



UNIVERSITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM  
SCHOOL

# UOB SCHOOL NEWSLETTER

Autumn Edition 2024 | Issue 14





# CONTENTS

Message from the Principal	1
UoB School win at the Stephen Spender Prize	2
Launching our NEW School College System	3
Bridge Building	4
T1 Rugby Team shines at Allianz Stadium	5
Pupil celebrates after Paralympic Games Performance!	6
Swimming to Success	7
Friends of the School	8
Physicists Explore Nuclear Physics at UoB	9
Duke of Edinburgh Award Updates	10
Winter Concert	11
Award Ceremonies 2024	13
Supporting Trainee Teachers at UoB School	14
Educational Exchange	14
A Journey Through History	15
Community Spirit	15
In Other News...	16
The Book Nook	19
Term Dates & Useful Contacts	22

# MESSAGE FROM THE PRINCIPAL

Dear Parents, Carers, and Friends of the School.

It is my pleasure to introduce this newsletter – autumn 2024. As ever, the collective determination across our School community to put in place the best education and development for our young citizens, shines through. I am grateful to each of my colleagues for their care, expertise, and professionalism – together we are greater than the sum of our parts. I appreciate also the strong and purposeful working partnerships we hold with our parents, carers, and family members. In its absence the successes, accomplishments, and potential of our children would surely be diminished.



*Delighted to commend individual endeavour and accomplishments, across all of our year groups.*

We continue our institutional journey to establish exceptional all-round provision, standards, and thus outcomes. I have always been and remain an advocate of excellence – to aim lower or accept less limits the possibilities we lay open for pupils, students, and staff. Of course, excellence takes hard work, perseverance, and intent. I observe these characteristics daily and with delight – and at the end of this busy term typified through this newsletter.



*'The secret of making dreams come true can be summarised in four 'C's. They are Curiosity, Confidence, Courage, and Constancy; and the greatest of these is Confidence.'*

*Walt Disney  
Animator, film producer, voice actor, and entrepreneur  
(USA, 1901-1966)*

At the start of January, an annual point of renewal, we shall continue with our ambitions. This includes in particular the support and challenge for our current year 11 pupils and year 13 students – with sights set on aspirational personal excellence. Through diligence and drive, alongside thoughtfulness for their peers I encourage each individual to grow in character and prepare well for examination success ahead. In so doing, dreams known or yet to be discovered, can become a reality with confidence.

In the meantime, and at this time of year, individuals, families, and communities seize an opportunity to slow a little – to rest, to reflect, to recharge – and to connect with those nearest and dearest to us.

Wishing you Season's Greetings, a blessed Hanukkah, and a peaceful Christmas.

**Colin Townsend**

# UOB SCHOOL WIN AT THE STEPHEN SPENDER PRIZE

The Stephen Spender Prize is a leading annual award that celebrates the art of poetry translation. It provides a platform for poets and translators of all ages to share their love for languages and literature with a wider audience.

This year, UoB School Sixth Form student, Ana, emerged as one of three winners nationally in the Schools Laureate Post 16 category. Ana's achievement is a testament to her creativity, and passion for poetry and translation. Winning this award is no small feat, as it involves a deep understanding of both the source language and the target language, as well as the ability to convey the original poem's tone, rhythm, and meaning.



Ana selected Romanian Poet Alexandru Macedonski's poem 'Rondelul rozelor ce mor' translated as Rondel of the Dying Roses. Her winning entry stood out for its eloquent translation and the way it captured the essence of the original poem. By carefully selecting words and phrases that resonate in the target language, Ana managed to retain the emotional depth of the original work. "I considered the form of the poem to be essential...I knew I needed to keep it, and the rhyme pattern. Consequently, it was difficult to directly translate everything in each verse, however, I believe that even with the altered phrasing, the atmosphere and feeling was retained." Ana.

"Taking part in the Stephen Spender Prize encourages our young people to engage with languages and literature, fostering a deeper appreciation for cultural diversity and artistic expression. It demonstrates how languages can transcend boundaries and connect people from different cultures.

Many of our pupils and students from all year groups have been taking part in translation workshops (funded by the University of Birmingham Impact Accelerator Award with Dr Emma Wagstaff) in English and Languages lessons throughout the year, inspiring many to submit their work for the competition. I would like to say well done to all those who entered their work, including pupil Rithicka who received a special commendation in the lower school category." Mrs L Holleran, Subject Leader for Languages at UoB School.

A special thank you and congratulations goes out to Mrs Holleran, who was awarded the 'Outstanding Teacher Commendation' for her, and the wider department's, work on translation and languages.

[You can read 'Rondel of the Dying Roses', translated by Ana here.](#)

FOLLOW US



@uobschool

# LAUNCHING OUR NEW SCHOOL COLLEGE SYSTEM

This academic year, we are thrilled to announce the launch of our new College System, bringing a fresh and exciting development to our School community. Our new colleges are named after iconic University of Birmingham buildings: Muirhead, Munrow, Bramall, Barber, Lapworth, and Winterbourne, celebrating our connection with the University and aims to inspire our pupils and students to aim higher.

## Building Community & Pride

Every pupil, student, and staff member has been randomly assigned to one of these colleges. Each has received a badge to represent their college, which they wear with pride, fostering a sense of belonging and community spirit. Our colleges will compete for the prestigious 'College Cup' each year, with college points awarded for demonstrating a range of virtues.



## College Competitions

Staff have earned points through a creative 'selfie-competition' themed around the college building they represent. In the library, points have been awarded for perseverance in reading and for writing book reviews. We have also reintroduced our popular rowing competition, utilising our newly refurbished activity studio. College teams have shown dedication by using the rowing machines before and after School, as well as during breaks and lunch times. For many, this was a new skill, showcasing their courage and willingness to try something new.



## Recognising Virtues & Achievements

Every Friday, during enrichment sessions, staff allocate a 'golden ticket' to pupils and students who have enacted outstanding character virtues. These tickets contribute to the weekly college points totals, shared during form time each week alongside green stamps. This system recognises and celebrates the virtues that are essential to personal growth and community success.

### Leadership Opportunities

We have recently launched positions for our College Leadership Team and are taking applications from pupils and students in Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5 to lead their college across the School, build camaraderie, and get thinking creatively of new ways to benefit from our college system. Shortly after their appointments, they will be seeking College Ambassadors to support them from Key Stage 3 pupils. This will be entirely pupil and student led, offering an excellent opportunity to develop leadership skills.

### Fostering Relationships and Courage

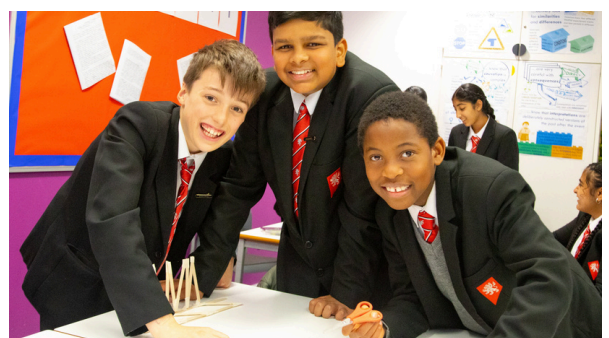
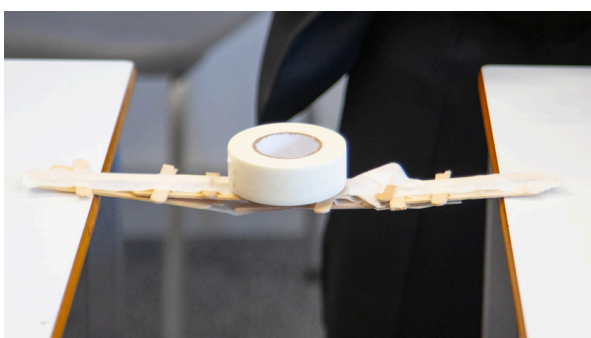
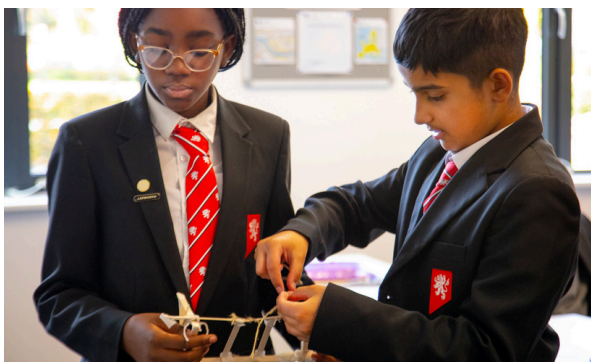
We are hopeful that our pupils and students will continue to build strong relationships across the School, practising kindness and showing the courage to participate in new activities. This relaunch of our college system is more than just a competition; it is an opportunity for personal growth, teamwork, and the celebration of shared achievements.

## BRIDGE BUILDING CHALLENGE

Year 7 pupils participated in an exciting and educational bridge-building enrichment, guided by engineers from Mott MacDonald. The activity was designed to give pupils a glimpse into the world of civil engineering, as part of our ongoing aspirations programme aimed at exploring various career paths, particularly in STEMM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics, and Medicine).

The challenge was to construct a bridge that meets specific dimensions and can support the most weight possible. The catch? Pupils could only use wooden lollipop sticks, string, and masking tape as their building materials. This tested their creativity and problem-solving skills, and offered practical understanding of engineering principles.

Many bridges were built, offering unique approaches and creative solutions. The activity concluded with a friendly competition to see which bridge could hold the most weight. Great work Year 7!



# SIXTH FORM MIXED-T1 RUGBY TEAM SHINES AT ALLIANZ STADIUM

The Sixth Form Mixed-T1 Rugby Team recently had the honour of representing the West Midlands at the prestigious Allianz Stadium in London, allowing the team to showcase their talent and expertise in the newest format of the game.



The team's journey began with their outstanding performance at the National Finals in Worcester earlier this year, in May. Their victory at these finals earned them an invitation to compete at the Allianz Stadium this term, a testament to their hard work and dedication throughout the season.

Competing at such a renowned venue was a fantastic way to conclude what has been a great season for the team. The players demonstrated not only their skill and athleticism but also their teamwork and sportspersonship, attributes that have been integral to their success.



# PUPIL CELEBRATES AFTER SENSATIONAL PERFORMANCE AT THE PARALYMPIC GAMES!



University of Birmingham School pupil Maddie Down finished eighth in the T38 100m final and sixth in the T38 long jump final at the Paralympic Games in Paris 2024, just two weeks after receiving her GCSE results in the summer. Maddie has worked incredibly hard to manage her academic and sporting commitments and has continued her journey with UoB School into our Sixth Form.

Colin Townsend, Principal of University of Birmingham School commented: "All at the School are incredibly proud of Maddie's GCSE and sporting achievements. Maddie has shown great determination, skill and humility and embodies the character virtues that we are proud to bring forward here at the School."



## SIXTH FORM APPLICATION DEADLINE 31 JANUARY 2025

Applications for Year 12 places in September 2025 opened in November. Year 11 pupils are reminded to submit their applications by 31 January 2025.

If you have any questions, please contact [admissions@uobschool.org.uk](mailto:admissions@uobschool.org.uk)

[Click here to start your application today!](#)





# SWIMMING TO SUCCESS

Earlier this year, Year 13 student Josh showcased his impressive swimming talents at the Swim England National Summer Meet. Competing in two events, the 100m and 200m breaststroke, Josh successfully made it to the 100m final.



## Aquatics GB Summer Championships

August marked another milestone for Josh as he participated in the Aquatics GB Summer Championships. Here, he qualified and competed in the 50m breaststroke, further demonstrating his versatility and strength in multiple distances.

## Regional and National Rankings

Josh's dedication and skill in swimming have led to significant achievements over the years. With a strong presence in both regional and national competitions, he continues to demonstrate his potential and ambition in the sport. This year, Josh qualified for the West Midlands regional championships, where he reached the finals in all breaststroke events securing a commendable 4th place in the 200m final.

On a national level, Josh stands among the top competitors for 18-year-olds in England. He is ranked in the national top 20 for all breaststroke distances, with his highest achievement being a 6th place ranking in Great Britain for the 50m breaststroke.

His upcoming participation in the Swim England National Winter Meet will undoubtedly be an exciting event to watch. We are really proud of his achievements and look forward to following his journey ahead.



# FRIENDS OF THE SCHOOL



We are looking for new members to join the Friends of UoB School, our Parent Teacher Association (PTA). Joining is a great way to make new friends, get to know the UoB School environment and make a real difference to our School community. There isn't a set expectation of how much time you would need to volunteer, any amount of time that you can give really helps! Members can organise events in their local area too - you don't have to be physically located near the School to be involved. If you are a parent or carer and would like to join in, please get in touch via email [friends@uobschool.org.uk](mailto:friends@uobschool.org.uk) or contact us on [Facebook](#).

"My son is in Year 8. I decided to join the Friends of UoB School as a way to become more familiar with the School environment and to meet other parents and share experiences. I think it is very important to rebuild and strengthen our communities, especially in an increasingly digital society. I also find it rewarding to contribute to the School by supporting various activities and initiatives. What I especially appreciate is that there is no pressure regarding how much I can help, allowing me to participate in ways that fit my schedule and capacity." Veronica, Parent at UoB School.

"UoB School staff would like to say a huge thank you to the Friends of the School who have fundraised an incredible £1200 for our community garden. We look forward to working together to improve this space for pupils, students, and staff to enjoy in the future." Miss E Mason, Director of Partnerships and Engagement.

"I have a child in Year 10 and my other child left the School to go to university in the summer. I joined the Friends because I wanted to give something back. This is a fantastic School and both of my children have had a really good time here, developing in confidence, independence, and resilience. I have come to know more parents after joining the Friends. In secondary school, it is hard to get to know fellow parents/carers as we do not drop off or pick our kids up most of the time and we also do not live near the School. You should join to get to know more fellow parents/carers and get support from them." Hoi Fei, Parent at UoB School.



## WE NEED YOU!



[@UoBSFriends](#)

# PHYSICISTS EXPLORE NUCLEAR PHYSICS AT UOB

A group of enthusiastic A level Physics students recently had the opportunity to explore the cutting-edge facilities at the University of Birmingham's Nuclear Physics Department. The visit included an exciting tour of two significant pieces of equipment: the neutron accelerator and the cyclotron.

## High Flux Accelerator - Driven Neutron Facility

Neutron accelerators support the study of neutron interactions in materials for the nuclear sector. They generate high-speed neutrons, which are essential for various experiments, including those in nuclear physics, materials science, and medicine.



During the tour, students were introduced to the workings of the neutron accelerator. They learned about:

- The generation of neutrons: the process of accelerating particles to produce neutrons.
- Applications: how neutrons can be used for probing materials and understanding nuclear reactions.
- Safety measures: protocols put in place to protect researchers and students from radiation exposure.



### The MC40 Cyclotron Facility

The MC40 Cyclotron is the latest in a series of particle accelerators that are used to propel charged particles to high energies. These devices are crucial for research in various fields, including nuclear physics and medicine.

Students were particularly interested in the cyclotron's design and functionality:

- How the cyclotron uses magnetic fields and electric fields to accelerate particles.
- Its role in producing radioactive isotopes for medical diagnostics and treatment.
- Recent improvements and innovations in cyclotron technology.

Both the cyclotron and the nuclear accelerator are unique resources to the University of Birmingham; no other university in the country has such facilities.

The visit provided students with a hands-on, tangible understanding of complex physics concepts. They also had the chance to interact with researchers and faculty members, enquiring about future educational and career opportunities.

The tour was an enriching experience for the visiting physics students, offering them an experience of the world of nuclear physics and the innovative tools used in the field. Such visits are invaluable in nurturing the next generation of scientists and researchers.

The visit was also an opportunity to take Mr. Campbell (Subject Leader for Physics) back to where he had studied as an undergraduate, and to thank him for his commitment to our pupils and students at UoB School. Mr. Campbell will be leaving us this term and we wish him all the very best in his new venture.

"Thank you for teaching me in Year 8 and at A level Mr. Campbell" - Yusuf.

"Roses are red, violets are blue, depending on their velocity relative to you! Arigato for teaching me physics for the past one and a half years. Sayonara!" Ali.

"Thank you for making physics so much fun. I wish you all the best with your future plans." Hajara.

## DUKE OF EDINBURGH AWARD

In the newest season of DofE at UoB School, all 150 of our Year 9 pupils have been enrolled onto the Bronze Award. 32 pupils in Year 10 have opted to take on the Silver Award, and 18 students in Year 12 have embarked on their Gold Award.

All expeditions will take place between March and July in 2025, with locations varying from Worcestershire to Shropshire, Brecon Beacons to the Lake District. Keep an eye on the School's DofE Instagram for news, updates and pictures of our adventures! @UoBSchool\_dofe





**WINTER  
CONCERT  
2024**







# AWARD CEREMONIES 2024



# SUPPORTING TRAINEE TEACHERS AT UOB SCHOOL

This term, we had the pleasure of hosting over 100 University of Birmingham (UoB) trainee teachers in their Introductory Practice. For many, this was their first experience stepping into a professional role within a school in England. We hosted trainees across a diverse range of subjects, including mathematics, biology, physics, modern languages, history, geography, and physical education.

## Building Expertise Through Collaboration

Throughout the year almost all UoB trainee teachers spend time in our School, allowing them to work closely with our subject experts, providing the support and guidance necessary to refine and enhance their teaching skills. Our dedicated staff mentors are passionate about inspiring the next generation of educators, ensuring the trainees receive both practical in-class experience and insightful feedback.



## Partnering with Training Providers

We are committed to collaborating with training providers from across the West Midlands, enabling us to share best practices and teaching strategies, ensuring that trainee teachers are well-equipped to face the challenges and opportunities of the modern classroom. Educators play a pivotal role in shaping the future, and we are proud to contribute toward their journey and future career. If you're thinking about changing your career and would like to get into teaching, [click here to check out the various routes into the profession.](#)

# EDUCATIONAL EXCHANGE

We also hosted student teachers and their tutors from universities in Sweden, Germany, and Spain. This visit provided an opportunity for these aspiring educators to observe and engage with our 'English as an Additional Language' (EAL) practice.

The visit served as a platform for cross-cultural exchange and learning, offering the student teachers fresh perspectives on language teaching methodologies. By engaging with our EAL practices, they gained valuable insights into effective strategies for teaching English to non-native speakers.

With thanks to our UoB School coordinators of Early Language Acquisition, Mrs. Naggea and Miss Lockett, for their work in hosting and delivering the sessions.





# A JOURNEY THROUGH HISTORY



Kenilworth Castle, located in the heart of Warwickshire, stands as one of the most well-preserved medieval castles in England. Its rich history and impressive architecture offer a fascinating glimpse into the past, making it an ideal site for Year 11 History pupils to explore and analyse. Built in the 12th century, Kenilworth Castle has played a pivotal role in English history, witnessing the reigns and influences of several significant monarchs.

Kenilworth Castle remains a vital link to England's past, offering insight into medieval architecture, key British moments in history, and the lives of influential figures. For Year 11 pupils, exploring this historic site provides a key opportunity to engage with the physical remnants of history and to understand the castle's enduring legacy within the tapestry of English heritage.

## COMMUNITY SPIRIT

Volunteering is a powerful way to make a positive impact in the community, and for our Year 7 pupils, participating in a local litter pick is an excellent opportunity to practice their civic virtues such as neighbourliness, kindness, and social action. Civic virtues form a part of our Character Education Curriculum and are fundamental qualities that contribute to the well-being of a community. They include:

- Neighbourliness: Being considerate and helpful to those in your community.
- Kindness: Exhibiting compassion and empathy towards others, including the environment.
- Responsibility: Taking ownership of one's actions and their impact on the community.

By engaging in activities like litter picking, pupils learn the value of these virtues through practical experience and give back to their community. It also fosters a sense of pride and encourages others to maintain a clean environment and protect local wildlife. A huge shoutout to all pupils who took part and the staff who guided this activity.



# IN OTHER NEWS...



## The Brilliant Scholars Programme

We are delighted to announce that 14 of our Year 12 students have successfully applied and joined the Brilliant Scholars Club Programme for January 2025. The programme offers a valuable opportunity for students to engage in university-style learning guided by PhD tutors, enabling them to improve their research and academic writing skills under the mentorship of PhD researchers. This experience will not only expand their knowledge in their chosen subject area but also prepare them for the transition to university post-sixth form. Congratulations to students Adiy A, Nazela A, Maya H, Emily H, Noor I, Haniya M, Ramsha M, Seema M, Arham R, Ahnaf R, Mariam S, Tiffany T, Wahja Y, and Muhammad Z.

## November Awareness & Fundraising

UoBS staff participated in Movember, which involves the growing of moustaches during the month of November to raise awareness of men's health issues, such as prostate cancer, testicular cancer, and mental health. Alongside a fantastic total of £281 raised by donations, the real impact was the powerful conversations had with pupils and students to break down stigma surrounding mental health which often prevents men and boys from talking about their problems and seeking help when they need it.

A huge thank you to everyone who took part and supported us in reducing the stigma attached to male mental health. The mighty moustaches have been a powerful symbol of this great cause!



## UCAS Applications

Year 13 have been working towards submitting their UCAS applications this term, and we already have students with offers from Russell Group Universities such as Birmingham, Cardiff, and Manchester.

A number of our students have also been invited for interviews at Oxford and Cambridge. To help prepare, they have been taking part in mock interviews and personal statement preparations with academics from the University of Birmingham. To support, the Sixth Form staff team have been busy submitting references in the lead up to the deadline in the new year.

## Light Painting

Our photography pupils have been exploring light painting in their lessons this term – creating art with a moving light source as ‘paint’ and long exposure times on a camera. Light painting is a technique where exposures are made by moving a hand-held light source or by moving the camera itself. The term "painting" comes from the way the light is used to 'draw' or 'paint' in the frame. This technique can be used to create abstract images, write words, or emphasise specific parts of a scene.



## Bring it on Brum! Winter Activities

Bring it on Brum! is a FREE Holiday Activity and Food Programme funded by the Department for Education, designed for children and young people across Birmingham to support fulfilling, active, and healthy school holidays.

Bring it on Brum! is the biggest scheme of its kind in the country.

[Click here to book your place now!](#) You will need a HAF Code, which for our School is: 3304014.



## Annual Foodbank Donations

Team UoBS continues to demonstrate the spirit of community and compassion this term, as pupils, students, staff, and families donated to our annual foodbank drive. The donations were collected throughout the month and personally delivered to a local Foodbank in Birmingham. Your contributions will make a difference to the lives of many families and communities in the city this Christmas.

We would like to extend our gratitude to everyone who donated, contributed, and supported this worthy cause. Your generosity and kindness have not gone unnoticed, reminding us of the impact of collective action and the difference we can make when we work together.

## Armistice Day



We marked Armistice Day this year by coming together as a School. Staff, pupils, and students all gathered together on Armistice Day in the School grounds to pay their respects and to remember all those who have given their lives in service to their country since 1914.



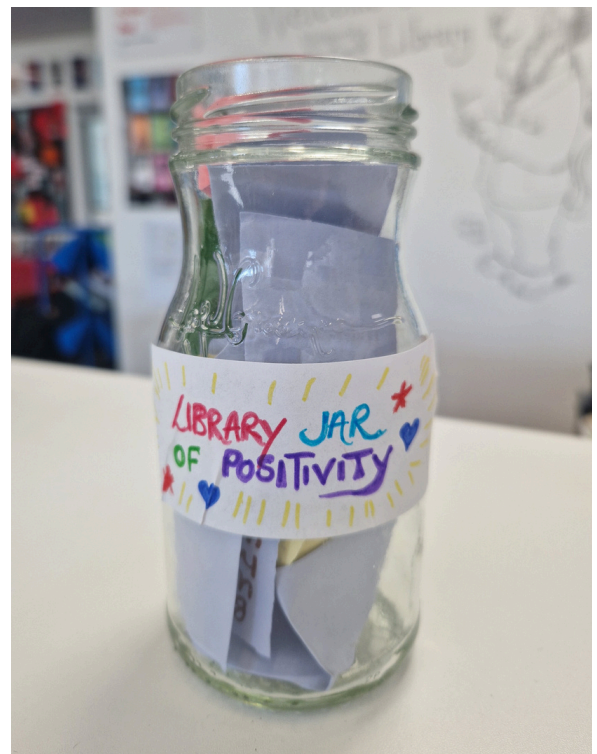
## Christmas Jumper Day

Congratulations to Preston in Year 8 for winning the prize for the best Festive Christmas Jumper in School this year! All money raised will be donated to 'Mind' and 'Children in Need' - charities that were selected by our pupil and student voice.



## Wellbeing Leaders

Our Year 13 Wellbeing Leaders led a 'Tea And Talk' event this term for World Mental Health Day. We had a number of resources, staff, and wellbeing leaders on hand to help and to just chat...with biscuits & hot chocolate too! Pupils and students created 'jars of positivity' and filled them with positive words for peers to take home with them, and add their own for others! The jar of positivity will be making an appearance every Friday at break from now on (or whenever it looks like someone needs a little lift)!



## Extended Project Qualification

15 Sixth Form students have completed their extended project qualification (EPQ) this month in Year 13. Students have completed projects based on a number of topics including, Artwork Inspired by Indian Architecture, Near Death Experiences, Moral Discussions around Lobotomies, Creative Writing in Folk Tales, Coding Websites about Dark Matter, Creating a Windrush Encyclopedia, and many more. The diverse range of projects reflects both the interest and dedication of the students involved. They have presented their final work to their peers, School Governors, their project supervisor and the UoBS Sixth Form Team.

# THE BOOK NOOK

## Two Cities Book Award

Eight of our keenest readers in Year 10 and Year 12 took part in the Two Cities Book Award. Now in its third year, the award is run in partnership between King Edward's School in Edgbaston and Wolverhampton Grammar School with the aim to inspire young adults to read for pleasure. During enrichment lessons we read and discussed the four books on the shortlist and then were lucky enough to attend the award ceremony to see the winner revealed live and meet the authors in person.



"I liked meeting and talking to pupils and students from other schools and asking them questions about reading in their school. I also enjoyed meeting the authors of the books. It has inspired me to write more in my spare time." Aminata, Year 12 Student.

## UoB School Bookmark Competition



Pupils and students are invited to get their creative thinking caps on over the holidays because next term we will be looking for designs for our official UoB School Library Bookmark. Winners will see their work replicated on professionally produced bookmarks which will be handed out to all Key Stage 3 pupils on World Book Day and become the signature bookmark of the School library. Themes we'd like to see represented are character virtues, reading for pleasure, sustainability, mental health matters, and aspiration. Look out for more information in the new year!

### Top borrowers this term:

1. Aisha R in Year 7
2. Hannah A in Year 8
3. Ahmad S in Year 7
4. Kashif B in Year 10
5. Hephzibah O in Year 7
6. Faisal E in Year 9
7. Mahima V in Year 7
8. Rowan S in Year 8
9. Jack R-M in Year 8
10. Solyana S in Year 12

### Most Popular Books:

1. The Hunger Games by Suzanne Collins
2. The Recruit by Robert Muchamore
3. Heartstopper Vol 1 by Alice Oseman
4. The Hidden Oracle by Rick Riordan
5. Brawl of the Wild by Dav Pilkey
6. Savage Island by Bethany Pearce
7. Percy Jackson & the Lightning Thief by Rick Riordan
8. Little Badman & the Invasion of the Killer Aunties by Humza Arshad
9. Gone by Michael Grant
10. Dog Days by Jeff Kinney

**We collectively borrowed 4,500 books from the library this term.**



**TOP Class borrowers:  
Form 7Y4**



# 10 Top Tips for Parents and Educators

## SAFETY OVER THE FESTIVE SEASON.

The holiday season, marked by Christmas and New Year, brings joy and togetherness but also presents unique safety challenges for children, families and educators. From busy holiday shopping, traveling and family gatherings to managing digital activity during school breaks, staying safe during this period requires heightened awareness. This guide offers practical tips to help families and educators maintain a more secure and fulfilling festive period.

### 1 MONITOR DIGITAL ACTIVITY



Children spend more time online during school holidays, increasing exposure to potential dangers such as cyberbullying, inappropriate content and online predators. Balancing screen time, avoiding harmful websites and ensuring children engage positively online can be difficult without proper monitoring tools. Set clear boundaries, encourage open discussions about online safety and use parental controls to manage content exposure and screen time effectively. Regular check-ins and positive reinforcement around digital habits encourage safe online behaviour.

### 2 PRACTICE FIRE SAFETY PROTOCOLS



The incidence of house fires increases during Christmas due to greater use of candles, cookers and electrical decorations. Open flames, electrical overloads and the need for quick response plans can make fire safety challenging. Ensure smoke detectors are operational, keep fire extinguishers on hand and teach children how to respond in case of a fire emergency. Avoid leaving cooking unattended and use fire-safe candles to prevent mishaps.

### 3 CREATE TRAVEL SAFETY PLANS



More families tend to travel during the holidays, resulting in busier roads, increased traffic accidents and weather-related hazards. Weather conditions, road rage, fatigue and busy airports can all compromise travel safety. Pack emergency kits and adhere to seatbelt laws. Plan routes in advance and allow extra travel time to avoid rushing and mitigate risks on busy roads.

### 4 BEWARE OF ALLERGIES



Holiday meals often involve many foods that may contain allergens. Cross contamination, unclear labelling and lack of allergy-friendly options can lead to severe reactions. Communicate any allergy needs to hosts, provide safe food alternatives and carry necessary medications like antihistamines or EpiPens. Teaching children how to advocate for themselves and recognise dangerous foods also contributes to safer celebrations.

### 5 PREVENT THE SPREAD OF ILLNESS



Cold weather and seasonal socialising can increase the spread of viruses like flu and COVID-19. Crowded gatherings, schools out of session and frequent travel can lead to higher infection risks. Emphasise hygiene, encourage vaccination, disinfect surfaces and isolate symptomatic individuals. Communication with children about proper hygiene practices is essential to reduce the spread of illness.

### 6 STAY VIGILANT ON THE ROAD



Increased holiday traffic heightens the risk of accidents for both drivers and pedestrians. Distracted driving, pedestrian safety and inclement weather can complicate road safety. Encourage pedestrian safety practices, avoid distracted driving and never drive under the influence.

### 7 MAINTAIN SAFE DECORATIONS



Festive decorations such as Christmas lights and candles can pose electrical, fire and choking hazards if mishandled. Frayed wires, toppling Christmas trees, small ornaments and open flames can be difficult to control, especially in busy households with children. Inspect and maintain decorations, secure Christmas trees, place fragile or small items out of reach and ensure candles are never left unattended. Testing smoke alarms and using flame-retardant decorations can significantly reduce risks.

### 8 SET BOUNDARIES FOR GIFTS



Some toys and gadgets can present choking, sharp-edge or safety risks, particularly for young children. Ensuring that gifts meet safety standards and are age appropriate can be complex with so many options available. Inspect all toys carefully and ensure any tech devices have parental controls. Setting expectations around safe gift use and discarding packaging that poses a risk also helps to prevent accidents.

### 9 ADDRESS STRESS & FATIGUE



Holiday pressures can lead to burnout, which affects both physical and mental health. Overpacked schedules and a lack of downtime can cause stress and fatigue, leading to accidents or poor decision making. Incorporate rest, maintain regular routines and seek support to reduce stress. Encourage activities that promote relaxation to create a healthier, happier holiday experience for everyone.

### 10 DRINK RESPONSIBLY



Alcohol is commonly present at holiday events, raising concerns about safety and supervision. Excessive alcohol consumption can lead to accidents, impaired judgment and lack of supervision for children. Designate responsible adults, limit consumption and provide transportation alternatives for guests. Teaching moderation and modelling responsible behaviour in front of children ensures that celebrations remain positive and secure.

## Meet Our Expert

James Whelan is a chartered health and safety consultant with 10 years of experience in promoting family and community safety. Specialising in risk assessment and preventative strategies, he has worked with educational institutions, public health agencies and community groups to deliver safety education and training.



The National College®

# What Parents & Educators Need to Know about

# SNAPCHAT

AGE RESTRICTION  
**13+**

**SNAP STREAK**

**97**

**DAYS**

Snapchat is a messaging app which allows users to send images, videos and texts to others. Its best-known feature is that anything sent 'disappears' 24 hours after it's been viewed; however, users are known to take screenshots or use another device to obtain a photo of their screen. In 2023, Snapchat added a chatbot function called 'My AI'.

## WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

### ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

My AI is Snapchat's new chatbot, which replies to questions in a human-like manner. However, the software is still in its infancy and has significant drawbacks, such as biased, incorrect or misleading responses. There have already been numerous reports of young users turning to AI for medical help and diagnoses, which could be inaccurate and therefore potentially dangerous.

### PREDATORS AND SCAMS

Predators can exploit Snapchat's disappearing messages by, for example, telling a user they have naked photos of them and will post them unless they're paid. Snapchat's own research found that 65% of teenagers had experienced this – on this app or others. This likely isn't helped by 'SnapMaps' – a feature which highlights your exact position in real-time. This is meant to help friends keep track of each other, but could be used for more sinister reasons.

### MY EYES ONLY

Snapchat has a hidden photo vault called 'My Eyes Only'. Teens can conceal sensitive photos and videos from parents and carers in this folder, which is protected by a PIN. You can check for this by clicking on the icon which looks like two playing cards. This takes you to the 'Memories' folder which stores photos, stories and the My Eyes Only folder.

### SCREEN TIME ADDICTION

Snapchat prioritises user engagement, with features like streaks (messaging the same person every day to build up a high score). The app also has sections called 'Discover' and 'Spotlight', which show tailored content to each user. However, this could also be seen as an attempt to hook users into watching videos endlessly. Furthermore, constant notifications can lure people into using the app.

### INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

Some content on Snapchat simply isn't suitable for children. The hashtags used to group content are determined by the poster, so even an innocent search term could still yield age-inappropriate results. The app's 'disappearing messages' feature also makes it easy for young people to share explicit images on impulse – so sexting continues to be a risk associated with Snapchat.

### ONLINE PRESSURES

Although many of Snapchat's filters are designed to entertain or amuse, the 'beautify' effects on photos can set unrealistic body image expectations – creating feelings of inadequacy in younger users. Snapchat now also has 'priority' notifications (which still get displayed even if a device is in 'do not disturb' mode), increasing the pressure on users to log back in and interact.

## Advice for Parents & Educators

### UTILISE PARENTAL CONTROLS

Snapchat's 'Family Centre' lets you view the details of the child's account – their friends list and who they've spoken to in the last week – and report any concerns. You must invite a child to the Family Centre for them to join. To keep the child's location hidden on the app, go into settings and turn on 'Ghost Mode' and 'Hide Live Location', and ensure they know not to share their location with anyone.

### BLOCK AND REPORT

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

### FAMILIARISE YOURSELF

Before you allow a child to download Snapchat, download it yourself and familiarise yourself with the app. Snapchat has produced a parents' guide to the app to help you understand how it works and any protections they have in place. A link for this can be found in the sources below.

### ENCOURAGE OPEN DISCUSSIONS

Snapchat's risks can be easier to handle if you nurture an open dialogue. For example, discuss My AI's responses to questions and how reliable they are. Talk about scams and blackmail before letting children sign up. If they're lured into a scam, encourage them to tell you immediately. Talk openly and non-judgementally about sexting, emphasising its inherent risks. Furthermore, explain how popular 'challenges' on the platform can have harmful consequences.

### 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.



The National College

# TERM DATES

## Spring Term 2025

\*Staff Professional Development Day: Monday 06 January 2025

**Term Starts: Tuesday 07 January 2025**

\*Staff Research Day: Friday 14 February 2025

**Half Term: Monday 17 February to Friday 21 February 2025**

**Term ends: Friday 11 April 2025 from 12.00**

## Summer Term 2025

\*Staff Professional Development Day: Monday 28 April 2025

**Term Starts: Tuesday 29 April 2025**

BANK HOLIDAY: Monday 05 May 2025

**Half Term: Monday 26 May to Friday 30 May 2025**

\*Staff Research Day: Friday 27 June 2025

\*Staff Professional Development Day: Monday 07 July 2025

**Term ends: Friday 18 July 2025 from 12.00**

\*no pupils or students to attend/non-teaching day.

# USEFUL CONTACTS

## PAUSE - Forward Thinking Birmingham

**0207 841 4470**

A mental health service provider for young people up to the age of 25 in Birmingham.

## Childline

**0800 1111**

**childline.org.uk**

Support for children and young people in the UK, including a free 24-hour helpline.

## SHOUT

**Text 'SHOUT' to 85258**

**Available 24/7**

A FREE and confidential service for anyone in the UK who needs support.

## Birmingham Mind

**0121 262 3555 (helpline)**

**helpbirminghammind.org**

Open 09.00 - 23.00 everyday. Offering support to people who may be feeling low, anxious, worried, or stressed.

## NSPCC

**0800 800 5000**

**nspcc.org.uk**

Support for children and anyone worried about a child.

## Kooth

**kooth.com**

Free, anonymous online support service for young people.





University of Birmingham School  
12 Weoley Park Road  
Selly Oak  
Birmingham  
B29 6QU

t: 0121 796 5000  
e: [reception@uobschool.org.uk](mailto:reception@uobschool.org.uk)  
w: [uobschool.org.uk](http://uobschool.org.uk)

Keep in touch

   @uobschool