



# St Mark's C of E Junior School

*Growing together, becoming all we are created to be*

Weekly Newsletter - Friday 23rd January 2026

[www.stmarksjunior.com](http://www.stmarksjunior.com)

All enquires: [admin@st-marks.gloucs.sch.uk](mailto:admin@st-marks.gloucs.sch.uk)

Our Value in focus this term is Courage

## Headteacher's Message:

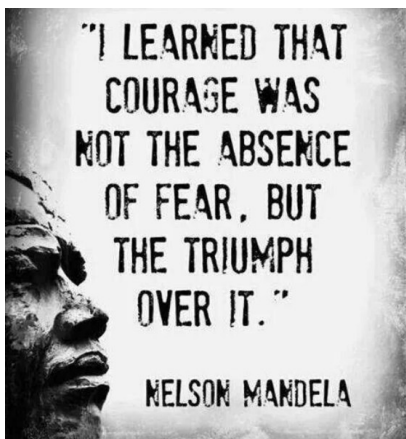
As part of discussions about our **school value of courage** this week, we have been reflecting with the children on the feelings that arise when we feel a little nervous, why those feelings appear, and the strategies we can use to take brave steps forward—one at a time.

We have also explored the sense of pride that comes when we achieve a goal, recognising not only how proud we can feel of ourselves, but also how proud others are of us too.

Using our key quotes as reminders, the children have been learning that, in the words of Nelson Mandela, "**courage isn't the absence of fear, but the triumph over it.**"

Each day, whether at home or in school, we encounter moments that invite us to step outside our comfort zones; and each time we do, we grow in confidence and character, living out our school vision: **Growing together, becoming all we are created to be.** See below for some questions you might like to use to spark conversations about courage at home.

Courage doesn't mean  
you don't get afraid.  
Courage means you  
don't let fear stop you.



*Have a super weekend,*

*Mrs A Fitch and the Staff Team*

## Questions to spark reflection on courage

- Can you think of a moment today when you felt a bit nervous or unsure? What did you do next?
- What is something you did recently that took courage, even if it was a small step?
- How did your body feel when you were nervous or worried? What helped you calm down?
- Was there a time this week when you stepped out of your comfort zone? What helped you try?
- Who helped you feel brave today? What did they do to help you?
- Is there something you are proud of doing, even though it felt difficult at first?
- If you could encourage a friend who feels scared about something, what would you tell them? How would you help them?
- What goal are you working towards right now that might need a little bit of courage?
- How do you feel after you've done something brave? What does that proud feeling feel like?



## Cheltenham Young Artist

It was an exciting weekend for our **Cheltenham Young Artists** finalists **Tegan, Rex and Luke**, who attended the awards ceremony in Montpellier Gardens. Despite the rain, over 250 people were present to celebrate the event. They each received a certificate and their framed artwork to take home, presented by Edward Gillespie, Lord Lieutenant of Gloucestershire - a proud moment for the children and their families.

Luke was also **commended** for his artwork, receiving this extra special prize, which was absolutely fantastic. **Well done Luke!**



The aim of the competition was to celebrate the talent of young artists and give them a unique opportunity to have their masterpieces hung in a gallery. Over 450 entries were received from Primary and Secondary Schools. From these, 50 works from 26 different schools were selected, framed and displayed, with artists ranging in age from 5 to 17.

The judges commented:

*"A fabulous selection of work, media and ideas made the judging very difficult. We were most impressed by the diversity of subject matter. We all had our favourites for different reasons: composition, individuality, use of colour, excellent observation drawing and imaginative ideas. Some of the work really made us smile which was a bonus and made the judging such a pleasure. The work selected for the exhibition shows good planning and consideration of the subject matter making the task of choosing Award winners agonising!"*

If you would like to view the exhibition please click on the link below:

<https://youtu.be/SoalHwIVeEw?si=dSIX4G9z3zS1J7LE>

Thank you to the children for bringing their artwork into school today to share with pupils and staff during our **Celebration Assembly**. It was lovely to celebrate and share your achievements with the whole school.



## Teaching & Learning Owls

**Gold - Evie, Grace, Mya & Elena**

**Silver - Phoebe**

**Bronze - Divit**

**Congratulations to our badge winners!**



### *Learning Highlight of the Week*

**Class 1:** In outdoor PE, Class 1 has been developing their ball handling skills by dribbling and bouncing a ball through a set of cones. They have also been working on how to effectively move into a space.

**Class 2:** This week the children took part in a whole school Science investigation within their classes, which could easily have been the highlight of the week for every class! They explored the variables of a hoop glider to discover which features would extend the distance travelled. The children designed and built their hoop gliders, tested them, and collated the data from their investigations.

**Class 3 & 4:** In Computing, Year 4 have been using AutoDraw, which is a programme that uses machine learning with drawings from artists to help the children create images. A link to this programme can be found in the Computing section of the [Year 4 page](#).

**Class 5:** In Hockey, the children have enjoyed developing their passing and dribbling skills through a range of drills designed to improve their technique.

**Class 6:** Class 6 also chose the whole school Science investigation as their highlight of the week.

**Class 7:** In Art, inspired by street artist Banksy, the children have been designing their own graffiti walls, which they plan to use to create a whole class collage piece.

**Class 8:** The learning highlight for class 8 was also the Science investigation.

### Prayer group leader needed!

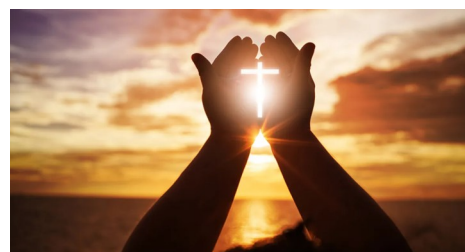
We are hoping to restart a Parent Prayer Group as part of the Cheltenham Prayer for Schools network, where parents and carers can come together to pray for our school community.

We're looking for someone who feels called to lead or help coordinate the group — someone with a heart for prayer. You don't need to be an expert — just someone who has a faith and enjoys connecting with others.

#### What's involved:

- Helping to organize short, friendly prayer times (weekly, fortnightly or monthly — whatever works best!)
- Liaising with the school if needed for space or scheduling

If this sounds like something you'd enjoy, or if you'd just like to chat about what's involved, please get in touch with [clerical@st-marks.gloucs.sch.uk](mailto:clerical@st-marks.gloucs.sch.uk) who will put you in touch with the previous coordinator.



### Big Garden Birdwatch—This Weekend!

23rd—25th January 2026

A reminder that the **Big Garden Birdwatch** is taking place this weekend and there is still time to take part!

Simply spend **one hour** counting the birds you see in your **garden, local park, or outdoor space** at some point this weekend.

If your child has not picked up a form from school, you can print out the form attached with this week's newsletter to record the birds you spot. The form also includes a useful bird identification chart to help with identifying different species.

#### How to submit your results:

- **Online:** Once you have completed your Birdwatch survey, visit [www.rspb.org.uk/birdwatch](http://www.rspb.org.uk/birdwatch) and submit your totals using the online results form. Please Submit your online results to RSPB by **22nd February 2026**.
- **By Post:** Alternatively, you can send the completed form by post to:  
**FREEPOST RSPB BIG GARDEN BIRDWATCH**  
Please post results by **17th February 2026**. (This is a short address, but it will definitely reach them!)

Thank you for taking part and helping the RSPB monitor bird populations across the UK!

**A huge thank you to everyone who is planning to visit the School Council's bird seed stall today. Your support will help us raise funds to buy bird feeders and bird boxes for the school, encouraging wildlife to thrive in our community.**

**We will keep you updated on how the School Council gets on with the Big Schools' Birdwatch over the next couple of weeks, as the Schools' Birdwatch runs until 13th February.**



## SEND Coffee Morning

**Year 3&4 - Mon 26th January @ 9am**

**Year 5&6 - Tue 27th January @ 9am**

We will be holding SEND Coffee Mornings where you can meet other parents, chat with the SEND team, and learn about our school's processes and procedures for supporting children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.

This will be a relaxed session with time to ask questions, share experiences, and find out more about how we work together to support your child's needs. There will be no formal presentations—just an opportunity to talk, listen, and connect.

**We hope to see you there and look forward to sharing a warm drink and friendly conversation!**



## Caterlink Pupil Survey

Our school meal provider, **Caterlink**, is carrying out their annual pupil survey to help improve their catering service.

They would really value your feedback and would be grateful if you could complete the short survey by clicking the link below. It should take no longer than **4 minutes** to complete.

**Survey closes:** 27th March 2026

**Primary Pupil Survey Link:**

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/R3RTFTV>

Thank you for your support.



## Young Writers—

### I Have A Dream Poetry Competition Reminder

As mentioned in last week's newsletter St Mark's pupils have been invited to enter the **Young Writers, I Have a Dream** poetry competition.

If your child would like to take part they can collect an entry form from the school office. Please return the completed form to school by **Monday 2nd February**.

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



## Rags 2 Riches 4 Schools Collection Reminder

Thursday 5th February

A reminder that the **Rags 2 Riches 4 Schools** collection is coming up soon! If you can spare a moment to have that much needed clear-out of clothes, shoes and accessories, we would very much appreciate your donation.

Please pop items into a carrier bag or bin bag and drop them in to the school office by 9am on the day of the collection. Money raised will directly benefit our children and the items of clothing are currently being sent to the Ukraine.

**Please note that school uniforms cannot be accepted**

For a full list of items that can be collected, please visit: [www.rags2riches4schools.co.uk](http://www.rags2riches4schools.co.uk)

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



## 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

- Athlete Announcement—PTA Letter and Sponsorship forms



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.



## Holiday Free School Meal (FSM) Voucher Scheme

We would like to make you aware of the holiday Free School Meal (FSM) voucher scheme that Gloucestershire County Council is currently offering to families in Gloucestershire.



This **February half-term**, Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) will provide families in receipt of Free School Meals, who sign up to this offer, with vouchers to assist with food costs during the school holidays. The vouchers are funded through grant funding they have received and they are separate to that of term time free school meals.

The scheme is for children in reception to year 11 who receive Pupil Premium (benefits-related) **free school meals** and attend a school in Gloucestershire.

**Applications for holiday FSM vouchers for the February half-term 2026 will be open from midday 19 January until midday on 26 January. Voucher emails will be sent from week commencing 9th February.**

Please check your junk/spam folders during this period as sometimes the vouchers end up there. If you have not received your vouchers by 16 February, please submit a query via the Microsoft Form [HERE](#)

Families who have signed up to the scheme or who are already registered will receive a total of **£15 per child for one week**.

**Families who have signed up previously do not need to re-register for the February half-term vouchers - they will already have been included.** If you have previously signed up you will need to contact GCC with any changes to your circumstances (e.g. if the number of children eligible increases or decreases). **To ensure GCC reach all those who are eligible, they are encouraging parents that have not previously signed up, to sign up as soon as they can.**

For any parents wishing to **update details of an existing application**, please submit an update existing details request via the **Microsoft Form [HERE](#)** so GCC can update your account, as details are not automatically updated.

Please note that GCC check eligibility for the scheme by cross-referencing with the term-time free school meal register, so please ensure you are registered beforehand. You can register by visiting the [apply for free school meals](#) page.

**Using vouchers** – vouchers need to be used and will only be awarded once you have registered for the scheme and cannot be backdated. Vouchers should be used in the holiday period in which they are awarded. If vouchers are not claimed and have expired, they cannot be re-issued.

Vouchers not received should be queried via the **Microsoft Form [HERE](#)** by the end of the holiday period.

**To apply and for those wishing to find out more about eligibility please visit:** [Holiday free school meal vouchers | Gloucestershire County Council](#)

## Absence Reminder

Government regulations make it necessary for the school to keep a record of absences, with reasons. **If your child is absent, please telephone the school before 8.45am each day your child is unwell and will not be at school, even if you called the previous day, so we are assured your child is safe.**



**St Mark's Absence Line:  
01242 702280 Option 1**

Should we not hear from you, we will make contact to establish the reason for the absence. If we cannot reach you as the first emergency contact, we will use the list of 3 contact numbers provided. If, by **12 noon**, we still have not managed to reach you, members of the Senior Leadership Team may make a home visit and call the Police if we are concerned for the safety of your child.

Thank you for your understanding in this matter.