THE MESSENGER

Dear Parents/Carers,

As we begin a new term in the early days of 2023, it is heartening to be able to share this newsletter with so much positive news from last term. We were delighted to be able to have a sense of returning to a more regular cycle of activities culminating in the party for more senior members of our local community. We are exceptionally grateful to MiQuills who provided a delicious meal for everyone who attended and to staff and students who contributed to such a wonderful event. We also enjoyed a very special whole school service of Holy Communion - the first time in a long time that we have shared a service like this as a whole school community in St. Matthew's Church.

I am acutely aware of the challenges which our communities currently face and I pray that a new year will bring a sense of hope and optimism for a positive 2023. As we enjoy the final days of the Christmas season and step into a new year, we look forward to the opportunities of the year ahead. We will be celebrating Blue Coat Sunday on 5th March 2023 with a theme of Respice Prospice, where we hope to active reengage with Old Blues and celebrate the school's long and proud history.

Mr Smith, Principal

Upcoming Dates:

3rd January
Start of spring term

9th January
Mock exams begin

12th January
Year 11 Parents Evening

26th January
Year 9 Parents Evening

Smith's Myths

The first Christmas crackers were made in the UK.

William the Conqueror was crowned on Christmas Eve.

The first Christmas song to be played in space was Jingle Bells.

St Nicholas' coat was originally green before Coca-Cola changed it to red in an advertising campaign.

Answers on next page

Young Writers Competition 2023

The Rotary Club of Walsall is holding a **creative writing competition** and Blue Coat CofE students aged between 11-15 are being invited to enter.

Young writers are being asked to submit a story or poem entitled **'Climate Change isn't Cool'.** If you would like to take part, here's what you need to know:

- Stories should be between 125 and 500 words
- Poems should be between 75 and 300 words
- Entries may be handwritten **or** typed
- All entries should be received **on** or **before Friday 17th March 2023** and should clearly display your name, age and school.
- Entries can be submitted electronically to **youngwriters@walsallrotary.org** or by post to **The Organiser, Young Writers Competition, Walsall Rotary Club, 336 Skip Lane, Walsall WS5 3RA.**

Prizes will be awarded for the **best five entries**, with the next best thirty entries all receiving special awards.

In 2022, the County Bridge Primary School won the prize for the highest number of entries into the competition and their prize was a forest of **over 300 trees** planted near their school! The trees were supplied by the Woodland Trust and planted on land supplied by Walsall Council.

Maybe **we** could win a very special prize for our entries in 2023? Good luck! From The English Department.

Prayer Corner

Jesus, as we celebrate Your birth, I pray that our hearts would be filled with joy. That this holiday season would be a time of happiness and love. A time when we remember all the good times we've had together and look forward to many more to come. Thank You for my family and friends. I pray that we would all be drawn closer to each other and to You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Trips with Mr Homer

Cambridge University College Visit

10 Year 11 students accompanied by Mr Homer visited Newnham College Cambridge. The trip was designed to show the opportunities available to our aspiring students. Here are some reviews from our students:

Great experience, definitely do this kind of thing again - Nimrah

It opened my eyes to the opportunities available at the University of Cambridge. I loved this experience - Kehinde

This experience showed me what it's like to study at Cambridge and allowed me to acquire all the information and requirements needed to get accepted. This trip was very helpful and useful - Taiwo

Carding Mill Valley Trip

A really sodden visit to Carding Mill Valley on the Long Mynd.

Years 13, 12, 11 and 10 Geographers battled up the hill in treacherous conditions. The students worked extremely hard on difficult conditions showing huge amounts of endurance and strength. While it wasn't quite the trip planned, the Geography department is proud of all the students that took part.

Birmingham A-Level Trip

Nine students went on a tour of Birmingham to complete their Geography fieldwork research. We visited Grand Central, Brindley Place, The Mailbox and Digbeth on our tour. Mr Homer was really pleased that Baseer had decided to measure the quality of water and also decided that Mr Homer was going to do it. We look forward to very successful coursework results in the New Year.

Events at the School

Year 12 Careers Fair

Each year, the world of work is changing, and it is very important that our students are equipped for these changes. We want our students to be able to make choices that will inspire them and raise their aspirations for their futures. On the 21st November Year 12 were able to attend a careers fair in the hall and speak with various training and education providers as well as people from the world of work.

The session ran successfully from 9:15am until 12:00pm and each provider was able to share the following:

• To know what opportunities, they can offer our students
• The skills/qualities and qualifications required to follow courses
• The different routes (job opportunities/careers) on offer from different organisations
• The number of students who successfully go onto employment and particularly the financial side of things

Pupils found the event useful. A few comments that were received, "I found a place that did the course I wanted to pursue in the future," and "I've learnt about the different courses that each of the universities do, and it gave me an idea of my career."

The providers that were invited in were very complimentary of our students and the event. A few even said how well prepared the pupils are when it come to the path they want to take in the future!

Year 7 Sky on Tour Experience

We were honoured to be chosen to take part in the Sky on Tour experience which promotes the **#GoZero project**. All year 7 students were able to create their campaign to consider the impact we have on the planet through playing and watching sport, and how small changes (such as repairing equipment) can reduce carbon emissions. This is part of Sky's 10-year plan to #GoZero and help the world reduce carbon emissions.

Pupils had the opportunity to put their campaign to life by using the technology that was brought into school. They were given different job roles and worked together in teams to bring the campaigns to life. They used a green screen and recording equipment but more importantly looked at the job roles that would be needed in order to complete the task set. They had so much fun and Sky were so impressed with the campaigns! Pupils went home with their own campaign that they can watch in their own time.

Christmas Party for OAPs

On Monday 5th December, the Academy's Sixth Form threw a Christmas party for residents of different care homes, such as Highgate Lodge Care Home, Cedar Falls Care Home and Pelsall Hall Care Home, as well as our very own St Matthew's OWLs (Our Wave Length)! The party included live music from the school choir, a special guest singer, popular band singer Laura Burford, a game of Bingo, a Christmas quiz and a visit and presents from Santa. A deliciously mouth-watering Christmas dinner was also served to all guests followed by pudding and, of course, lots of mince pies. A huge thank you to all the Sixth Formers who volunteered their time and made the event so special! A great time was had by all!

Science Competition Winners

Blue Coat Academy would like to say congratulations to the winners of the Science Competition, we hope you enjoy your prizes! The individual winners are: Rohan, Antoni, Kehinde, Naqeeb, Darisha, Sam, Olanike, Noreen, Alessia-Maria, Achsha, Prosper, Laibah, Sumaia, Shakayla, and Cyra. The form groups who came in first place are: 11APB, 10SJG, 9LAG/JSL, 8SSK, and 7SPK.

Macmillian Coffee Morning

On Wednesday 19th October, our Level One Pathway students hosted our annual Macmillan Coffee Morning. We managed to raise £401.24!

Online Safety - Helping You Keep Your Children Safe

Welcome to this new section of our newsletter, dedicated to helping you keep your children safe online. Over the next couple of pages you will see some useful information about Snapchat, a very popular app used by many students.

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What Parents & Carers Need to Know about

SNAPCHAT

AGE RESTRICTION 13+

Snapchat is a photo- and video-sharing app which also allows users to chat with friends via text or audio. Users can share images and videos with specific friends, or through a 'story' (documenting the previous 24 hours) visible to their entire friend list. Snapchat usage rose during the pandemic, with many young people utilising it to connect with their peers. The app continues to develop features to engage an even larger audience and emulate current trends, rivalling platforms such as TikTok and Instagram.

CONNECTING WITH STRANGERS

Even if your child only connects on the app with people they know, they may still receive friend requests from strangers. Snapchat's links with apps such as Wink and Hoop have increased this possibility. Accepting a request means that children are then disclosing personal information through the Story, SnapMap and Spotlight features. This could allow predators to gain their trust for sinister purposes.

EXCESSIVE USE

There are many features that are attractive to users and keep them excited about the app. Snap streaks encourage users to send snaps daily, Spotlight Challenges give users to the chance to obtain money and online fame, and the Spotlight feature's scroll of videos makes it easy for children to spend hours watching content.

INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

Some videos and posts on Snapchat are not suitable for children. The hashtags used to group content are determined by the poster, so an innocent search term could still yield age-inappropriate results. The app's Discover function lets users swipe through snippets of news stories and trending articles that often include adult content. There is currently no way to turn off this feature.

SEXTING

Sexting continues to be a risk associated with Snapchat. The app's 'disappearing messages' feature makes it easy for young people (teens in particular) to share explicit images on impulse. While these pictures *do* disappear – and the sender is notified if it has been screenshotted first – users have found alternative methods to save images, such as taking pictures with a separate device.

DAMAGE TO CONFIDENCE

Snapchat's filters and lenses are a popular way for users to enhance their 'selfie game'. Although many are designed to entertain or amuse, the 'beautify' filters on photos can set unrealistic body image expectations and create feelings of inadequacy. Comparing themselves unfavourably against other Snapchat users could threaten a child's confidence or sense of self-worth.

VISIBLE LOCATION

My Places lets users check in and search for popular spots nearby – such as restaurants, parks or shopping centres – and recommend them to their friends. The potential issue with a young person consistently checking into locations on Snapchat is that it allows other users in their friends list (even people they have only ever met online) to see where they currently are and where they regularly go.

Advice for Parents & Carers

TURN OFF QUICK ADD

The Quick Add function helps people find each other on the app. This function works based on mutual friends or whether someone's number is in your child's contacts list. Explain to your child that this feature could potentially make their profile visible to strangers. We recommend that your child turns off Quick Add, which can be done in the settings (accessed via the cog icon).

CHAT ABOUT CONTENT

Talk to your child about what is and isn't wise to share on Snapchat (e.g. don't post explicit images or videos, or display identifiable details like their school uniform). Remind them that once something is online, the creator loses control over where it might end up – and who with. Additionally, Snapchat's 'Spotlight' feature has a #challenge like TikTok's: it's vital that your child understands the potentially harmful consequences of taking part in these challenges.

CHOOSE GOOD CONNECTIONS

Snapchat has recently announced that it is rolling out a new safety feature: users will receive notifications reminding them of the importance of maintaining connections with people they actually know well, as opposed to strangers. This 'Friend Check Up' encourages users to delete connections with users they rarely communicate with, to maintain their online safety and privacy.

KEEP ACCOUNTS PRIVATE

Profiles are private by default, but children may make them public to gain more followers. Your child can send Snaps directly to friends, but Stories are visible to everyone they have added, unless they change the settings. If they use SnapMaps, their location is visible unless 'Ghost Mode' is enabled (again via settings). It's prudent to emphasise the importance of not adding people they don't know in real life. This is particularly important with the addition of My Places, which allows other Snapchatters to see the places your child regularly visits and checks in. Additionally, it's important to be cautious about Shared Stories as this allows people who are not on your contact list access to the post.

TALK ABOUT SEXTING

It may feel like an awkward conversation (and one that young people can be reluctant to have) but it is important to talk openly and non-judgementally about sexting. Discuss the legal implications of sending, receiving or sharing explicit images, as well as the possible emotional impact. Emphasise that your child should never feel pressured into sexting – and that if they receive unwanted explicit images, they should tell a trusted adult straight away.

BE READY TO BLOCK AND REPORT

If a stranger *does* connect with your child on Snapchat and begins to make them feel uncomfortable through bullying, pressure to send explicit images or by sending explicit images to them, your child can select the three dots on that person's profile and choose report or block. There are options to state why they are reporting that user (annoying or malicious messages, spam, or masquerading as someone else, for example).

Meet Our Expert

Dr Claire Sutherland is an online safety consultant, educator and researcher who has developed and implemented anti-bullying and cyber safety policies for schools. She has written various academic papers and carried out research for the Australian government comparing internet use and sexting behaviour of young people in the UK, USA and Australia.

National Online Safety
#WakeUpWednesday

Users of this guide do so at their own discretion. No liability is entered into. Amended: 04.07.2022

What Parents & Carers Need to Know about
SENDIT

Age rating:
12+ App Store
Teen Google Play
However, Sendit's own terms and conditions state that it was developed for the 17+ age group

Sendit is an add-on to Snapchat, not a standalone app: it requires users to have an active Snapchat account, which they then connect to Sendit. It's important that trusted adults realise, therefore, that any risks associated with Snapchat also affect children using Sendit. Within the app, people play question games like 'Truth or Dare' and 'Never Have I Ever': users select a question to share on their Snapchat story for their friends to reply to. All responses are anonymous, although – for paying subscribers – Sendit reveals hints about who sent which messages.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

ANONYMOUS RESPONSES
Anonymity online encourages people to say things and act in ways that they normally wouldn't. They're less accountable, and it's harder to track who sent a message. Research has highlighted that children perceive anonymous messages as being more severe than if the *same* message had come from a friend. Any app that lets children communicate anonymously should be treated with caution.

MENTAL HEALTH IMPACT
Categories of questions such as "Ask me anything" or "Rate me" – coupled with the app's anonymity – mean there is a likelihood of some friends or strangers (if the account is set to 'public') responding in a negative manner. These critical comments (especially if there are several) could ruin a young person's self-esteem – heightening their insecurities and affecting their mental health.

MEMBERSHIP COSTS
Currently costing £8.49 per week, Sendit's Diamond Membership offers clues about who sent a particular message, such as their approximate location, the type of phone used and any mutual friends. Membership also provides exclusive games and an ad-free experience. Young people may well be curious to find out who certain messages are from and therefore sign up for membership.

BULLYING AND HARASSMENT
Open-ended questions which relate personally to the sender are an opportunity for malicious people to make offensive remarks, which can lead to full-blown bullying and harassment. Additionally, bullies and trolls can hide behind the anonymity that Sendit offers, feeling more powerful and able to intimidate their target – who, by contrast, feels hurt, victimised and helpless.

POSSIBLE GROOMING
If your child doesn't have their Snapchat account set to private, or they have previously added strangers as friends, there is a possibility of predators responding to their Sendit questions. They do this in an attempt to gather information about your child – or to initiate a conversation with them, seeking ultimately to form an online 'friendship' and gain the young person's trust.

REPEATED ENGAGEMENT
On Sendit, users receive trophies for reaching a particular number of responses, for answering friends' questions and for posting their own. This sense of achievement could incentivise a young person to be active on Sendit more frequently – spending more time on their phone or tablet as they may naturally want to collect all of the trophies or might be competing with their peers.

Advice for Parents & Carers

ENCOURAGE EMPATHY
If your child has already downloaded Sendit, it might be wise to have a discussion with them about the impact that saying something anonymously online could have on others. Encourage them to think about how *they* would feel if they were on the receiving end of a particular comment. Reminding them to stop and re-read messages before sending could reduce the number of regrettable situations.

BLOCK IN-APP PURCHASES
Even if you *do* allow your child to use Sendit, you might want to consider talking to them in advance about whether they really need a membership subscription. Either way, it's probably safest to make sure that in-app purchases are blocked in the settings, or that you have configured your child's device to ask for your approval before making a purchase online.

TALK IT OVER
Before allowing a young person onto a social networking app, it's a good idea to chat with them about the possibility of receiving hurtful comments. Explain that not everyone online is nice; that people often say things they don't mean; and that posts get misinterpreted. Teach your child not to reply to any offensive users on Sendit and simply block them instead (via the three dots in the top right of the screen).

ONLY PLAY WITH FRIENDS
Stress the importance of your child playing Sendit games only with their close friends and not having strangers on their contacts list. This should help to keep the nature of the questions light-hearted – and if the games are being played among a small group, it will be easier for the members to figure out who gave certain answers if someone's been left feeling hurt or uncomfortable by any responses.

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