



St Mary's C of E Primary School

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Newsletter No. 2

Wednesday 25th September 2024

Dear Parents and Carers,

We've had a superb few weeks in school and it's been a pleasure to welcome the Reception children into our St. Mary's family. There's lots to tell you and some important dates to share, so please read carefully!

Collective Worship:

This half term, we continue to be inspired by our memory verse 'Be a light for other people. Live, so they will see the good things you do.' We have learned the Makaton signs for some of these words – do ask the children to show you.

We've reflected on different ways we can shine our light and do good things at home, school, Barnet, England and in the whole world. Examples include smiling, helping out at home, offering to help a friend who is hurt, litter picking and avoiding polluting rivers and streams – lots of recognition of our role in being good stewards in God's world.

We've recently made an exciting connection with the [Good Samaritan School for the Deaf](#) to support the children's understanding of Christianity as a Global faith. The school is in Uganda and we plan to share our very different experiences in school with one another with the added ambition of shattering stereotypes. The children are so keen and have already thought about questions to ask. We will be writing (with pen and paper!) to the children with a view to receiving a reply.

In preparation for this, we are learning lines of the Lord's Prayer in British Sign Language which has been a wonderful challenge for the children. We are all learning!



Harvest Festival:

On **Tuesday 1st October**, we will be celebrating Harvest festival in school. Please give what you can – all donations will be split between the Chipping Barnet Food Bank and Homeless Action in Barnet.

We ask for donations to be **brought to the school hall as the children arrive for school on Monday morning**. Please bring donations in a strong plastic bag as we will donate these too.



URGENTLY NEEDED FOOD ITEMS

TINNED MEAT

PASTA SAUCES

RICE

COFFEE

JAM

Please don't include any fresh fruit and vegetables in your donations.

Here is a [link to Homeless Action in Barnet's online wish list](#) which includes bigger items like bedding should you wish to donate to HAB directly.

Music Mark Award:

We are delighted to announce that Barnet Education Arts Trust (BEAT) have recognised the value that we place on music at St. Mary's School by giving us a prestigious Music Mark Award. We are immensely proud of this achievement and the recognition that we provide so many opportunities for the children to have enriching musical experiences at school.



PROUD TO BE A
MUSIC MARK
SCHOOL
2024 - 2025

Justice and Equity:

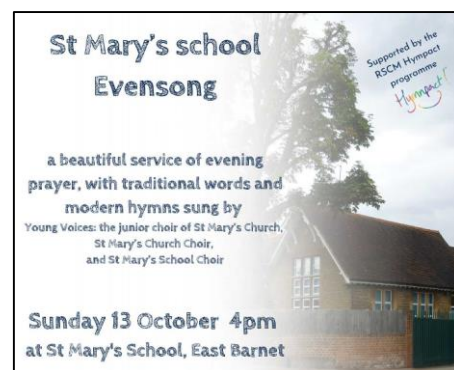
Our reflections in collective worship will include continued work on understanding justice and equity in all its forms so we will once again participate in **'wear red day'** on Friday 18th October, in support of the organisation 'Show Racism the Red Card'. The children should wear uniform or PE kit (as usual or a Friday) **and a red item** e.g. a red t shirt, red socks, red hair band etc. Any donations towards the cause can be made directly [via their website](#).

Evensong Service at School: Sunday 13th October 4pm

We are really looking forward to a special Evensong service that will bring the church congregation and the school community together at St. Mary's School.

Our school choir will be singing some modern hymns at the service to show case their beautiful voices too.

Please do come along and join us for the service.



Speaking to teachers:

If you have an urgent message that you need to relay to your child's teacher in the morning, please either **call and speak to someone in the office, or tell the senior member of staff on the gate** and we will speak to the relevant person. **Please don't come into classrooms** at the start of the day as this is a very busy time and teachers will be focused on settling the children. Thank you for your cooperation.



Friends of St. Mary's (FOSM):

Thank you so much for your ongoing support. Our next fundraising focus will be on the ongoing development of outdoor spaces at school. Money raised at every cake sale, event and fayre will go directly towards improving facilities for the children.



Here are a few dates to keep in mind:

- **Friday 4th October at 9am:** Coffee morning for parents and carers of children in Reception. Please come along at school drop off time and have a cuppa in the school library. Pre-schoolers welcome. This will be a chance to meet other Reception parents and to meet some of our FOSM members too.
- **Wednesday 9th October at 6.30pm:** FOSM Annual General Meeting followed by committee meeting. This will be in the school hall – glass of wine and nibbles on offer as well as opportunities to hear about the FOSM's success last year and plans looking ahead. **Everybody is welcome to come along** – this meeting is open to all parents and carers at St. Mary's. There is no expectation to stay to the committee meeting after the AGM.
- **FOSM non uniform day – Thursday 10th October.** Details to follow.
- **Friday 25th October:** Y6 cake and fruit sale - pick up your treats on the playground at home time. Bring some cash and a bag or container to take goodies home.

Smartphones: Childhood is too short to spend on a smartphone

I am sure that many of you have seen coverage in the press recently about the detrimental effects of smartphones on young people.

In June of this year, seventeen state schools out of twenty in Southwark announced that they were taking collective action to shift away from pupil usage of smartphones. In North London, you may be aware of the Smartphone Free Childhood campaign: <https://smartphonefreechildhood.co.uk/>

What's the problem with kids and smartphones?

When children first started getting smartphones a decade ago, there was no research about their impact. Now there is, and it's overwhelming. Exposing children to things their brains aren't yet developed enough to deal with can cause a whole host of problems, from triggering anxiety and eating disorders, to opening the door to cyberbullying or sexual predators, according to the latest research.

We work very hard at school to teach the children about their safety online but when smartphones are involved the potential risks are significant.

Concerns include:

- Harmful content - 90% of girls and 50% of boys say they're sent explicit content they didn't want to see.
- Addiction - 1 in 4 young adults show signs of behavioural addiction to smartphones.
- Academic distraction - Studies show that excessive smartphone use has negative impacts on academic performance. Children at schools with effective smartphone bans get GCSE's 1-2 grades higher.
- Grooming - Since 2022, there has been a 66% rise in 'self-generated' sexual abuse imagery of children under 10.
- Cyberbullying - Disagreements between pupils used to stop at the school gate, now they follow children wherever they go, 24/7.
- Mental Health - Rates of depression, anxiety and suicide in young people have spiked globally since 2010, when children first began getting smartphones. The first generation to grow up with smartphones are now adults – data shows that the younger they got their first smartphone, the worse their mental health is today.
- Opportunity cost - For the first time in human history, children are spending more time on devices than they are playing – an activity crucial to our healthy development. Smartphones are 'experience blockers', distracting children from engaging in the real world. The average UK 12-year-old now spends 29 hours a week – equivalent to a part-time job – on their smartphone. This leaves little time for the real world activities and relationships that enable us to learn the essential life skills we need to transition into adulthood.

Parents have been put in an impossible position

They either...

Give children access to an adult product that opens the door to harmful content, addictive algorithms and the anxiety machine that is social media.

Or they...

Risk alienating them from their peers at a crucial stage of their development.

It's a lose-lose; for parents, children and society. But there is a mission to fix it.

The smartphone free childhood campaign's mission is to change the cultural norm that children are given smartphones, and challenge Big Tech's ever-increasing colonisation of childhood. They'll do it by:

- Growing the national conversation about the harms of smartphones for children.
- Empowering parents and schools to take collective action and create change at a local level.
- Putting pressure on government and tech companies to help us protect children.

Just as we marvel at the fact cigarette companies used to market their products as healthy, people will look back on this era and ask why children weren't better protected from Big Tech.

What are we asking you to do?

- If your child already has a smartphone, take a moment to think about the campaign.
- **PLEASE take 5 minutes** to look on the [smartphone free childhood website](#) and consider signing the [parent pact](#) or [find a local What App group for parents](#) to connect with other parents in your neighbourhood, to share ideas, find solidarity and hear what steps others are taking to keep childhood smartphone free.
- Take time to speak to your child about this in an age appropriate way.
- **If your Y6 child is an independent traveller and they carry a mobile phone with them for security**, we kindly ask that this phone is not a smartphone. We appreciate that a non-smartphone is not trackable so recommend buying an AirTag to put on the phone or in a school bag if you wish. A list of alternative phones to smartphones can be found [here](#). MANY local secondary schools have already adopted this policy. **We'd like to action this decision from 5th November to give more time to sourcing an alternative phone if necessary.**

Just One Tree Day:

As part of our commitment to climate change, we will be supporting the organisation Just One Tree again this year.



[Just One Tree is a non-profit organisation](#) whose mission is removing CO2 from the atmosphere through global reforestation.

Last year, we planted an amazing 278 trees in Madagascar. This supported local communities, encouraged biodiversity and is contributing toward the reduction of effects caused by climate change.

Why should we plant more trees?

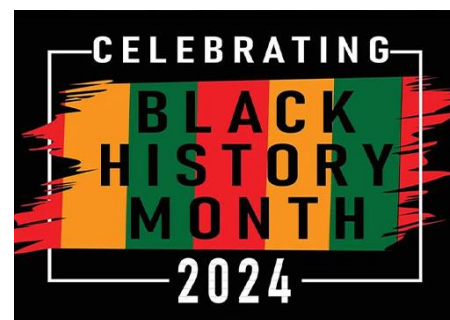
- Trees absorb the pollutants we humans put into the atmosphere.
- They clean the air we breathe, filter the water we drink, prevent soil erosion and flooding, give life to the world's wildlife, house complex ecosystems, supply us with medicine and provide jobs to over 1.6 billion people.
- They really are the superheroes of the planet and we need them in order to survive.

You can donate £1 or whatever you'd like to give, by clicking our [school fundraising page here](#). For **every** pound donated, **one** tree will be planted.

Black History Month:

We will have various workshops in school during October to highlight this important time of year. Whilst we always mark Black History Month we are immensely proud of our curriculum which features diverse authors, scientists, artists, musicians, history units, and so much more.

We're also looking forward to inviting an author called Talya Bruck, into school who'll be leading a book reading with Year 4. She'll be sharing her book *Tiana's Tale* which explores the themes of racism and inclusion.



On the same day, at home time on Thursday 24th October, the author will have a book sale in the hall – all of her books are therapeutic stories that can be used with children of all ages. Do pop along to the sale!

Other key dates:

- Tuesday 1st October: Harvest festival – food bank donations welcome.
- Wednesday 9th October: Y6 trip
- Thursday 10th October: Y1 parent workshop - 6pm at school.
- Sunday 13th October at 4pm: Evensong service at school – all welcome!
- Wednesday 16th October: Y4 parent meeting 6pm at school – Y4 residential trip
- Thursday 17th October: YR parent workshop - 6pm at school.
- Friday 18th October: Wear something red for Show Racism the Red Card
- Tuesday 22nd October: Black History workshop for KS2
- Thursday 24th October: Y4 author visit and book sale in the hall after school



From all of us at St Mary's School, stay safe, stay well and our love and prayers are with you as always.

Maria Constantinou

Headteacher

