently make possible much of the time.

Harrison catering

In a completely unconnected segue, I just wanted to update you on how things have been going with our new caterers, and some ideas they have to streamline their service.

As someone who eats a hot school lunch every day, I would like to say that the quality of the recipes and the taste of the food are far better than during the days of Nourish. There have been some teething and settling issues with supply which has affected the menus and availability, but these should be resolved very soon. I apologise on behalf of Harrison if your child has been affected – please do let us know and we will forward your concerns to them. We have been assured that the menus will continue to be adapted to meet the needs of the school and to ensure that those children with restricted diets or additional needs (an important distinction from my rant on choice above - for an update on dietary requirements and allergies please see the next section) have a tasty and wholesome option available.

The feedback we have received has been quite polarised, with children and parents having very different views on the new caterers. Harrison have offered to meet the school council soon to get their opinion on how the children feel about the food being offered.

The recent changes mean that those children who ate a baked potato or pasta each day may need to consider broadening their horizons, as these alternate on the menu. Again though, Harrison are keeping this under review.

We currently run a system where children can choose their food as they reach the serving counter. Unfortunately, this means that catering staff must guess from experience how much to make from each option – something which can be difficult to predict. We are looking at the possibility of moving to a different system in the weeks ahead where meals are pre-ordered; that way there will not be an issue with availability.



Allergies and dietary requirements

As we now have Harrison as our new catering company, we felt that it was important to check out current system for identifying children who have allergies and/or dietary requirements. We were using badges for all years, but have now changed the system in Key Stage 2 to lanyards. Your children may well have told you about these!

I have transferred all the information we hold about the children on to the new lanyards, but I have had a few children say that their information has changed and they can/cannot eat a certain food or have changed their diet.

If your child has changed their diet (vegetarian, pescatarian etc) or they are unable to eat certain foods due to an allergy or an intolerance that has been diagnosed since they started at St James, please can you email your child's class teacher so that we can update our information.

Also, if you want to check we have the correct information, please contact the class teacher and they will be able to check for you on their information sheet.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Mrs Mill

Parking at the church

I am not going to start a rant about entitled drivers, but please just have some basic courtesy and awareness of other human beings, especially when you are in your car. Please do not use the church car park unless you have children at Preschool – it is just rude. Not only are parents using up all the spaces, but their staff and parents can't even get into the car park when school parents are queueing to get out or are stuck across it.

Zig-zag parking

More on the theme of rude parking! This has become an issue again and Lucy and I have become a bit tired of listening to people trying to excuse their law breaking (over the sound of their idling engine) through a half open car window. We really do not like telling people to move their car – it's not really what we came into the profession to do. We have therefore bought some signs to remind people who have a colour-blindness to yellow that they cannot stop on the zigzags outside the school, even for just a few moments. Hopefully these will arrive next week.

Unauthorised absence

We wrote to you in November about our updated Attendance Policy and procedure for late arrivals. Since we wrote to you, we have seen an increase in pupils arriving on time in the morning and would like to say 'thank you' to each family who is working hard each morning to get their children into school on time.

Please could we remind you that, if your child is absent, you should notify us before 9am on the day of the absence and each subsequent day of absence. We also ask that you let us know when they are expected to return if possible. If we do not hear from a parent, we will contact you to find out the reason for the absence to ensure safeguarding concerns are satisfied. We are required to record a code for each absence within 5 days of the absence. If we have not been able to ascertain the reason for an absence, then this will be recorded as an Unauthorised Absence.

For more information please see our Attendance Policy which can be found on the school website here: [Attendance Policy 2024](#).



To accompany our attendance policy, we now ask that all parents complete the below form for any term time absence requests. You will also be able to find the form on our website, under the Parents, Attendance section of the website.

<https://forms.office.com/e/80jQ1if6CQ?origin=lprLink>

Fire Fighters' Visit

On Monday 20th January, we were very lucky and had a visit from the Tunbridge Wells Fire Service. They came in their fire engine and they showed us all the special equipment that they use to help people. They showed us the special tools that they use to help people trapped in cars after an accident. Another piece of equipment that they showed us was the camera they use to find people in smoky fires, called a thermal imaging camera. They showed us the special breathing masks that they use when putting out fires, so that the smoke doesn't make them poorly. They showed us the special clothing that they wear when helping people in floods, and when putting out fires. Mr Wong even got to try on the special fire suit. When they left they put on the flashing blue lights and their sirens.



Mrs Cunningham

Forest School News

When we returned from our Christmas break, we were surprised to find that the rope holding up our parachute on the Juniors site had broken leaving the pulley it was attached to high up and out of reach on our supporting cable. Fortunately, we have a lovely tree surgeon as part of our wider school community named Neil Stevens,



who generously gave up his time to safely climb up a tree to attach a new pulley and rope. He showed great skill, even when watched by curious children (and adults) and we would recommend him if you need help with trees. All we need now is a clear wind-free day to re-attach the parachute, maybe after Storm Éowyn has passed!



Mrs Greenaway

Early Years

The children in Early Years have been really enjoying the start of their topic 'Tell me a story!' They have been busy drawing, painting and writing pictures linked to the book 'The Princess and the Wizard.' Sadly the Wizard had turned the characters into stone whilst at Princess Eliza's birthday party and the princess luckily escaped. The children have been busy looking for her and found her this week lost in the woods, but where is that Wizard?!



Mrs Coward



Kent Young Carers

Just a reminder that if your child has a family member with a disability or mental health difficulties they are eligible to be signed up to Kent Young Carers. They do not need to have a caring responsibility as such. There are a range of benefits including a free bus pass from age 11. You can follow the attached link and complete the online form to sign them up or contact me on senco@st-james.kent.sch.uk and I will refer them.

[Kent Young Carers](#)

Mrs Wardell

Church fashion show

Last May, Bethany, Summer and Rosie in Year 6 went into the She Matters Boutique Charity shop and were so inspired by the work they do with women who are in prison, that they asked Judi if they could go a cake sale in the church grounds to raise money for Imago Dei, the charity behind the shop. They did a great job and raised over £500 which was amazing!

The church are delighted to be hosting their first fashion show and pre-loved clothing sale in conjunction with the #SheMatters charity shop. The team are busy curating a fantastic selection of items from our #SheMatters charity shop in Monson Road in Tunbridge Wells to bring along to our #SheMatters fashion show on Saturday 25th January.

There will be an opportunity to see some great looks on the models followed by the chance to look through our rails of pre-loved clothing items.

To book a ticket only £5 per person to include a glass of fizz follow this link.

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/shematters-fashion-show-tickets-996560859357?aff=oddttdcreator>

Proceeds raised from the evening will be going to Imago Dei. Please also see the attached flyer.

Visiting Athlete Courtney Orange

Well done St James' community, so far we have raised a whopping £2381.00 for our upcoming physical fun day with Courtney Orange joining us in school. I am sure the children are going to love having a Commonwealth Star to promote healthy fun fitness. I am hopeful the children will remember the event as it is a great one-off chance to do exercise with a star.

Mrs Naismith

Reading

Did you know that children who read at home make greater progress in school? As well as educational benefits (improving speaking, reading and writing abilities), reading helps your child's wellbeing and develops their imagination. Just a few minutes a day can have a big impact on children of all ages.

A huge thank you to all parents who continue to read with their child regularly at home. Unfortunately, and worryingly, we are noticing that opportunities for reading at home are being missed. We know that life can be very busy but feel it is extremely important that every child is able to read at home regularly, ideally every day. Your child, depending on their age, may read to themselves but we also hope that every child has opportunities to read aloud at home with an adult, even if it is only for five minutes.



Although our children in Year R and Year 1 are taught to read at school, they should be continuing their practice at home. These children bring home two books – a reading practice book and a sharing book. Their **reading practice book** (Little Wandle) has been carefully matched to their current phonics stage so that they can work out all the words and read this book to you fluently and independently (without your help). Remember to give them lots of praise – celebrate their success! These books will also be available on the Collins Hub e-book library so they can be read again at any time.

Their **sharing book** is one that they have chosen for enjoyment and interest. In order to encourage your child to become a lifelong reader, it is important that they learn to read for pleasure. It will have words they may not be able to read yet so it is for you to read and share together and talk about. You can read it aloud to them or with them - discuss the illustrations, enjoy the story, predict what might happen next, use different voices for the characters or explore the facts in a non-fiction book. The main thing is that you help and support your child to develop their love of reading.

We love hearing children tell us about the books they are reading at home, about the fun and joy this gives them. All children, regardless of their age, should experience you reading aloud to them or with them – it’s a very special time for you both to cherish. If you haven’t had the chance to do this recently, please remember just a few minutes a day can have a big impact on your child.

Our Year 2 and Key Stage 2 children should be bringing home their **Accelerated Reader book** every day to read at home. As these books have been carefully matched to their understanding of texts, they may be bringing home a range of books. Again, thank you so much if you are reading with your child at home. Making opportunities to listen to your child read aloud are extremely beneficial to their learning and progress at school.

If you have any questions or would like further support or guidance about reading with your child at home, please contact your child’s class teacher.

KS2 Accelerated Reader Challenges

Many congratulations to this week’s overall winners (24th January):

Highest Individual Word Count	Highest Class Word Count	Highest Individual Number of Quizzes Passed	Highest Class Quizzes Passed
Leila in Stoat Class 632,334 words	Dormouse Class 1,285,622 words	Naomi in Dormouse Class 24 quizzes	Stoat Class 99 quizzes

As well as Dormouse, three more classes also read more than one million words this week – Stoat (1,201,983 words), Osprey (1,198,624 words) and Vole (1,052,263 words).

Happy Reading everyone!

Mrs Simpson

Kindest regards,

John Tutt

