



Barnsole Bulletin



TERM 3 | WEEK 4| Friday 30th January 2026

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Dear Parents & Carers,

This week, I would like to share a message I mentioned recently in an assembly with the Year 5 and Year 6 children: a good night's sleep is one of the kindest gifts we can give a growing brain. During the school day, children take in an incredible amount - new facts, new vocabulary, friendships, playground moments, worries, achievements. At night, the brain doesn't simply "switch off". While your child sleeps, their brain gets busy sorting and filing the day's learning. It strengthens important connections and helps new information move into longer-term memory. This is one reason why children often find something tricky one day, then come back the next morning and it suddenly feels easier. Sleep also supports attention, mood, and emotional regulation - all essential for a calm, successful day in class. We are noticing some children arriving at Barnsole Primary School feeling very tired. When children are short on sleep, it can be harder to concentrate, manage emotions, and make the most of learning time. As a gentle reminder, primary-aged children generally need around 9-12 hours of sleep each night. One of the biggest barriers to sleep at the moment is late-night screen use. Phones, tablets and some TVs give off blue light - a type of light that can tell the brain it's still daytime and reduce the natural sleep hormone (melatonin), making it harder to drift off. If you can, please consider keeping devices out of bedrooms, aiming for a screen-free wind-down in the hour before bed, and replacing it with a calmer routine (a bath, a story, quiet reading, or gentle music).



Thank you, as always, for your support.
Best wishes,
Mr J Smales

House Points (Overall Total for the Academic Year)



1542

Invicta

1486

Medway

1238

Gordon

1278

Adams

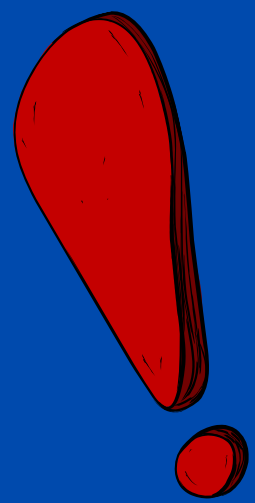




If you have concerns about a child in school, please contact one of the Safeguarding team:

Designated Safeguarding Lead: Jonathan Smales (Headteacher)
Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead: Liz Kramer (Deputy Headteacher)
Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead: Nicole Barber (Assistant Headteacher)
Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead: Stephanie Tollervey (Assistant Headteacher)
Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead: Michelle Kagan (FLO)
Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead: Helen Rixon (Office Manager)

If you are concerned about a child outside of school, either after school, at the weekends or during a school holiday, you can contact the following to report your concerns:



Helpful Contact Numbers
Medway Children Services – 01634 334466
Out of Hours Duty Team Medway – 03000 414141
NSPC – 0800 800 500
Police – 101
[Medway.gov.uk/mscb/](https://www.medway.gov.uk/mscb/)

Nursery

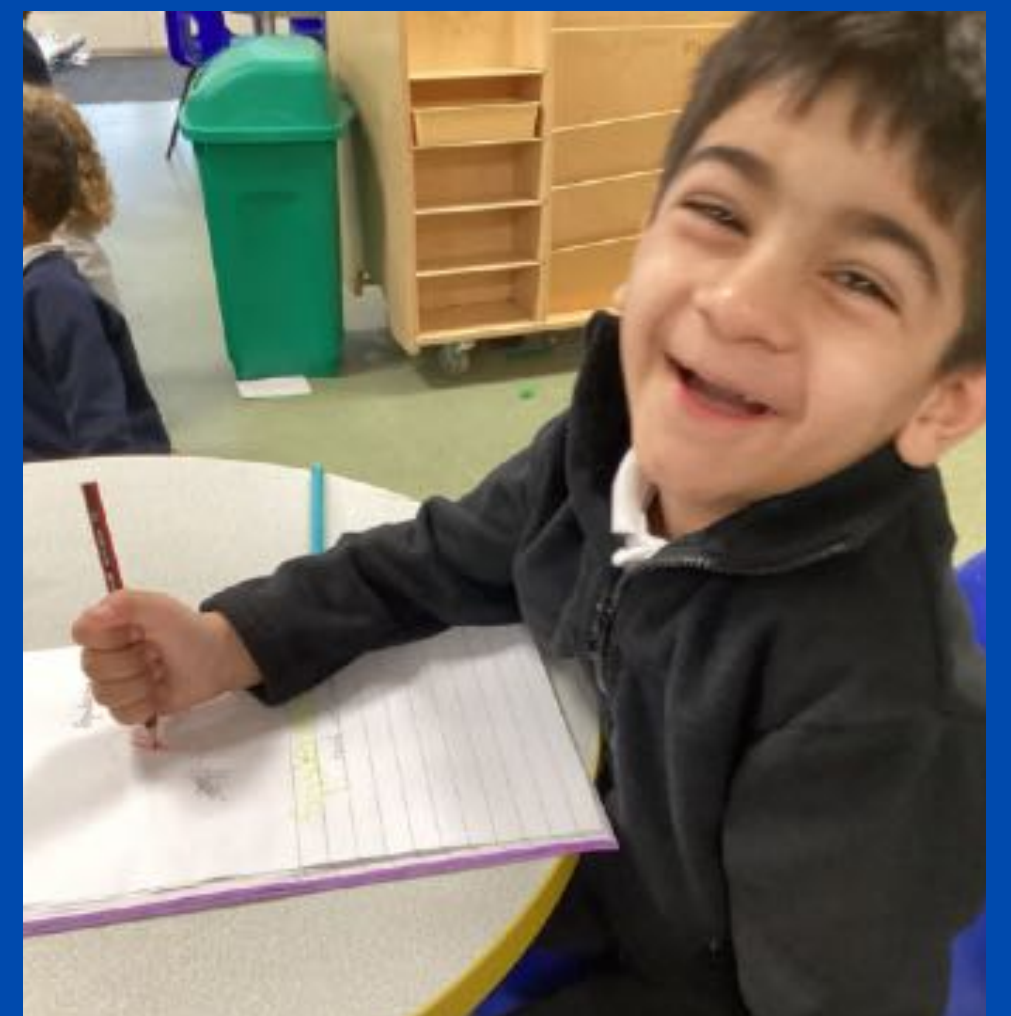
This week we have been looking at animals that live in the cold. The children enjoyed playing with them in the shaving foam snow.



Year R

Comets and Moonbeams have been super busy measuring things this week. We started by looking at weight and using weighing scales and getting them to balance by adding cubes. Later in the week we explored full, half full and empty with different containers and then measured how much water each container held. We were surprised that some of the containers held more or less than we were expecting.

The children are continuing to make fantastic progress with their Phonics. Look out for some more resources coming home for you to practise when you can.



Year 1

In Year 1, the children have been having lots of fun exploring numbers to 20 in maths, comparing amounts and talking about which numbers are greater than or less than others. They used practical resources and enjoyed explaining their ideas to their friends. In

English, they have been practising writing simple sentences and are getting better at remembering capital letters and full stops within their sentences. The children were lucky enough to take part in a drama workshop with a visiting company and had lots of fun exploring different drama challenges together.



Year 2

This week Year 2 have begun their next writing unit. We have read the book, 'Postcards from Crabby Spit' so we now know what makes a good postcard. All that was left, was to experience a day at the beach. We recreated the beach at school and immersed ourselves fully – building sandcastles, splashing in water, having a picnic and relaxing on a beach towel. The descriptions and language being used tells us that there is going to be some fantastic writing ahead.



Key Stage 1 Satellite

This week we have been learning about the three little pigs. We have been building houses, making pigs and learning the story.



Year 3

Year 3 have been busy enjoying lots of exciting, hands-on learning across the curriculum. In Art, the children explored block printing as part of their Fibonacci-themed learning. They had great fun creating repeating patterns and experimenting with different designs. During English lessons, Year 3 began working on setting descriptions. To help spark their imaginations, they immersed themselves in a range of objects—looking at them closely, touching them, and even smelling them—to decide whether they belonged in a jungle or a volcano setting.

In Science, the children investigated Newton meters. They tested how these tools work and discussed what kind of information they can give us, developing their understanding of forces through practical exploration.

Year 3 have shown wonderful curiosity and enthusiasm in all their learning!



Year 4

This week in Year 4, we became real-life explorers on a thrilling mission to survive the wild! We were thrown into a series of dangerous situations where we had to think fast, stay calm, and make smart decisions to stay alive. Working as a team, we escaped the grip of fierce animals, including a wild bear and hungry wolves. Using our compass skills, we navigated through unknown land, crossed a rising river by leaping across slippery stepping stones, and battled through a violent storm to find shelter.

When all hope seemed lost, we used our knowledge of body symbols to send secret messages to a helicopter flying high above, guiding it to rescue us just in time! We will use this exciting experience to help us write our very own survival guides, filled with everything we learned about courage, teamwork and never giving up.



Year 5

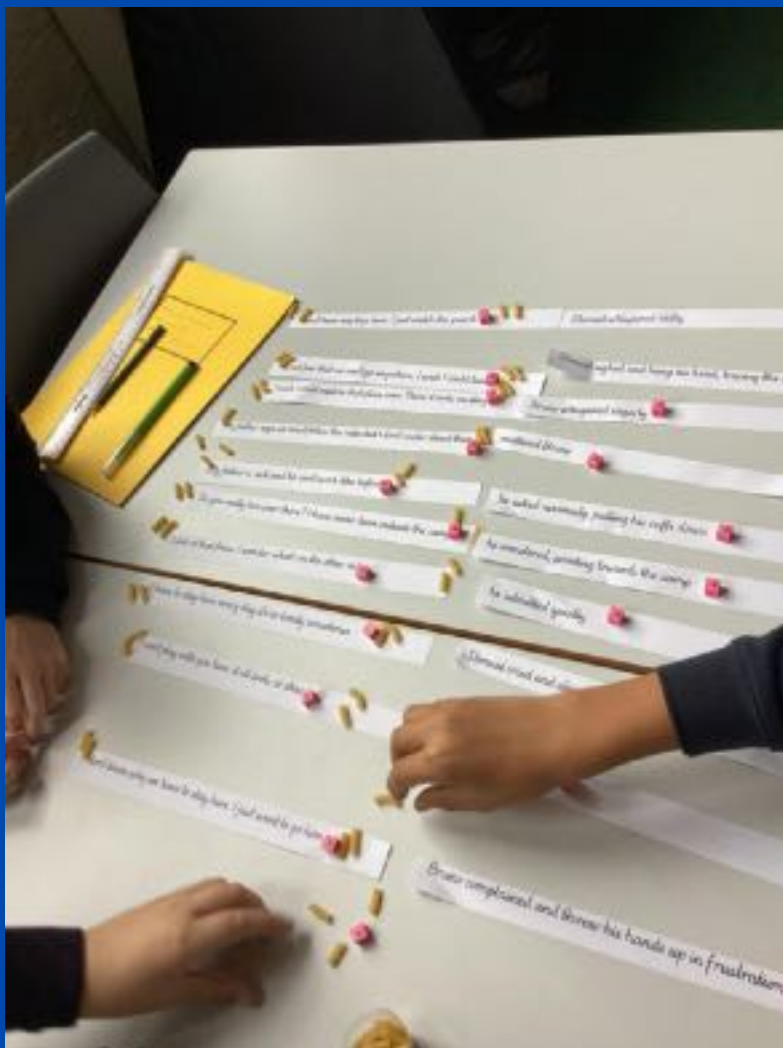
Year 5 have been busy growing their own plants as part of their geography learning. They planted seeds, bulbs and tubers to explore how plants grow in different environments and to learn about sexual and asexual reproduction. Using clear pots, they loved watching roots spread through the soil and spotting just how quickly the plants changed. Watering them daily and measuring their growth has been a real highlight, and the children have been fascinated by seeing plant development happen right in front of them.



Year 6

Year 6 have been fully immersed in all things World War I this term. From exploring the causes and key events of the conflict to examining life in the trenches, pupils have been developing a deep understanding of the era. Recently, we took part in a thoughtful re-enactment of the 1914 Christmas Truce, where the children stepped into the shoes of soldiers on both sides to reflect on humanity and hope amidst the hardships of war.

In English, the children are busy preparing to write their own meeting tale inspired by *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*. We've been focusing on enriching dialogue – using macaroni inverted commas with confidence – and adding carefully chosen details to convey emotion and move the action forward. The children are showing real maturity as they explore character perspectives and develop their narrative voices.



It is the National Year of Reading this year!



Reading is one of the most important skills children develop during their primary school years. We encourage all children to read a little every day, or as often as possible, both at school and at home. Even short, regular reading sessions can make a lasting difference.

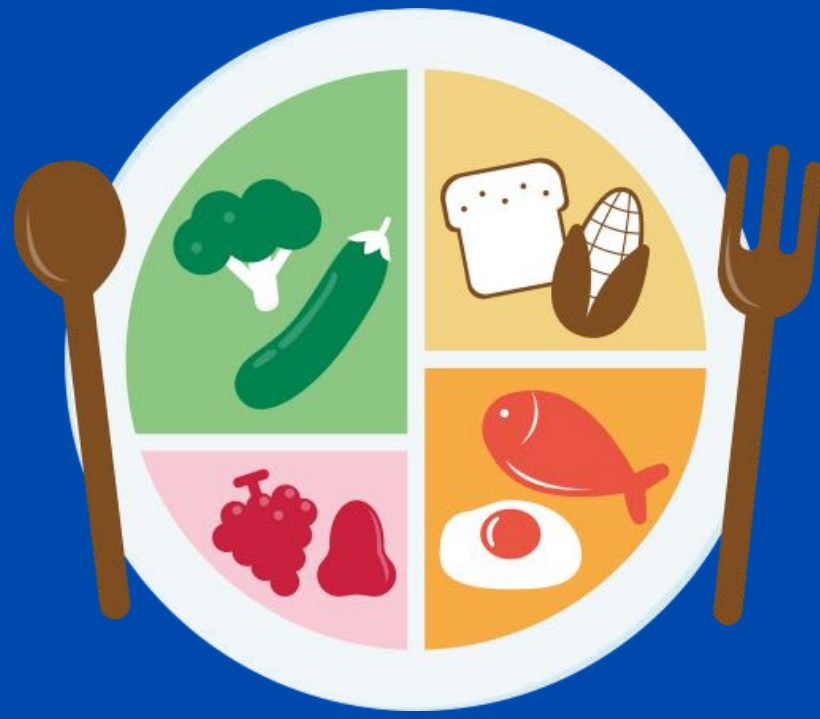
Developing a love of reading takes children on incredible journeys, sparking imagination, curiosity and enjoyment. Just as importantly, research shows that regular reading supports children in many other ways. It can improve mental wellbeing, build confidence, strengthen vocabulary and communication skills, and support success across the whole curriculum.

The benefits of reading extend far beyond the classroom. Children who read regularly are more likely to achieve better qualifications, enjoy wider career opportunities and feel confident expressing themselves as they grow older. Reading helps children understand the world around them and develop empathy, resilience and independence.

Struggling to read does not only hold children back at school - it can hold them back in life. That is why early support, encouragement and positive reading habits are so important. By sharing books, talking about stories and making time to read every day, we can work together to give our children the very best start.

Thank you to all parents and carers for the time, effort and support you give to helping your children read. Your encouragement at home plays a vital role in developing confident, enthusiastic readers.

HEALTHY LUNCHBOX TIPS FOR PARENTS



Providing a balanced lunch helps children stay focused, energetic, and ready to learn throughout the school day. When packing your child's lunchbox, try to aim to include a variety of foods from the main food groups to support their growth and wellbeing.

There is also the option of ordering a free hot meal each day for your child in Reception and KS1 or a paid hot meal in KS2.

What a Balanced Lunchbox Looks Like:

- Starchy Foods

These give children the energy they need to learn and play. Good options include wholemeal bread or rolls, wraps, rice, pasta, or crackers.

- Protein

Protein supports growth and keeps children feeling full for longer. Try lean meats, eggs, hummus, tofu, beans, or cheese.

- Dairy or Dairy Alternatives

These foods help support strong bones and teeth. Include plain or low-sugar yoghurt, cheese, or plant-based alternatives where appropriate.

- Fruit and Vegetables

Aim for at least one portion of fruit and one portion of vegetables each day. Fresh, chopped options all count.

- A Healthy Drink

Water is the best choice for staying hydrated. Please avoid sugary drinks.

A lunchbox that includes a mix of these foods helps children get the nutrients they need to thrive at school. Thank you for supporting healthy eating habits at home and at school!

REMINDER: CLOTHING BANK

This is just a reminder that our clothing bank is located on our Junior Site near the front office.

If you have any used or unwanted clothing at home, you can place it in the clothing bank. Not only does this provide a simple way to recycle items and support the environment, but the school will also receive a small amount of money for every kilogram of clothing collected. This will go directly towards supporting our children and school community.

If your local charity shop is not accepting clothing please feel free to use the clothing banks provided.



Parent Information – Uniform Reminder



School Uniform

Please can we remind parents of our school uniform policy. Please take the time to read this on our school website.

Jewellery & Hair Accessories

Earrings – plain Studs only

Hair bands or hair ties should be plain colours and small

No necklaces, bracelets or any other item of jewellery is allowed

Items of Religious Significance

Children from the Sikh community are allowed to wear a kara, which is a steel or iron bracelet. As part of the Sikh faith, the kara must not be removed.

Head coverings (hijab) should be plain navy blue or black without any embellishments, patterns or additional decorations.

PE Days

For PE Days, children should be wearing black shorts, leggings or tracksuit bottoms. T-shirt in the colour of your child's house team or a plain white t-shirt and Black trainers (no bright ones).

On the days that the children have PE they can come to school already their PE kit. It is essential that all items of clothing are clearly marked with your child's name, including coats and PE kit.

FRIENDS OF BARNSOLE

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

2026



♥ FEBRUARY ♥

06/02 : Year 1&2 Disco
12/02 : CommuniTea

🌸 MARCH 🌸

05/03 : CommuniTea
12/03 : Mothers Day
Shop
27/03 : Family Bingo

🥚 APRIL 🥚

02/04 : CommuniTea
23/04 : Bake Sale

🏰 MAY 🏰

Class tea towel
07/05 : CommuniTea
15/05 : Inflatables
afternoon

🎵 JUNE 🎵

11/06 : CommuniTea
18/06 : Fathers Day
Shop

🎪 JULY 🎪

09/07 : CommuniTea
10/07 : Donation tag
day
15/7 : Summer Fair

CommuniTea

Join us for a relaxed tea & coffee morning once a month right after drop-off.

A chance to meet, chat and connect with other parents in our school community.

Babies and pre-school children are very welcome.

If you can bring a mug, that would be great!

We'd love to see you there!

Thursday 12th February

Thursday 5th March

Thursday 2nd April

Thursday 7th May

Thursday 11th June

Thursday 9th July

Free to attend!



STAY UP TO DATE WITH ALL EVENT DETAILS ON OUR FACEBOOK PAGE



facebook.com/friendsbarnsole



friends@barnsole-maritime.org



FRIENDS OF BARNSOLE

School **DISCO**

FRIDAY 23RD JANUARY

4PM - 5PM YEAR 5

5.15PM - 6.15PM YEAR 6

FRIDAY 30TH JANUARY

4PM - 5PM YEAR 3

5.15PM - 6.15PM YEAR 4

FRIDAY 6TH FEBRUARY

4PM - 5PM YEAR 1

5.15- 6.15PM YEAR 2

TICKET £3 - WATER PROVIDED

**KS1 HALL - ENTRY NEXT TO NEPTUNE
CLASS**

NO PHONES ALLOWED



**PURCHASE TICKETS VIA
[PTA-EVENTS.CO.UK/FRIENDSOFBARNSOLE](https://pta-events.co.uk/friendsofbarnsole)**

DISCOVER 100's OF FREE ACTIVITIES DURING THE SCHOOL HOLIDAYS



**READY WHEN YOU ARE!
GO.MEDWAY.GOV.UK**



MedwayGo
FREE ACTIVITIES DURING
SCHOOL HOLIDAYS

**A BETTER
MEDWAY**
Easier ways to be heard

Medway
Serving You

8:30AM - 4PM
8AM EARLY
DROP OFF
fees apply

BROMPTON ACADEMY

FEBRUARY 2026

MULTI-ACTIVITY AND SPORTS CAMP

DAYS	THEMES
MONDAY 16 TH	Bouncy Castle & Football Penalty Shootout Inflatable
TUESDAY 17 TH	Pancake Making Day
WEDNESDAY 18 TH	Winter Olympics - Kurling, Snowball, Dodgeball, Bobsleigh Push & Speed Skating & Snowball Fight
THURSDAY 19 TH	Laser Tag & New Gymnastic Spring Boards
FRIDAY 20 TH	Valentine's Arts & Crafts

**CONTACT
US!**

07378 951411 www.strivepeandsport.co.uk
@strivepeandsport



FEBRUARY 2026 Timetable

All sessions delivered live online via zoom. 90 minutes long

£24 each or FREE with School Membership

Book online at facefamilyadvice.co.uk

Recordings available for 48 hours (excluding Free Talk)

Autism - Improving Communication	2 Feb 10am
Improving Family Communication	2 Feb 7pm
Supporting A Child with ADHD	3 Feb 10am
Understanding Addictive Behaviour	3 Feb 7pm
Anxiety Based School Avoidance	9 Feb 10am
Anxiety Explained	16 Feb 10am
Cannabis and Ketamine Awareness	16 Feb 7pm
What is ACT?	17 Feb 10am
Introduction to OCD	17 Feb 7pm
FREE - Reducing the Harm from Screens	19 Feb 7-8pm
Understanding the Teenage Brain	23 Feb 10am
Raising Self-Esteem	23 Feb 7pm
Decreasing Depression	24 Feb 10am
Supporting Healthy Sleep	24 Feb 7pm
Understanding Anger	9 Mar 7pm
Facing Defiance	10 Mar 7pm

Medway SENDIASS

January - March 2026 Information Sessions

Medway Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, Information, Advice and Support service (SENDIASS) have a number of information sessions this year, so please come along and see us if you require information or advice.

No need to book, just turn up.

Please note, if you require support in relation to EHCP applications or appeals, please contact the service separately as these sessions are not suitable.

**Strood Children and
Family Hub**
27th January - 12.30
until 14.30

**Chatham Children
and Family Hub**
24th February -
10.00 until 12.00

**Gillingham &
Twydall Children
and Family Hub**
25th March - 10.00
until 12.00

medwaysendiass@family-action.org.uk

01634 566303

www.medway-sendiass.org.uk

**SENDIASS
hosted by**



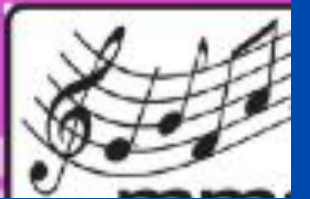
FREE

Online Music Technology Sessions

- Open to pupils in Year 5 - 13
- Tuesdays 5:30pm - 6:30pm
- Term time only

SIGN UP NOW

www.medwaymusicassociation.co.uk



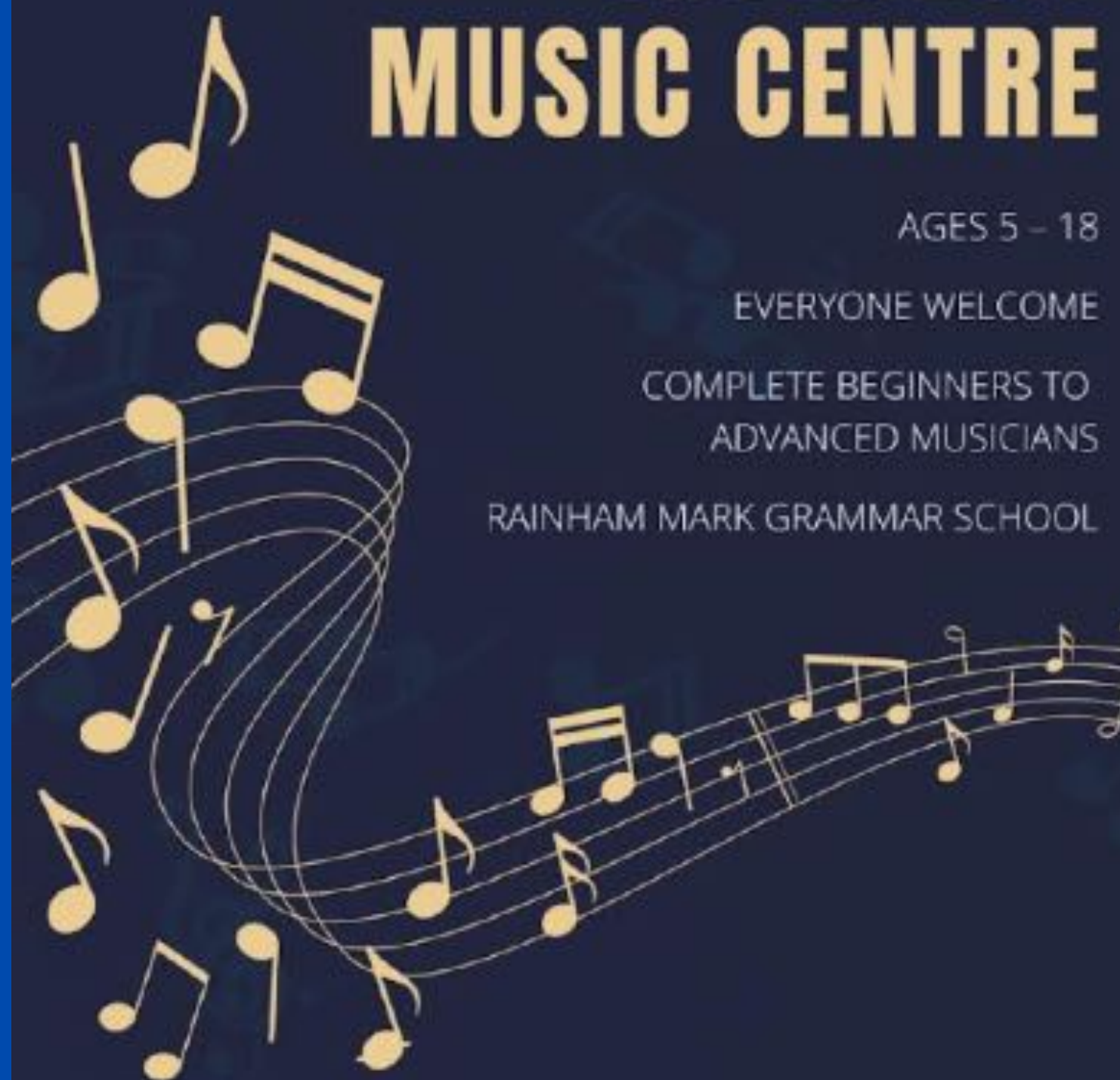
JOIN OUR SATURDAY MUSIC CENTRE

AGES 5 - 18

EVERYONE WELCOME

COMPLETE BEGINNERS TO
ADVANCED MUSICIANS

RAINHAM MARK GRAMMAR SCHOOL



DISCOVER MORE

www.medwaymusicassociation.co.uk



Class Attendance for the year so far ...

Infants

Saturn - 96%
Neptune - 94%
Mercury - 93%
Comet - 93%
Moonbeams - 91%
Jupiter - 90%
Venus - 90%
Mars - 89%



Juniors

Oberon - 96%
Titan - 95%
Icarus - 95%
Apollo - 95%
Phoenix - 95%
Aquarius - 95%
Dragon - 93%
Juno - 93%
Pegasus - 92%
Capricorn - 92%
Polaris - 91%
Aquila - 90%
Orion - 90%

Dates for the Diary

Friday 6th February	Yr 1 Disco (4pm-5pm) Yr 2 Disclo (5.15pm-6.15pm) <i>Further information to follow</i>
Tuesday 10 th February	Yr R and Yr 6 Height, Weight and Measure
Thursday 12 th February	CommuniTea - Join us to meet, chat and connect with other parents in our school community (younger children welcome) (9am-10am) KS1 Hall
Friday 13th February	Spring Term 1 ends
HALF TERM	Monday 16th February-Friday 20th February
Monday 23rd February	SCHOOL RETURNS
Thursday 5 th March	CommuniTea - Join us to meet, chat and connect with other parents in our school community (younger children welcome) (9am-10am) KS1 Hall
Thursday 5 th March	World Book Day <i>Further information to follow</i>
Friday 6 th March	Yr 1 Disco <i>Further information to follow</i>
Wednesday 11 th & Thursday 12 th March	Mother Days Event <i>Further information to follow</i>
Thursday 11 th March-Wednesday 18 th March	Scholastic Book Fair <i>Further information to follow</i>
Friday 27 th March	Family Bing <i>Further information to follow</i>
Friday 13 th March	Red Nose Day <i>Further information to follow</i>
Friday 20th March	INSET DAY
Wednesday 25 th March	Parents Consultation Meetings 3.30pm-5.30pm <i>Further information to follow</i>
Wednesday 1 st April	Parents Consultation Meetings 3.30pm-5.30pm <i>Further information to follow</i>

Dates for the Diary

Thursday 2 nd April	CommuniTea - Join us to meet, chat and connect with other parents in our school community (younger children welcome) <i>(9am-10am) KS1 Hall</i>
Thursday 2nd April	Spring Term 2 ends
Friday 3rd April-Friday 17th April	Easter Holidays
Monday 20th April	SCHOOL RETURNS
Thursday 23 rd April	Bake Sale
Monday 4th May	May Bank Holiday
Thursday 7 th May	CommuniTea - Join us to meet, chat and connect with other parents in our school community (younger children welcome) <i>(9am-10am) KS1 Hall</i>
Monday 11 th May-Thursday 14 th May	Yr 6 SATs Week
Friday 15 th May	Inflatables afternoon (3.30pm-5pm) <i>Further information to follow</i>
Monday 25th May-Friday 29th May	May Half Term
Monday 1 st June	School Returns
Thursday 11th June	CommuniTea - Join us to meet, chat and connect with other parents in our school community (younger children welcome) <i>(9am-10am) KS1 Hall</i>
Thursday 18 th & Friday 19 th June	Fathers Day Event <i>Further information to follow</i>
Wednesday 8 th July	Summer Fayre
Thursday 9 th July	CommuniTea - Join us to meet, chat and connect with other parents in our school community (younger children welcome) <i>(9am-10am) KS1 Hall</i>
Friday 10 th July	Donation Tag day
Wednesday 15 th July	Summer Fair Infant Site
Tuesday 21st July	End of School Year

What Parents & Educators Need to Know about AI TOYS

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

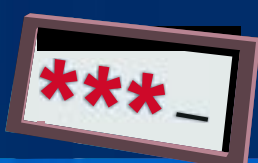
This festive season, the newest toys on the shelves do not just blink or make noise; they listen. Many now come with artificial intelligence (AI), allowing them to talk, learn, and even respond to a child's emotions. These toys can be educational and engaging, but they also collect, store, and process information. This guide explains what that means for families and why it matters.

TOYS THAT LISTEN AND LEARN



When a toy uses AI, it collects data such as voice recordings, interactions, and background sounds. This information is sent to remote servers, where it is analysed to improve responses. Your child's voice becomes training data, which may be stored indefinitely or shared with third parties.

WEAK SECURITY PROTECTIONS



Some AI toys have poor password protection or open network connections. Others may have microphones or cameras that stay on, even when the toy appears to be off. This can lead to recordings being made without your knowledge, including conversations unrelated to play.

ARTIFICIAL VOICES, REAL INFLUENCE



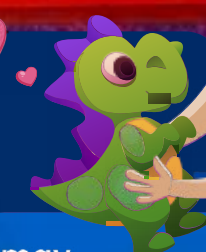
For very young children, an AI companion may become one of the first voices they interact with regularly. How that voice shows humour, empathy, or authority can shape how a child learns to communicate. If the model is artificial, then part of what is learned is artificial as well.

PRESSURE TO KEEP ENGAGING



Some toys reward repeated use or track engagement, encouraging children to interact more. When children compare how their toys perform, it creates pressure to play more often. This increases the amount of data collected and can make learning feel like competition.

MARKETING THROUGH PLAY



Toys that learn a child's preferences may feed that data into future advertising. A toy that knows a child's favourite colour or hobby could help a company design more targeted marketing to that child and their family.

PLAYTIME AS DATA TRAINING



The information collected from children helps train AI systems. Their voice, emotional responses, and behaviour shape how machines 'understand' people. Play becomes part of a much larger system that influences how future technologies behave.

Advice for Parents & Educators

START WITH A CONVERSATION

Talk to young people. Explain that some toys learn from what they say and do. Help them understand that even friendly technology should have boundaries, and to ask questions about it. Curiosity is healthy, blind trust is not.



SET LIMITS ON USE

Turn off Wi-Fi or Bluetooth when the toy is not in use. Check for updates regularly, as they can change privacy or safety settings. Treat connected toys like any smart device; they should be monitored, updated, and switched off when not in use.



MODEL DIGITAL AWARENESS

Children learn from adults. If they see you checking privacy settings, reading terms, and talking openly about online safety, they are more likely to do the same. Show them how to question technology in a healthy way.



RESEARCH BEFORE YOU BUY

Look for toys that work offline or store data locally. Check for a free or demo version so you can test how it behaves. Read privacy policies to understand what data is collected, where it goes, and whether it's shared with others.



REVIEW PRIVACY SETTINGS

Find out where the data is stored and who has access to it. Some companies sell or share data with advertisers. If the toy connects through an app, check what it requests access to and limit those permissions whenever possible.



BALANCE AI WITH REAL PLAY

AI toys can be fun and creative, but they are not a replacement for real human interaction. Encourage time away from technology with activities that foster emotional and social development. Use AI toys to support learning, not define it.



Meet Our Expert

Clara Hawking is Executive Director of Kompass Education. She advises governments, school trusts, and global organisations on AI governance and safeguarding, helping schools and families understand how technology shapes learning, wellbeing, and the digital future of children.



#WakeUpWednesday

The National College

What Parents & Educators Need to Know about DIGITAL DEVICES & WELLBEING

Children aged 7 to 14 now spend roughly 3 to 5 hours a day on phones, tablets, consoles, and computers. That much screen time has parents and educators worried – not just about the hours logged, but about online safety and the knock-on effects on mental health. This guide brings together practical, expert-backed strategies so adults can nurture healthier digital habits and help young people thrive both on and offline.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

SLEEP DISRUPTION

Excessive screen time, especially before bed, can interfere with melatonin production and delay sleep onset. Children may struggle to concentrate or regulate emotions due to poor sleep hygiene linked to late-night device use.

ONLINE PEER PRESSURE

Social media platforms expose children to unrealistic standards and peer validation loops. Likes, comments, and follower counts can influence self-worth and lead to anxiety or risky behaviour to gain approval.

CYBERBULLYING EXPOSURE

Children may encounter bullying through messaging apps, games, or social media. This can be persistent and anonymous, making it harder to detect. Victims often feel isolated and reluctant to report incidents.

REDUCED PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Time spent on screens often replaces outdoor play and physical activity. This sedentary lifestyle can contribute to obesity, poor posture, and reduced cardiovascular health.

EMOTIONAL DYSREGULATION

Fast-paced digital content can overstimulate young brains. Children may become irritable, impatient, or struggle with boredom and emotional control when not engaged with screens.

PRIVACY AND SAFETY RISKS

Children may unknowingly share personal information or interact with strangers online. Without guidance, they may not understand the long-term consequences of digital footprints or unsafe online behaviour.

Advice for Parents & Educators

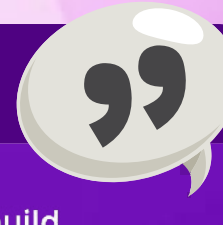
SET CLEAR BOUNDARIES

Establish screen-time limits and device-free zones, e.g. classrooms and dinner tables. Use parental controls and co-create a digital use agreement with children to encourage accountability. Trying a visual schedule or timer app can help children understand and stick to limits.



ENCOURAGE OPEN DIALOGUE

Create a safe space for children to talk about their online experiences. Ask open-ended questions like, "What did you enjoy online today?" to build trust and awareness. Try setting aside 10 minutes each day for a digital check-in where children can share what they've seen or done online.



MODEL HEALTHY HABITS

Children mirror adult behaviour. Demonstrate balanced device use, take regular screen breaks, and prioritise face-to-face interactions to reinforce positive behaviours. Making a habit of putting your phone away during meals and conversations can show that real-life interactions come first.



PROMOTE DIGITAL LITERACY

Teach children how to evaluate online content, recognise misinformation, and understand privacy settings. Empower them to think critically and act responsibly in digital spaces. You could use real-life examples from the news or social media to help children practise spotting fake information.



Meet Our Expert

Adam Gillett is Associate Vice Principal for Personal Development at Penistone Grammar School and works on secondment one day a week for Minds Ahead, which works with schools on improving their mental health provision.



#WakeUpWednesday®

The National College®

What Parents & Educators Need to Know about MENTAL HEALTH MISINFORMATION ONLINE

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

A research study by Ofcom revealed that children aged 9–15 increasingly use online platforms like TikTok for mental health advice, with 50% relying on social media for information. Unverified medical content online is concerning, with the potential to cause confusion, anxiety, or incorrect self-diagnoses. This guide provides expert strategies to help parents and educators tackle misinformation effectively and ensure safer digital experiences for young people.

POPULAR ONLINE SOURCES

Platforms like TikTok and Instagram are two of the main sources of young people's mental health content. Videos and posts frequently feature unqualified influencers, contributing to misinformation, myths, and oversimplifications. While appealing to young audiences, this unverified content can distort perceptions, and create unrealistic expectations and misunderstandings about mental health conditions.

RISK OF SELF-DIAGNOSIS

Social media's misleading content encourages young people to self-diagnose complex mental health conditions inaccurately. Misdiagnosis can exacerbate anxiety, cause unnecessary worry, or delay essential professional intervention. This has the potential to escalate manageable conditions into more significant mental health issues requiring comprehensive clinical support.

LACK OF FILTERS

Social media platforms struggle to filter misinformation effectively, allowing false content to spread widely and quickly. Without proper guidance, young viewers may not discern fact from fiction, potentially internalising inaccurate beliefs about mental health. This can negatively influence their decisions about seeking professional help or managing mental wellbeing.

IMPACTFUL PAST TRENDS

Historically, online mental health misinformation has led to harmful trends, including inappropriate coping strategies or sensationalised symptoms. For example, past TikTok trends on self-harm or anxiety 'hacks' have spread damaging advice, underscoring the risk when misinformation is not promptly addressed or corrected by knowledgeable adults.

MISLEADING CLINICAL TERMS

Online trends often include the misuse of clinical terms, such as 'trauma' or 'OCD', making serious conditions seem trivial or inaccurately understood. Such misinformation can diminish empathy, and lead young people to misunderstand mental health complexities, potentially preventing them from identifying real mental health issues in themselves or others.

REPLACING PROFESSIONAL HELP

Frequent reliance on digital content can deter young people from seeking professional mental health care, substituting expert support with unverified online advice. This substitution can prolong issues, complicate recovery, and reduce the effectiveness of future professional interventions, ultimately impacting overall mental health and wellbeing negatively.

Advice for Parents & Educators

MONITOR ONLINE ENGAGEMENT

Regularly review and discuss a young person's online activity, providing appropriate guidance on discerning accurate content. Tools such as parental controls or co-viewing content can help mediate exposure to harmful misinformation, facilitating safer digital habits and informed critical thinking about mental health.



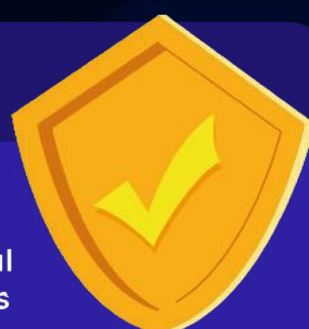
SCHOOL-HOME COLLABORATION

Strengthen collaboration with educators to integrate digital literacy into the school curriculum, emphasising misinformation awareness. Jointly delivered education sessions on identifying and responding to misinformation can significantly improve pupils' ability to critically assess mental health content, supporting their mental wellbeing effectively both online and offline.



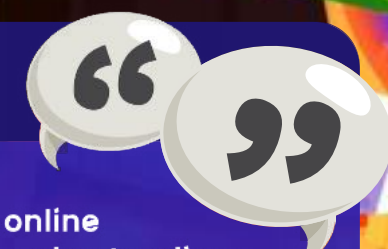
IDENTIFY RELIABLE SOURCES

Teach young people to critically evaluate mental health content by checking credentials, source authenticity, and evidence-based information. Encourage them to refer to trusted medical or educational platforms and to consult healthcare professionals for clarification. This reduces young people's reliance on potentially harmful or misleading online sources.



ENCOURAGE OPEN DIALOGUE

Foster a non-judgemental environment where young people feel comfortable discussing online content. Regularly talking about their online experiences and perceived mental health concerns helps clarify misunderstandings, mitigates misinformation, and builds trust, thereby enhancing their resilience and digital literacy. Model situations where you have sought advice from accurate sources and not solely relied on social media for health advice.



Meet Our Expert

Anna Bateman is Director of Halcyon Education Ltd, Director for Wellbeing and Family Services at Leigh Trust, and lead expert for mental health at The National College. Anna specialises in strategic mental health solutions for schools, supporting educators and families to improve resilience, emotional literacy, and overall wellbeing for children across the UK.



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