



St Mark's C of E Junior School

Growing together, becoming all we are created to be

Weekly Newsletter - Friday 16th January 2026

www.stmarksjunior.com

All enquires: admin@st-marks.gloucs.sch.uk

Our Value in focus this term is Courage

Headteacher's Message:

The Importance of Oracy at St Mark's

Oracy—our ability to communicate effectively through spoken language—is a **foundational life skill**. It shapes how confidently we can express ideas, listen to others, engage in problem-solving, and build positive relationships. It will be no surprise that strong oracy skills are strongly linked to improved academic outcomes, better job prospects, and greater confidence in adult life.

When children learn to articulate their thinking clearly, they develop not only their speaking and listening abilities, but also their reasoning, vocabulary, empathy, and self-belief. We want this for each and every child at St Mark's.

Therefore, one of our key priorities this year is to strengthen opportunities for oracy within the curriculum. We know that when children are explicitly taught how to speak well—whether in discussions, presentations, debates or performances—they become more active learners and are more likely to become ambassadors for change. Embedding oracy across subjects ensures that every child has the chance to find their voice.

One exciting way we are developing this is through the **Look Who's Talking** competition launched this term. The competition is already giving pupils a structured and motivating platform to practise high-quality speaking, build confidence, and celebrate the power of their voice. Below is a summary from Mr Sim.

LOOK WHO'S TALKING!

Over the past two weeks, our school has enjoyed an inspiring series of presentations as part of the *Look Who's Talking* competition. Children from across all year groups impressed us with an incredible variety of topics — from crocheting techniques, golf, religion, history, the arts, and rollerblading, to heartfelt personal reflections such as navigating challenges with dyslexia.

Every participant showed tremendous courage, speaking confidently in front of a large audience with clear articulation engaging their audience, ensuring that the judging process was particularly challenging.

After much thoughtful deliberation, we are delighted to announce the two students who will be representing our school in the next stage of the competition:

- **Lower School: Eleanor**, who delivered a captivating presentation about her hobby of bouldering.
- **Upper School: Riana**, who impressed us with her insightful talk on artificial intelligence and how it works.



We are incredibly proud of all the children who took part. Their confidence, creativity, and the wide range of topics shared made this year's competition truly outstanding.

Please also see Page 2 to find out how parents can support oracy at home.

**With my best wishes for a lovely weekend,
Mrs A Fitch and the Staff Team**



How Parents Can Support Oracy at Home

Parents play a powerful role in helping children develop strong speaking and listening skills. Oracy isn't about formal lessons—it grows through everyday conversations, shared experiences, and opportunities to express ideas. Here are some simple, effective ways families can support oracy at home:



1. Make Time for Daily Conversation

- Ask open-ended questions such as *“What made you think that?”* or *“Tell me more about that.”*
- Encourage children to explain their reasoning, not just give short answers.

2. Model Good Listening

- Show interest by maintaining eye contact and responding thoughtfully.
- Demonstrate turn-taking and how to build on what someone else has said.

3. Build Vocabulary Through Talk

- Introduce new words naturally during discussions.
- Explore synonyms (alternative words with a similar meaning), precise vocabulary, and descriptive language together.

4. Encourage Storytelling

- Ask children to recount events from their day or make up stories.
- Use prompts such as pictures, objects, or sentence starters to spark ideas.



5. Involve Them in Real Life Talk

- Let children take part in conversations at the dinner table, on walks, or during car journeys.
- Encourage them to ask questions, share opinions, and contribute their own thoughts.



6. Give Opportunities for Performance

- Support them in practising speeches, poems, or presentations for school.
- Invite them to share something they've prepared with family members or friends.

7. Discuss Books, TV, and Real-World Issues

- After reading or watching something together, talk about the characters, motivations, or messages.
- Encourage them to express an opinion and justify it.



8. Celebrate Effort, Not Perfection

- Praise clear explanations, confidence, listening, and thoughtful contributions.
- Help children see speaking as a skill they can keep developing.

Learning Highlight of the Week

Class 1: Maths was the highlight for Class 1 this week! The children have been learning different multiplication methods, including the partitioning method, to help them to multiply a two digit number by a one digit number.

Class 2: In Geography, the children have been leaning about settlements. As part of this unit, they have begun to learn how to read maps using Ordinance Survey map symbols.

Class 3: Class 3 have enjoyed Hockey this week. They practised their dribbling skills as well as playing mini matches.

Class 4: In Computing, Class 4 have been using Lightbot to develop their coding skills. They also enjoyed taking part in, and watching their friends participate in, the *Look Who's Talking* competition.

Class 5: In Geography, Class 5 have been learning about the water cycle and finding out where rivers begin (the source) and where they end (the mouth). They used an atlas to help them label the main rivers of the UK on a map, building their confidence in using maps and atlases.

Class 6: Class 6 also enjoyed Maths this week. They have been converting fractions into decimals and will eventually move onto percentages.

Class 7: In English, the children have been writing action narratives inspired by the animation *DreamGiver*. They brought their stories to life by performing them as an iMovie.

Class 8: Class 8 have been looking at trading through the ages, for example comparing the Stone Age, to the global trading of 17th and 21st century.



League Football Match

On a very wet Thursday afternoon our girls team braved the wet weather and muddy conditions to play their second league match against Springbank.

Despite challenging conditions, the team worked tirelessly, passing the ball around really well and taking every opportunity they had to earn them a very **convincing 16-0 win**.

What an amazing result—well done to the whole team!

Rags 2 Riches 4 Schools Collection—Thursday 5th February

Rags 2 Riches 4 Schools is a fantastic way for schools to raise much-needed funds for resources and projects that directly benefit our children. A collection for **St Mark's** is scheduled for **Thursday 5th February**, so why not take this opportunity to enjoy a much needed clear-out at home?

Why This Project Matters

The **Rags 2 Riches 4 Schools** project is about more than fundraising — it's about protecting our planet and helping others:

- It helps reduce waste going into landfill
- It benefits the environment
- At present, all donated clothing is being sent to **Ukraine** to support families

How You Can Help

To help us raise funds for the school, please place any **unwanted clothing, shoes and/or accessories** into a bin bag or plastic bag and return them to school by **9:00am on the day of collection**.

Please note:

- Rags 2 Riches are not currently providing collection bags
- Unfortunately, **school uniforms cannot be accepted**

For a full list of items that can be collected, please visit: www.rags2riches4schools.co.uk

Thank you for your continued support — it is very much appreciated!



Brass Club—Year 4 & 5

We have spaces available in Mr Sim's **Brass Club**, which takes place on a **Thursday after school 3.10pm—4.00pm**.

The club is now open to **Year 5** pupils and you don't even need your own instrument, as these will be provided!

If you are in Year 4 or 5 please and interested in singing up, please email clerical@st-marks.gloucs.sch.uk.



Big Garden Birdwatch

23rd—25th January 2026

In our Celebration Assembly today, the School Council, led by Mrs Reilly, gave a fantastic presentation encouraging everyone to take part in the RSPB's **Big Garden Birdwatch**.



The **Big Garden Birdwatch** is the world's largest garden wildlife survey. Every year, hundreds of thousands of nature lovers take part, helping to build a picture of how garden birds are faring.

How to take part?

- Children can collect a **Big Garden Birdwatch form** from their **Class School Council representative on Monday**.
- Simply spend one hour counting the birds you see in your garden, local park, or outdoor space over the weekend of **23rd–25th January**.



Big Schools' Birdwatch 2026

As a school, we will also be taking part in the **Big Schools' Birdwatch**. On behalf of the St Mark's, the School Council will survey and count the bird species in our school grounds on **Friday 23rd January**.

To encourage birds into our school grounds and to help birds and wildlife continue to thrive, there will be a stall in the playground on **Friday 23rd January**, where bags of bird seed will be sold for 50p each. All funds raised will go towards purchasing bird feeders and bird boxes, which the School Council will place around the school grounds.

Well done to the School Council members for such a dynamic and informative presentation today and thank you for supporting this important project and helping our local wildlife thrive.

Teaching & Learning Owls

Gold - Emily

Bronze - Thea, Hannah, Seren & Imogen

Congratulations to our badge winners!



GLOUCESTERSHIRE SCHOOLS INDIVIDUAL TABLE TENNIS COMPETITION

Table Tennis Competition

Last weekend, Luke in Year 5 represented St Mark's in his first ever table tennis tournament. The competition was open to children under 19 who attend schools across Gloucestershire. Luke competed in the under 11 category, facing 21 other competitors.

Luke won his group, claiming victory in all three of his matches and securing a place in the quarter-finals. He then went on to win his quarter-final 3–0. Although he was unfortunately defeated in the semi-final, Luke came away incredibly happy to have reached the semi-finals in his very first tournament.

At times the nerves were intense, but Luke showed real grit and determination, making fantastic comebacks in matches to secure victories.

What an incredible achievement, Luke! We are all extremely impressed, especially as this was your first competition. We look forward to hearing about your future successes.



Young Writers— I Have A Dream Poetry Competition

St Mark's pupils have been invited to enter the **Young Writers I Have a Dream** poetry competition.

Pupils are encouraged to write a poem about a **dream**— this could be a hope for the future, a magical world, or something they can only imagine! It's time to dream big and have fun!

There are individual prizes to be won - every pupil receives a bookmark and sticker and our school could win £1,000!

How to take part?

- Collect an entry form from the School office.
- Write your poem on the entry form (or an adult can scribe for you).
- Ensure your name, age and school are included in the space provided.
- Return the completed entry form to school by **Monday 2nd February**.

Important—Please do not enter directly as the school will submit all entries.

We have attached the **Young Writers I Have a Dream Pupil Information Guide** with this week's newsletter. Please take a look, and pop into the school office to collect an entry form if your child would like to take part.

We look forward to receiving your entries and good luck to all our young writers



Cheltenham Young Artists 2026

A reminder that you can visit the **Cheltenham Young Artist 2026** exhibition **this weekend at Gardens Gallery, Montpellier Gardens**, open from **10am–4pm on Saturday 17th and 10am–2.30pm Sunday 18th**. **Entry is free.**



Extra Curricular Clubs Spring Term 1



Monday

Baking Buddies Y3-6	3.10pm - 4.30pm
Chinese Language Y3-6	3.15pm - 4.15pm
Gymnastics Y3-6	3.10pm - 4.00pm
Hockey Y5-6	3.10pm - 4.00pm
Netball Y5-6	3.10pm - 4.00pm
Recorders Y3-6	Lunchtime

Tuesday

Orchestra Y3-6	12.30pm - 1.00pm
Book Club Y3-4	12.30pm - 1.00pm
Choir Y3-6	3.10pm - 4.00pm
Tennis Y4-6	3.15pm - 4.10pm

Wednesday

Baking Buddies Y3-6	3.10pm - 4.30pm
Cyclestars Y3-6	3.15pm - 4.15pm

Thursday

Brass Club Y4	3.10pm - 4.00pm
Coding Y6	3.10pm - 4.00pm
Kids with Bricks (Lego) Y3-6	3.10pm - 4.00pm

Friday

Girls Football Y4-6	12.30pm - 1.00pm
Boys Football Y5-6	1.00pm - 1.30pm

Please see club selections [table](#) for club dates!

School Term Dates

2025-26

Term 3: Mon 5th Jan - Fri 13th Feb 2026

Term 4: Mon 23th Feb – Fri 27th Mar 2026

Term 5: Mon 13th April – Fri 22nd May 2026

Term 6: Mon 1st June – Mon 20th July 2026

Inset Days:

1st Sept, 2nd Sept, 24th Oct, 1st June 2026, 20th July 2026



Letters Sent Home

- National Roman Legion Museum Trip —Year 4 Letter



2025-26



January

Sat 17th—Sun 18th Cheltenham Young Artist Exhibition
Gardens Gallery, Montpellier Gardens
Mon 26th - SEND Coffee Morning 9am Year 3&4
Tue 27th - SEND Coffee Morning 9am Year 5&6

February

Tue 3rd - Year 6 National Measurement Check
Thu 5th - Rags Collection
Thu 5th - Gymnastics Competition—9.30am-11.30am Yr 3 & 4
Thu 5th - Gymnastics Competition—12-30 – 2.30pm Yr 5 & 6
Mon 9th - Children's Mental Health Week
Tue 10th - Safer Internet Day
Thu 12th - Book Look
Fri 13th - End of Term 3
Mon - 23rd Start of Term 4

March

Mon 2nd—Fri 6th - Book Week
Thu 5th - World Book Day
Tue 17th - Parents Evening (Please note date change)
Wed 18th Parents Evening (Please note date change)

Advance Notice of Some Key Dates

11th May - Y6 SATs Week
10th June - Sports Day
8th - 10th July - Y6 Residential
16th July - Y6 St Mark's School Leavers Service - 1.45pm

PE - Spring Term 1

Children should come to school in their PE kit on PE days.

All swimmers to wear PE Kit on a Wednesday

Class 1: Tuesday & Thursday

Class 2: Tuesday & Thursday

Class 3: Monday & Friday

Class 4: Thursday & Friday

Class 5: Tuesday & Wednesday

Class 6: Wednesday & Thursday

Class 7: Wednesday & Friday

Class 8: Wednesday & Friday



Remember: tracksuit tops should be plain navy only. A school sweatshirt is absolutely fine.

Outdoor Learning

Outdoor Learning has finished for the term and will return again after Easter.

