

4th December 2020

Dear Parents

December already...and it is starting to look a lot like Christmas in school. We have welcomed Year 11, Reception and Year 1 pupils back this week and so it felt much more normal by the end of the week, with our oldest and youngest pupils back here rather than on the end of a Teams or Zoom call!

Many of you will have seen the announcements in the news this week about exams and assessments for this academic year and what the government and examination boards are doing to try and mitigate the effects of Covid related absences for pupils. If your child is in the Junior School or in Year 11, you will receive a separate letter about this from Mr Rees, with more detailed information as far as we have it. In essence, KS1 tests which pupils take in Year 2, will be cancelled this year, although pupils must still take the Phonics screening check. KS2 tests, taken in Year 6, will go ahead but the school results will not be published in league tables. Whilst I am not a fan of league tables, this is in many ways a shame for us as we know our primary results are improving just as our secondary ones are. There will also be accommodations made to next summer's GCSE examinations – though we will have to wait until next term to have further details about what exactly will be done for each subject. As soon as we know more we will disseminate this information to Year 11 parents and students – I know this is a real matter of concern and anxiety for our students as it is also for our teaching staff. If you would like to know more, then the press release and links can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/extra-measures-to-support-students-ahead-of-next-summertime-exams>

Thank you to all parents who have donated to Interact's Feeding Families project. This report is from Mrs Jones:

Today Interact members have taken the food and toiletries from the whole school donations to the Feeding Families packing centre. It has been incredibly heart-warming and humbling to see the vast array of donations that have been brought in from Reception students up to Year 11 as well as staff. Last night after school, Year 11 Interact members helped collect and sort the donations ahead of the Northern Echo coming in to interview the students. This was brilliant to see them coming together sorting donations, especially with it being their first day back in school after two weeks at home self-isolating!

Year 9 Interact members then helped pack the mini bus and enjoyed assembling over 120 hamper boxes in under two hours, filling them with donations at the packing centre today. The students threw themselves into the job, worked brilliantly as a team and didn't stop for two hours straight packing! Ed was a pro refilling the trays, Henry was amazing with his trolley moving filled boxes and Faith and Jason were fab sorting out donations as they came in. Olivia M and Paula were an epic packing duo and were packing hampers until the very end when we were asked to politely leave! A huge thank you from Interact and myself to everyone who donated items and will help make Christmas that bit brighter this year for families across Darlington and the North East.



Another good Christmas deed is being done by Mrs Johnson and the Year 4 Activities group:

This term in activities 4J have been looking at different charities and the importance of supporting them. This afternoon, they have drawn pictures and made stain glass Christmas decorations that they are sending to North Tees Hospital to decorate the wards as normal Christmas decorations are not allowed this year. Mrs Johnson and Miss Jackson are delighted to see how the children wanted support the NHS and its patients.



In other places in school, thoughts are also turning towards Christmas. Year 2 parents will know that their children are rehearsing for the Christmas Show, which we hope to Zoom to Infant parents this year. I have sent a letter about this today to all parents of children in Reception to Year 2. Mrs Mawson and Mrs Elsdon have sent me the following about how the Year 2 rehearsals have been going:

Mrs Mawson and Mrs Elsdon would like to say how excited they are that the Year 2 Nativity Rehearsals have begun this week! We are so impressed how well the children have remembered their lines and are really getting into the swing of acting out their parts - it's beginning to look a lot like Christmas...!

I encountered the Year 2 children heading into the newly refurbished Liddiard Theatre earlier this week and they were very excited about being able to perform. I can't wait to see the final film!

For Mr Robson's News Quiz the countdown has also begun to the end of term and the termly prizes for the best group! Competition is always fierce...He has sent me the leaderboard this afternoon and, as it stands and with two weeks to go, the top three forms are...

1st. 7V with 92 points

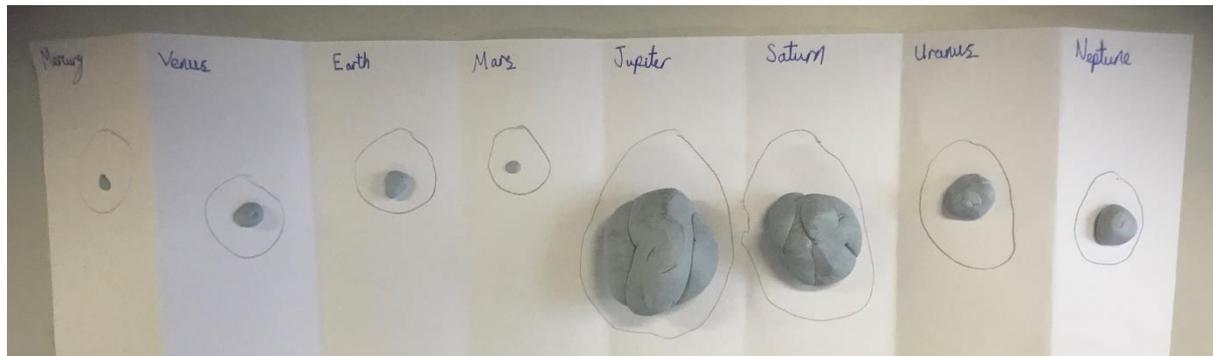
2nd 7J with 90 points

Equal 3rd 9M and 7S with 89 points

I wonder if the final two weeks of term will see any upset in the rankings?

As well as Christmas, there seems to have been a scientific focus to this week in school. Earlier this week, on one of my walks, I encountered both Year 4 classes engaged in a practical experiment about the Solar System. This report, from Mrs Hood and Mrs Johnson, tells you more about it:

Mrs Hood and Mrs Johnson, along with their classes, embarked on a journey into space this week, as part of their physics work. The teachers gave their classes a practical activity which challenged children to apply their understanding of fractions and measurement to compare the relative sizes of the eight planets and develop a more detailed understanding of the solar system in which they live. Children used blu-tack to create the planets, which were made to scale. Mrs Hood and Mrs Johnson were impressed with the children's teamwork and their ability to follow detailed instructions. Well done, Year 4.

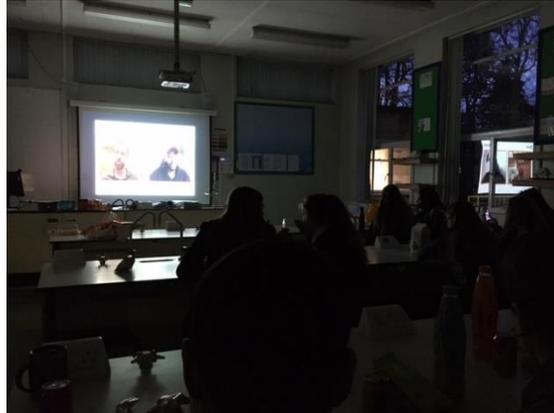


Dr Gardner has also asked me to award a CC (10 Housepoints – the highest honour!) to Archie in Year 7 for his experiment with tea bags. Having disagreed with Dr Gardner about the answer to an exam question about whether two tea bags would be better than one, Archie was challenged to prove it with an experiment, which is exactly what he did! His report, which I have been sent, identified the variables and was accompanied by a time-lapse video of tea bags diffusing to prove his point! Well done Archie- the CC is yours!

On Tuesday evening Year 10 GCSE students had the wonderful opportunity to talk to Gareth Southgate via a virtual 'Speakers for Schools' event. Mr Wilkinson – who was more than a little starstruck when I saw him afterwards – has sent this report:

This week our Y10 GCSE PE students watched a live talk from England Football Manager, Gareth Southgate about his new book and his life experiences.

We asked questions about his penalty miss and his experience of balancing his studies for GCSEs and Football. This was very inspiring for our students and super to see such an excellent turn out with around 90% of the class attending.



Next week is the start of the Mock Examinations for Year 11. In the two days that they have been back at school it has been really pleasing to see them taking advantage of the Study Club in the library after school. This provision, along with snacks and hot drinks, is available for all Year 11 students until 5.30pm throughout the period of the Mock exams – and we hope to continue it next term. Do encourage your son or daughter to attend – a quiet, warm and supportive place to study with staff and their peers on hand is a great offer and could be really helpful to those who find it harder to motivate themselves at home.

I will leave you with a picture of the Christmas tree that went up this week. I had promised the Year 11 Student Leadership Team that they could decorate it and so it looked bare for a few days while we waited for them to return. They've done a brilliant job – though it took a few goes to get it right! I considered publishing the picture of Matthew Dove wrapped in tinsel here, but I'll save that for Leavers'....



I hope you all have a good weekend – and of course that Year 11 use the time wisely to revise!

Best wishes

Kate Reid