

NEWSLETTER for Blackwell First School

...developing the whole child...

Dear Families,

Happy New Year 2025 everyone. The final two weeks of last term were a highlight of the autumn term, with productions of 'The Nutcracker', 'Nativity' and a special Nursery and Reception 'Christmas Singing and Nativity'. The children performed so well. Thank you on behalf of the staff and myself for attending the productions and for kind Christmas gifts, cards and words we received. As a staff we are very grateful for your support.

We start this Spring term with an exciting 'Let's Perform' project, including Art and Science as focus subjects in addition to the inspirational texts that the children will read. Planning the production of a class performance will be the focus for the children's learning over the coming weeks. The texts that the children read in school are all award winning and are planned and chosen to support the children's vocabulary and written language.

The Spring term is an important term for your child. The children are well established in their classes and it is a time to focus on moving on the learning, addressing any parts of the curriculum that the children find challenging. Expectations of knowledge and skills, in order to reach national expectations, have been outlined in our own Blackwell curriculum and we support the children in developing as many lifelong learning skills as possible without 'teaching to the test'. We do need your help though. In this age of technology, children are spending increased amounts of time in front of screens and are not reading as they previously did. Please ensure they read to you regularly (at least 4 times per week) and that you read to them to help develop their vocabulary, their use of standard English and their enjoyment of reading. Suggestions for age relevant bedtime story books are on their Home Reading cards. Expectations for times tables by the end of Year 4s is that the children will need to know all their times tables up to 12x12 by heart. In the national test, they only have 6 seconds per question and there are 25 questions, 20 of which will be the 6,7,8,9,12 times tables. This 6 seconds includes navigating the online response, so their recall needs to be instant. Please help them learn these at home. It is crucial for the children to learn these number facts in order to calculate mentally in Key Stage 2. This will help their transition to Middle School, whether or not the children take a test this year.

The key to successful learning is the quality of teaching. Here at Blackwell, we are fortunate to have very strong teachers and teaching assistants. This year, training for staff has included ensuring new staff have accessed all training that has previously been accessed by established staff, mental maths training and further Little Wandle phonics training. We have worked on further refining the writing curriculum and all subject plans and also had maths training from our maths consultant on developing mental maths. For many children, though, despite strong teaching, there will be times when 'they just don't get it' and this is when we introduce an individual or a group of children to intervention support. This means that the child/ children will take part in additional support on specific areas of the curriculum for a short amount of time to enable them to make more rapid progress. If your child comments that they are receiving small group or one to one support (with the exception of reading) then they are likely to be taking part in intervention. This aims to ensure that no child is 'left behind' and has the chance to reach national expectation.

As well as Parent Consultation 'meetings' in March, with information about the children's progress between the autumn and spring terms you will receive information about how to help them with their learning on class newsletters. Thank you.

Best wishes for 2025, Mrs A Moss.



Jack and the Beanstalk on panto day was a hit with the children with plenty of audience participation.

Christmas 2024- we thought you may enjoy some photos...



'He's over there...!' Could Red Class have shouted any louder?



Some scary bits...



and some frustrating parts.

As we start 2025, we wish you all a Happy New Year.



Thanks to Mrs Barker, Mrs Miles and Miss Shepherd for our delicious Christmas lunch day.



Nursery enjoyed singing their songs to their families.

Red Class enjoyed their Nativity performance on the stage. What super acting!

With a trip to the Rep, MAC and Birmingham Hippodrome as well as their Christmas Pantomime in school, the children have certainly had an opportunity to develop culturally during December.



PARENT QUESTIONNAIRES

As part of working in partnership with our families, we send out a questionnaire each year for parents to complete. These help us to develop our practice and are useful evaluation tools. The questionnaire that we send out is identical to the OFSTED (School Inspection Team) questionnaires that they issue. This means that we are able to evaluate our practice from your feedback in advance of an inspection and address any issues. For example, previous feedback on pre school provision, homework, home reading, after school provision and sport led to us developing our own After School Club, increasing the sport on offer and changing homework and reading provision. Blackwell First School was last inspected in December 2023 and we will not routinely be inspected for a few years. We continue to work with our external consultants to ensure that we offer the best education for children. These external advisors help us to make changes to our provision and to develop as a school. Your feedback is useful to help us prioritise our work. Please complete the Feedback Questionnaire which will be sent home shortly and return it by the end of January 2025. Thank you.



SCHOOL SPORT/ HEALTH AND THE ARTS

Mrs Barker, Mrs Miles and Miss Shepherd are preparing our lunches to start off 2025 as a healthy year for us all. Please see the details below regarding healthy snacks. Following on from art projects with Mark Riley, working to develop the back of school, we will be working with the PFTA to develop the side of the staff room during this year. We will work with him on art skills as part of the children's curriculum work.

Parking Please continue to park safely and respectfully along St Catherine's Road and Woodcroft Close. Our neighbours are often long suffering with regards to parking on the road and we aim to maintain good relationships with them. Please help us by leaving driveways clear and avoiding turning in the road. We have offered residents BFS parking slips to place on windcreens of cars blocking driveways, Please avoid those on yours! We do have some parents with disability badges who drop off and pick up outside school but ask that all other families avoid parking on the zig zags. Many thanks.

Parent app – PLEASE ENSURE YOU HAVE ACCESS TO THE PARENTAPP AND THAT YOUR BFS FRIENDS DO TOO SO THAT WE CAN COMMUNICATE WITH YOU.

We are aware that some families do have access but are not always 'in the loop' so the more families who have notifications turned on, the more likely everyone is to know what is happening in a timely way. Many thanks.

Returning to school- January 2025

Staffing had become a challenge at the end of term as COVID and a variety of other illnesses spread around school. We hope that the break has helped but ask that you support us.

When returning to school, please:

- Keep children away from school with **any** covid symptoms for 3 days (testing if possible and informing school of results) and
- Keep children with symptoms of infectious disease at home according to NHS guidelines. We can share these with you when you call us.

We will:

- Ventilate regularly;
- Handwash regularly;
- Clean equipment and areas regularly;
- Ensure staff with covid symptoms test and are absent when positive and
- Continue to operate following guidelines from Public Health.

At **Blackwell First School** we aim to educate the whole child and to ensure children are happy, healthy and fulfil their potential in terms of development of skills for life, social and moral values and academic success. We work towards the aims on our vision statement in all we do. Progress towards our School Development Plan during the autumn term is outlined below:

Quality of Education

Last term, we worked with Rebecca Kennedy, English consultant, to further refine our Writing curriculum. This will enable teachers to plan exciting and motivational writing tasks that produce carefully planned pieces of writing.

Outcomes for pupils - Monitoring of the children's progress last term showed that the vast majority of children are making good progress towards their challenging targets. Children who have made less progress than expected are being supported additionally through small group or individualised programmes, monitored closely by Miss Townsend.

As a staff, we worked with Anthony Reddy, Maths consultant, to further develop mental maths teaching and ensure that the children have the best start to their mathematical understanding.

Outcomes for pupils – The children are progressing well with their age related mental maths skills and extra practise at home will help too!

Following Ofsted, we have worked hard to further develop planning, producing a simpler format for external consultants/ inspectors to review during inspections.

Outcomes for pupils- The children continue to make good progress in foundation subjects and their books show how well they are working.

Tea and Toast

Many thanks to those supporting our 'Tea and Toast' café which opens each day 8.30-9.30am and 3-4pm. Volunteers bake and serve in this, supporting school with much needed income. If each family bought one item from 'Tea and Toast' each week during the school year, this could fund 50% of the salary of a Teaching Assistant or 30% of the salary of a teacher. This would be amazing! We do not wish to reduce staffing levels so any support that you can provide would be much appreciated. Huge thanks to our 'Tea and Toast' volunteers and to the PFTA for their hard work. THIS DIRECTLY CONTRIBUTES TO YOUR CHILD'S EDUCATION!

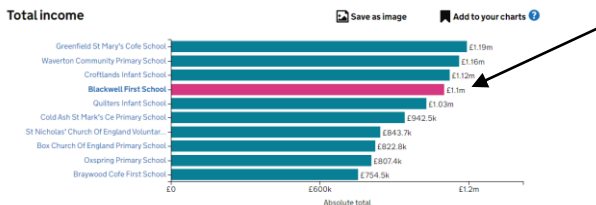


PFTA support

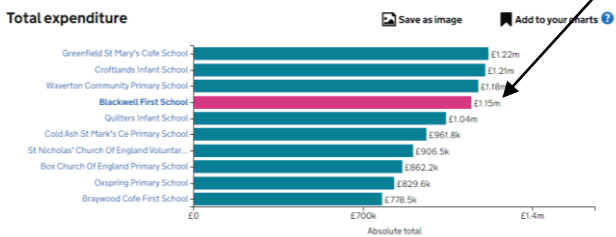
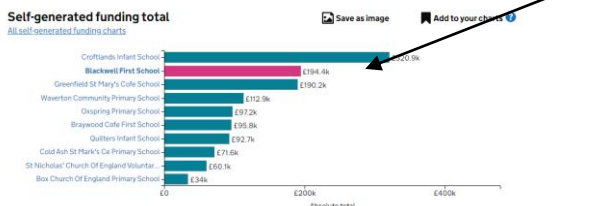
Congratulations to the PFTA and thank you to you all for raising over £7,000 at the various lovely events last term. This is a record! Thank you for continuing to support the work of the school through fundraising. Thank you to Manjit Sandhu, Emily Blore, Jo Lampon, Carrie Whitehouse, Emma Morgan and the whole PFTA team. The funding raised this year will subsidise school trips as well as enable the purchasing of resources.

You may have read or heard reports of a national school funding challenge and here at Blackwell things mirror the national picture and I would like to explain why our PFTA and in school fundraising is as crucial as it is.

The Department for Education (DfE) provides us with financial benchmarking information, comparing us with schools of a similar size and deprivation. Below are some tables that highlight both our income and expenditure for 2022.



This total income includes all funding from DfE (Department of Education) and funding for the Nursery, applied for grants and Universal School Meals (Red, Green and Purple Classes). **It also includes all self generated income, including the PFTA income, Before and After School income and the Blackwell Kitchen.** Our income is higher than other schools due to this self generated income (see below).



It is clear to see how without the self generated income, our total expenditure on the children would be far less than average and the school would not be as successful academically or socially and the opportunities and experiences would not be as rich. It is, therefore, with huge thanks to the PFTA/ Tea and Toast volunteers and the hard work of the school in running the Club, Kitchen and Nursery in order to generate income for the school that enables us to continue to offer the quality provision that we do. Finally, during this extremely financially challenging year, thank you to you all for supporting events and popping coins into collection pots and supporting the PFTA. It is for the benefit of the school and the children.

COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

We start the New Year with the following themes for discussion: New Year (focusing on making positive changes and reflecting on the old and moving on); Courage (personal courage and making the right moral choices as well as online safety and safety) and Honesty. The children will consider these themes using art.

We will also consider sporting events for 2025, such as the Women's Euros, as well as Arts events, including our local Worcester based 'Voices and Visions'.

I wonder what New Year resolutions you have made? Are your children's resolutions linked to citizenship and consideration of others as discussed in Collective Worship? We are trying to encourage the children to think of others, rather than themselves with their resolutions. Our aim, through Collective Worship, is to support a sense of community within the school and this is particularly important when world events have led to many people looking inwards. Opening the children's eyes to their role in community is particularly relevant and important.

Later this half term, the children will learn about unity, discovering that there are more things that unite countries than divide them and how this links to other children in school. We will consider our relationship with Europe and the wider world. As part of this theme, we will work on British values and the universal values outlined by the United Nations and the way in which they impact on everyone in the UK. As world events unfold, we tackle them through our discussions so that the children have an informed understanding at their level of issues that they are increasingly exposed to through television and media but without the background understanding. We will work on answering current issues that the children ask about sensitively as they arise in a factual way. We expect further questions regarding the ongoing wars in Ukraine and Gaza and will answer these questions simply but honestly in a way that does not cause anxiety but that helps children feel empowered by their own behaviours, such as charitable donations.

HEALTHY SNACKS AND LUNCH BOXES

Now that the festive season has passed, we wish to remind families that as a healthy school we encourage children to bring in healthy snacks (such as fruit, tuck shop items, cheese, dried fruit etc) and lunchboxes. Sandwiches, fruit, yoghurts, dried fruit etc are healthy ideas. We wish to remind you that sweets, crisps and chocolates are not part of a healthy lunchbox and we ask you to view them as treats for having at home. The message we teach the children is "everything in moderation" and in school we strive to promote healthy eating where possible. **We also remind you that we cannot have snacks with nuts in school, including cereal bars, as a result of children having severe nut allergies.**

We also ask that you do send a snack or 50p in daily as an increasing number of children are not receiving a snack mid morning and it is a long time to wait until lunchtime. If we provide a snack for them, we will let you know via a parentapp message.

Spring term dates 2025

- 6.1.25 School opens for Spring term
- 13.1.25 PFTA meeting on zoom 7.30pm
- 29.1.25 RAGS to RICHES- save and bring in 'loved clothing'
- 3.2.25 Blue Class visit to Hindu temple and Yellow Class visit to Mosque- details to follow
- 10.2.25 Green Class visit to Synagogue (Blue Class optional)- details to follow
- 13.2.25 Change the rules day
- Half term- 17th- 21st February 2025