



# THE MESSENGER



**Dear Parents & Carers**

**"The final edition of the newsletter for this academic year is a fitting celebration of the wide range of activities which have been going on in school during this term. As we draw towards the end of a very busy school year, it is important to reflect on the significant achievements which are evident across the school. This are reflected in a 'Good' judgement from the Ofsted inspection and 'Excellent' from the most recent SIAMs inspection.**

**While we take a break over the summer, work will be on going in school on an extensive heating replacement project in the Main Building and some road safety improvements on Birmingham Street, outside of the school. Both projects will limit access to the school at various times over the summer holidays.**

**I am always humbled by the commitment and dedication of the staff at Blue Coat – I am thankful and grateful for all of their hard work over the course of this year in supporting the efforts of our students to achieve their best and to grow into active citizens within our community. I would like to wish all of the staff, who are moving on to new challenges at the end of term, well for the future.**

**I hope and pray that all of our Blue Coat families will have a peaceful break over the summer and look forward to the new challenges which a new school year will bring in September."**

## UPCOMING DATES

- A Level Results Day – 17th August
- GCSE Results Day – 24th August
- Staff Training Days – 4th & 5th September
- Yrs 7, 12 & 13 return – 6th September
- Y11 return – 7th September
- Yrs 8, 9 & 10 return – 8th September



## SMITH'S MYTHS

- A: Elizabethan scribe Peter Bales produced a complete, hand-written copy of the Bible so small it could fit inside a walnut shell.
- B: Cricket originated in Sri Lanka.
- C: Muay Thai is known as "The Science of 8 Limbs".

## PRAYER CORNER

Heavenly Father, we thank you for this summer break. We pray for your protection over us as we enjoy time with family and friends. Keep us safe from all accidents and harm. Please help us to remember all of the blessings You have given us as we enjoy this time off. In Jesus' name, Amen.

# WORKSHOPS

## 5UP Gym

Over the summer term there have been lots of workshops and opportunities. We have had a group of student attend 5up gym in Handsworth to work alongside some of the coaches there. One of which is world Thai Boxing champion Nathan Bendon. The Year 9 students had a great session there.



## Walsall College

We have also visited Walsall College for a taster construction session. We took a small group of year 9s and 10s, they were able to see what courses are on offer to them and what they need to pursue a career in construction. They also completed a carpentry session and learned how to make a joint in 2 pieces of wood.



# WORKSHOPS

## Lovells

Next, we went to visit Lovells construction site in Oldbury. The students got to see what careers are available in construction and experience some time on a site for a new build site, they had the opportunity to ask questions about how they apply for jobs and what qualifications they need to get into the industry. We finished the trip by looking around one of the completed houses.



## Stephen Seki

Finally, this week we had Stephen Seki visit us to talk to Year 8. He spoke about his inspirational journey. He spoke to the students about how he was a farmer in Uganda up until the age of 10 then moved to the UK to be reunited with his Mum. He then went on to tell the students about his journey in education to become a pharmacist.



# WORKSHOPS

## Year 12 Lionheart Challenge

The Lion Heart challenge is an enterprise programme where young people work in groups of 12 to identify a problem affecting people in their area and then create a solution in the form of a product or project. The groups must present their solution to a group of judges – business people who give up their day to work with the young people, assessing their products and providing feedback and guidance.

The winning group wanted to address poor health and nutrition by creating a sports day for children from 5 to 18. This would involve the families and be held locally in a large place like the Arboretum. Equipment for the event would be borrowed from schools and the council. Funding would be provided by the NCS (National Citizens Council) and a relationship with the nearest supermarket - Morrisons would provide drinks and refreshments. This group stood out from the other three because of their sound business plan and marketing strategy as well as the main event plan.

Congratulations to Areeba, Malaika, Ferooz, Zohya, Haris, Blessing, Zoe, La'Shantay, Gbolahan, Desmond, Kevi and Tristan.

Many thanks to Mr Howell and Mr Morris-Casey for being part of the judging panel for the whole day.



# SCHOOL EVENTS

## U13 Cricket Team

Our U13 Cricket team have progressed throughout the year and finished by being crowned as champions of the Walsall Chance to Shine Tournament.

The boys overcame a difficult group, beating Walsall Academy and Bloxwich Academy. The lads faced a difficult semi final task against an Aldridge side full of club cricketers, but a fantastic performance saw Blue Coat win by 60 runs.

The final was a close encounter against St Francis, but the boys ran out deserved winners. Player of the tournament was Ahmad.



# SCHOOL EVENTS

## Year 12 Staffordshire University Trip

On Wednesday 12th July, Mrs Napper, Mr Hewitt, Mr Lowe and Miss Webley took the Year 12 students to Staffordshire University, as part of Year 12 Futures Week.

After introductions from Student Ambassadors, the Year 12's were given a tour of the campus, allowing them to see the facilities the University has to offer. We saw the University Gym, the Automotive Resource centre, and the incredible Art facilities.

The students then took part in a myth busting quiz, making sure students felt confident about access to university and what it allows them to do in the future.

After lunch, the students had a session on personal statement's where they were given thorough guidance on how to construct their personal statement as part of their UCAS application. It allowed students to have a think about the amazing things they have already done, as well as giving them the opportunity to ask questions about what to include, and how to make sure they fit it into only 4000 characters!

The students had a great day and thoroughly enjoyed their visit to Staffordshire University!



# SCHOOL EVENTS

## Young Muslim Writers Awards 2023

Muslim Hands is looking for young people aged between 5 and 16 to enter its annual creative writing competition.

There is the chance to win **£100!**

Are you a budding playwright, poet, journalist or storyteller?  
Do you feel you have what it takes to impress a panel of judges?

If you're one of this year's shortlisted writers, you'll be invited to the awards ceremony, receive a certificate, and receive a bag of books!

The closing date is midnight on Sunday 6th August 2023.

For more information, please see Miss Duncombe in the English Office.

## Year 11 Prom

Year 11s celebrated the end of their exams in style at the Village Hotel on the 30th June. The pupils dressed to impress and an amazing time was had by all who attended!



A night to remember!



# SCHOOL EVENTS

## Diversity Day

On Friday 23rd June we celebrated our annual Diversity Day. This was a wonderful day where everyone in school could celebrate their cultures and what it means to be different.

We had workshops from Dreadlock Alien; who taught the students how to write poems, Bhangra dancing lessons, and pupils created flag banners in time for our parade up to St. Matthew's Church.

Once we'd got into church, it was time for the show to commence! It was fantastic to see all students dressed up in their cultural dress, dancing on stage and supporting their peers.

Our students had the best time, and can't wait to do it all again next year!



# SCHOOL EVENTS

## Summer Prize Evening

On Thursday 13th July we celebrated our annual 'Summer Prize Evening' at St. Matthew's Church. This was an opportunity to praise and reward students, across years 7, 8, 9, 10 and 12 who had made exceptional effort and progress across a wide range of subject areas; achieved outstanding attendance or those who had made contributions to our student leadership teams, this academic year.

Almost two hundred students received awards, and we were pleased to be able to celebrate their success with their friends and family. We were also joined by Valerie Vaz, MP for Walsall South, who kindly presented awards, alongside our Principal, Mr Smith, and gave an inspirational speech to students and guests.

Mr Gardner and the choir, the 'True Blues', delighted us with a series of performances, including a rendition of 'Stand Up' by Cynthia Erivo, from the motion picture 'Harriet', which they had recorded at a professional recording studio.

The evening also provided an opportunity for us to introduce our new student leadership team, including our Student Principals, who gave their first address to students, staff and guests.

We would like to thank all those who attended and to once again, congratulate all of our award winners.



# What Parents & Carers Need to Know about AI VIRTUAL FRIENDS

Artificial intelligence – particularly in terms of how it generates natural language – has seen significant development over the last six months, with companies releasing new AI-based software or adding an AI element to existing apps (such as Snapchat, for example). One form of AI to become especially popular has been the 'AI friend' or chatbot, as children eagerly experiment with these new-found computer-generated companions. There are now numerous apps available with this 'virtual friend' functionality, with the likelihood of it being added to other successful platforms soon.

## WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

### CONTENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

AI chatbots may not always be able to recognise when content is age inappropriate or harmful and should be filtered out. So there's a possibility that children could be exposed to offensive language or explicit material while conversing with their virtual friend. The companies producing such AI solutions are also unlikely to take responsibility for any content that their algorithms generate.

D@\*#!

### REDUCED SOCIAL CONTACT

An excessive reliance on chatbots for social interaction could potentially cause a child to begin reducing the amount of face-to-face communication they have, leading to social isolation. If young people become dependent on chatbots to provide companionship, it could very likely hinder the development of their real-life social skills.

### LACK OF SENSITIVITY

Chatbot software isn't always sophisticated enough to pick up on subtle emotional cues or recognise signs of distress in children, as most humans would. It might therefore fail to respond appropriately. AI misinterpreting what it's being told or replying insensitively to a young user who's already struggling could potentially impact a child's emotional wellbeing or exacerbate any existing emotional issues.

### UNINTENTIONAL BIAS

AI companions are only as reliable as the information they've been programmed with. The algorithms they use, therefore, may unintentionally promote bias, stereotypes or discriminatory behaviour (as many originate from the USA or the UK, for instance, they can display a distinctly western-centric worldview). This could lead to children developing skewed attitudes and behaviours.

### COGNITIVE LIMITATIONS

Although many are now undeniably advanced, AI-powered chatbots still have limitations in terms of understanding complex concepts, context and nuance. Depending heavily on chatbots to help with learning or solving problems may stunt the development of a child's own powers of critical thinking, creativity and ability to engage in open-ended discussions with other people.

### PRIVACY CONCERNS

Chatbots typically collect data about users, including personal information and conversations. This is ostensibly to improve their performance as they gradually learn about our behaviour – but many experts are warning that there may be significant risks associated with how this information is stored and used (the possibility of potential breaches or misuse by third parties, for instance).

## Advice for Parents & Carers

### CHAT ABOUT CHATBOTS

If your child is already expressing an interest in AI apps, a relaxed, natural chat should help you to discover which ones they're aware of and how they're using them (or are planning to). Discuss these options with your child and perhaps do your own research to ensure you think they're suitable. Once you're totally happy, you could sit with your young one and begin exploring AI chatbots together.

### CREATE A SAFE ENVIRONMENT

If your child is keen to engage with AI chatbots, encourage them to do so in a safe environment: ideally in a shared space at home, so you can easily keep an eye and ear on their progress. Set up appropriate content filtering measures in advance – and gently remind them that you'll be close by and ready to help with any questions or concerns that may arise.

### FIND A BALANCE

Work alongside your child to establish the right balance in terms of how they might use AI-powered chatbots – and when it's appropriate. It's important to make sure that children are still getting plenty of opportunities to learn to solve problems for themselves, as well as building their interpersonal skills through face-to-face conversations with friends, family members and teachers.

### TAKE CONTROL

As with any form of app or game, when it comes to AI chatbots we'd strongly recommend that you consider employing parental controls (either on the device being used or within the software itself) to manage which apps your child can download and use. This is particularly important for younger children, who may be more at risk of being upset or frightened by inappropriate content.

### RECOGNISE THE RISKS

It's unlikely that most children will have even considered the potential risks attached to having a virtual companion. So it's probably wise to explain some of the possible hazards and challenges of AI chatbots to your child. In particular, emphasise that AI isn't a real person (however much it might sound like one) and may occasionally tell them something that isn't entirely impartial or accurate.

## Meet Our Expert

A Certified Information Systems Security Professional (CISSP), Gary Henderson is the Director of IT at a large boarding school in the UK, having previously taught in schools and colleges in Britain and the Middle East. With a particular interest in digital citizenship and cyber security, he believes it is essential that we become more aware of the risks around technology, as well as the benefits.



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