

St Mark's C.E. Primary School

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Living & Learning Together

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Dear Parents/Carers,

We have come to the end of a very busy Autumn Term, what a whirlwind it has been.

I have thoroughly enjoyed my first term at St Mark's and I really feel part of this special community now. As one child kindly wrote in a Christmas card to me, 'you're really becoming a stick of rock'; this is almost certainly the biggest compliment you can receive at St Mark's.

We continually work on reinforcing our CIRCLE Values and the children have really shown an understanding of our new value, Equity. That said, equality is still an important value to instill. Unfortunately, over the last few weeks, I have had to speak to a number of children about inappropriate, and at times, prejudicial language. As a school or parent, we cannot always shelter children from hearing inappropriate language, but I would welcome your support in helping the children to understand what is appropriate to repeat or not, and why. At a primary school age, language is often repeated without a full understanding of its meaning, which can in turn lead to unintended upset. The monthly online safety newsletters we send to you contain lots of tips on the age appropriateness of various games and apps, as well as parental controls that are available. You will find the language used on various YouTube and TikTok videos is not always appropriate. We will be working with the whole school community on reinforcing our value of respect, as well as celebrating our differences. It is vital that all children have an age-appropriate awareness of protected characteristics.

St Mark's really does know how to 'do' Christmas! I hope you have enjoyed all the festive events at school. The Nativity is always a highlight for me in the school calendar and carols around the camp fire was a welcome variation to a traditional carol service - our children really do sing beautifully. The choir have also brightened the days within the local community, singing to an audience of over 300 people at the 'One Day at Christmas' charity lunch at Farnborough International Exhibition and Conference Centre and in the local coffee shop on the High Street. A huge thank you to the PTA and the wider parent and staff body for your continued support of school events. The Christmas Fair was a fabulous start to the festive season and enjoyed by all.

The children were very excited when I announced that we were going to run a competition to 'Name our Classes'. I have received a large pile of suggestions - thank you for all your thoughtful ideas. These will be discussed at our INSET day and announced at the beginning of next term.

Once again, we acknowledge how difficult it has been for families without wrap around care, following the sudden closure of Jigsaw. We have been working hard behind the scenes to find a workable, high-quality solution that will hopefully stand the test of time. We are hopeful that we will have some good news to announce in the new year.

I have some other exciting staffing news to share with you, Mrs Woolley is expecting her first baby, due in the Spring. We will be recruiting to cover Mrs Wooley's maternity leave and will announce her replacement once the recruitment process has taken place.

Please remember to complete the Advent Reading Challenge, it is really important for children, of all ages, to keep reading over the holidays. For the Juniors, access to Times Tables Rockstars and Spelling Shed will be available over the holidays. I believe the staff have some challenges planned for the new year, so the Christmas holidays are a good opportunity for some additional practice.

That just leaves me to say a huge thank you for your ongoing support of the school and a particular heartfelt thanks to our incredibly hard-working, dedicated staff team.

I wish you all a wonderful festive break. I hope you enjoy this special time with loved ones and less need for Calpol than we've seen in the last few weeks!

Best wishes

Miss Vicky Ellis
Headteacher