



Newsletter – Friday 20th October 2023

Dear parents and carers,

We made it! A whole half term with a functioning water supply, no emergency school closures and no random wild animal incursions. It almost seems as if we are turning into a normal school, just like one of those your friends or relatives send their children to. Please do read to the end of the newsletter for some important news from the PTA.

Carrotty Wood was huge fun this week and Year 3 seemed to have a fantastic time. Quite how Mrs Greenaway managed to get a campfire lit in torrential rain was immensely impressive. The entire Forest School team, and all of the other staff members who helped, did an amazing job and gave the children a very special experience. It was a privilege to be a part of it.

Using Mrs Greenaway's feat of lighting a fire while partially submerged in water as a useful segue, I have been thinking about the limitless nature of children's ambition and imagination and, more specifically, how central they are to giving the children a truly immersive learning experience.

Ambitions have changed over the years. My ambition (aged 9) was to be Han Solo when I grew up (spoiler alert – I never made it). These days children seem to want to become professional footballers, YouTubers (!??) or unicorns (having the desire to cross the species threshold seems particularly ambitious). Fewer children seem to want to be singers than they used to, but the ambition to simply "be famous" is a modern favourite.

Children are marvellously ambitious – their imaginations are boundless. Watching the children, in driving rain, singing around that campfire at Carrotty Wood after a magical night-time walk in the woods was just another reminder of the incredible world without limits that our children live within and just what an immense privilege it is to be a part of it.

A long time ago, when I was teaching a Year 3 class, we had a topic on The Iron Man (the Ted Hughes version), and as part of that topic the children were challenged to design and build a robot that moved, using what we had learnt about electrical circuits. At the initial stage, the sky was the limit as children began designing the most incredible machines. A few of the children foresaw the whole AI debate as they fully expected their robots to be walking and talking machines – the whole future of humanity may have been sketched out in pencil and felt tip pen on those pieces of A4 paper. This remarkable ambition began to flounder as building began, with the reluctance of the cereal boxes (the primary building material) to accept poster paints, and it received another blow as the difficulty of cutting egg boxes to make the eyes became apparent. Ambitions for self-aware robots were scaled down well before the children had even begun to think about creating general artificial intelligence with the available classroom resources (a battery, small motor, a bulb, a few wires, some tissue paper, glitter, lolly sticks and PVA glue).



The robots however were absolutely incredible and the children were proud of what they had made ; they were far from disappointed. The rest of the class listened and asked questions as each child explained their machine's back story and demonstrated how it moved. To them, their robots were every bit as incredible as they had initially planned them to be.

Walking around the school today I was lucky enough to see Vole class doing their Roman soldier drills. As each child stood there in the playground, armed with a cardboard shield and a beaming smile, I could see that a little part of each of them was living the experience of a legionary as Mrs Featherstone (the Centurion) took them through their manoeuvres.

Children's ambitions have no bounds because neither do their imaginations. For a primary aged pupil, whether a child declares they want to become Han Solo or a unicorn is irrelevant, it is the journey that matters and again, it is always a privilege to be a part of it. The collective, boundless imagination of the children is the key resource in making their daily learning memorable. I am extremely lucky to be a small part of that learning experience for 630 amazing children and so many talented and dedicated adults.

Staffing news

We said goodbye to one of our Teaching Assistants this week, Izabel Swaffer, who is moving on to a career outside education. We are truly grateful for all of her hard work over the last few years and wish her well for the future.

We are extremely pleased to have some new members of staff on the team. Lucy Peddar joined the Year 4 team at the beginning of October and Ashaben Jain started a couple of weeks ago as a TA working in Early Years. Last week we appointed three new TAs to the team: Andrea Brustur, Devarchana Roy and Fiona Daniel will all be starting after half term and we are looking forward to welcoming them to the team.

School council update

School Council has worked with the rest of the school to find ways we can be more environmentally friendly to our planet. One measure voted on was to encourage walking to school. Here is their message:

Walking towards a Greener Future

One of our school's goals is to be an eco-friendly environment, and you can help by walking your child to school. Firstly, walking your child to school will help to reduce carbon emissions, leading to a cleaner world and a brighter future. Many of us know, first hand, about the impact of car fumes on our breathing and asthma. Surely your child deserves the right breathe clean, fresh air!

Did you know that millions of people in the UK with lung conditions could be at risk from toxic air? Alerting the Nation, a new report published by Asthma + Lung UK, reveals as many as 3.4 million people could be affected. There are also psychological and emotional benefits to walking to school with your children. It helps you connect with your child, whereas navigating the traffic on the busy road needs a lot of concentration, therefore limiting the time to bond with your child. Walking to school means you can talk and socialise with them, and have a wonderful range of conversations from politics to weekend plans, and arrive at school feeling refreshed and happy.

We hope you will take these factors into consideration while making your decision on whether to walk or drive your child to school.

Freya (Year 6)



Parking...again

I have had more complaints, including from the church, about anti-social parking. Putting aside the insanity of trying to negotiate a ton of metal and plastic around our local streets at school opening /closing times, it puts children's lives at risk if this is then abandoned somewhere not designated for safe parking. Accepting that this is the UK, and people would happily drive their 4x4 to the kitchen if they could, please be considerate of others. I am always proud to lead our school and fully embrace all of my duties and responsibilities as headteacher, but really balk at spending precious time apologising to people who are quite rightly fed up with the appalling parking habits of a minority of St James' parents; my own opinions on the morality of the overwhelming majority of car journeys closely align with the children on the school council.

Coats

That crucial early morning decision that we make every day about whether to wear a coat or not has been taken out of your hands! Please ensure your child has a warm and weather resistant coat with them every single day. At St James' there is no such thing as the wrong weather, just the wrong clothes, and our children go outside no matter what the elements throw at us.

Secondary school applications

If you have a child in Year 6 remember the deadline to apply for a place at secondary school is 31st October. Applications are made online via the KCC website.

Parent Rep meeting

Parent reps are volunteers who represent the parents in their class, and they are a great way of helping communication between home and school. I have set the 29th November after drop off for a first meeting, which will include a short tour of the school at the end. I hope you can join us!

Message from new Parent Support Worker from Spurgeons (formerly Fegans) Clare Cragg

We know that so many families are struggling with a range of issues, and I would love to support any parents who are feeling isolated, are finding family life stressful and would like some practical tips to improve things, in a friendly, non-judgmental way. I can provide support with improving communication, managing emotions and behaviour, establishing routines and much more. I can work with families in their home, at the Tunbridge Wells office or online for about 6 weekly sessions 1:1. This is all funded by Spurgeons so there is no cost to the parents.

If you are interested in being referred for parent support, or would just like more information, please contact Penny Wardell at the school, either phone or email on senco@st-james.kent.sch.uk

Sharing learning reminder

Following the parent consultations on 7th and 9th of November, we have set two sharing learning sessions on 14th and 15th November. Parents are welcome to come into school and see what their children have been getting up to at school! All parents/carers are very welcome. In the morning session, please come straight into your child's class with your child. In the afternoon session please go to the usual entrance/exit point in the school. You are welcome to come to both sessions of course if you have more than one child or, if you can only make one session, then you can move freely between classes.

Dates for the diary

These are on the school website so please take a look (under "parents" and "calendar").

30th October

INSET day – school closed for children

31st October

Children return to school & deadline for Y6 secondary applications



7 th & 9 th November	Parent consultations (3:30pm until 6.30pm)
7 th November	PTA AGM
10 th November	PTA pre-loved uniform sale 8:45am
14 th & 15 th November	Sharing Learning (afternoon 14 th and morning 15 th)
24 th November	Flu immunisation for all year groups
29 th November	Parent Rep meeting
4 th & 5 th December	Year 4 Christmas play (mornings)
6 th , 7 th and 8 th December	Infant nativities - all infant parents welcome & details to follow
12 th December	Year 3 led Christmas church service (2pm start) - Y3 parents welcome
15 th December	Last day of term
24 th December	Father Christmas visiting tonight
2 nd January	INSET day
3 rd January	First day of term

Have a lovely half term and, as always, sincere thanks to you all. Remember that school opens for children on Tuesday 31st October.

Kindest regards,

John Tutt

Message from the PTA

New year, new PTA team needed!

Our current team is stepping down. So we need to get a new team in place at the AGM (on Tuesday 7 November at 7.30pm at the school) to ensure that all the exciting events that take place throughout the year can still go ahead. And of course, to ensure that the children continue to benefit from items funded by the PTA.

The core team is the Chair, Vice-Chair, Treasurer and Secretary. These are all committee roles. Although each role has specific responsibilities, there is also a lot of flexibility to divide the work based on interests, skills, experience and availability, so please don't be put off by the job title!

The Chair runs the planning and committee meetings, oversees the programme of events and generally makes sure everything is on track and that all the volunteers are supported whether running or helping with events.

The Vice Chair works closely with the Chair and the rest of the committee to make sure events run smoothly. This is a hugely varied role which includes taking the lead on individual events, dealing with admin and being in charge of supplies for big events.

The Treasurer looks after the money. They prepare the accounts, reimburse expenses, track how much each event raises and make sure the correct papers are filed with the Charities Commission. They also organise floats for events and count and bank the takings afterwards.

The Secretary organises the meetings, takes the minutes and makes sure that any agreed points are followed up. They keep members informed of plans, co-ordinate volunteers and take the lead on admin.

All of these roles can be shared, so if you are worried about having enough time to deal with everything, why not team up with a friend and share the load? Or let the team know you'd like to be involved and we will help find you someone to work with.



There are lots of other roles available if you have a particular talent, interest or expertise or if you want to learn a new skill. We are always on the lookout for people to run social media campaigns, write newsletters and other communications, help out with admin, review compliance and policies, apply for grants, shop for supplies and to be lead volunteer for individual events (with full support from the committee).

Our PTA is a community organisation and we need as many people as possible from that community to take an active role in building it up. You can start small by volunteering at an event for an hour or jump straight in at the deep end and help run it from start to finish.

If you'd like to know anything more about any of it, please do get in touch through our Facebook page, via class reps or email hello@stjamespta.co.uk.

Dates for your diaries (please sign up to help if you can):

20 October / 1 November - Round Table Firework Tickets on sale at drop off and pick up

7 November- AGM at 7.30pm at school - come along and help make our community stronger

10 November- Uniform Sale at drop off outside the PTA shed. Please drop any uniform donations to the box in reception.

11 November- Table Top Sale 2-4pm

24 November- home clothes day and secret present room donations

27 November onwards- please donate your lovely but too small Christmas jumpers for our pre-loved jumper shop

1 December- Secret Present Room

8 December- Christmas Jumper shop

On sale now - tickets for Beauty & The Beast at the Assembly Halls. Save 10% and secure a donation to the PTA if you buy through our website. This is a family event so feel free to invite friends and extended family.

