

Weekly School News Roundup

Withycombe Raleigh
C of E Primary School

Date: 9th January 2026



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Happy New Year!

News from your Headteacher

I hope that you and your family had a lovely Christmas with lots of tasty food and quality time with one another. The children have come back to school full of energy and excitement and it has been wonderful to welcome everyone back. It is going to be a fun-packed and busy term so please ensure you keep abreast of what is going on via our website, Facebook and newsletters as well as the other communications sent out by text and email.

Attendance and Lateness



We monitor attendance and lateness regularly and I am becoming increasingly concerned about the high numbers of **late marks** and persistent absentees. Research on attendance in schools clearly shows that good attendance has a **positive impact** on children's academic achievements. **A good level of attendance** is essential for children to make the best progress in their academic, social and emotional development. Teachers regularly observe (and research supports this finding) that children who are persistently absent - with attendance below 90% - find it difficult to catch up on missed learning, and often do not meet their targets for the year.

We want every single child to have the best chance to reach their full potential.

When children are late to school this also creates significant problems for both staff and children - lateness causes delays to lessons, and disrupts our daily routines and learning.

Punctuality is an important life skill and we encourage children to be on time each day. In order to encourage children to arrive on time, reduce the impact on the administration team of re-registering 'lates' and to better support our families, we have introduced a new '**late gate duty**'. A member of the Senior Leadership Team will be present at the main gate each morning to record late arrivals. This will allow us to identify families who may be finding punctuality challenging, and to offer appropriate support to address the reasons for lateness. We employ a number of strategies to promote regular attendance and we will continue to monitor this termly. Attendance concern letters will be issued to children with attendance below 90%.

If a child is just 10 minutes late each day, this equates to 50 minutes per week of missed learning. Over the year, these late arrivals will have a detrimental effect on the child's learning and progress (and those of their peers).

We appreciate your cooperation and continued commitment to ensuring a calm and settled start to the school day for all children. Mrs L Jones, our dedicated Wellbeing TA, has included some advice in this newsletter too.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you would like some support or advice about how we can work together to improve your child's attendance or punctuality.

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Reporting absences

If your child does need to stay home from school due to illness, we operate a **first day response system** which requires parents/carers to ring the school absence line as early as possible on the first day to report a child's absence. When you leave a message, please state your child's full name and class, along with a short description of why they are absent, including any symptoms. If we don't receive notification of a child's absence we view this as a safeguarding concern, so the school office will make contact via text to ask the parent/carer to confirm the reason their child is absent. It may also be necessary for us to make a home visit to check on the wellbeing of an absent child.

Medical Appointments

We ask please that medical appointments during the school day are avoided whenever possible. We understand that sometimes there may be a medical emergency where this is unavoidable. If you cannot avoid having a medical appointment within the school day, parents/carers should inform the school office at the earliest opportunity, providing verification via a hospital letter/evidence from apps like MyCare, or an appointment card.

I would like to take this opportunity to remind you that any application for **Term Time Absence** must be made using an 'Absence Request Form' and submitted to the office at least 2 weeks prior to the event. Government guidance is clear that Headteachers should not grant any leave of absence during term time unless there are exceptional circumstances, eg attendance of a funeral.

Family holidays or other leisure activities are not considered exceptional circumstances.

OPAL Play (Outdoor Play and Learning)



We continue to be pleased with the developing opportunities for varied children's play during our lunch hour. Please be aware that in addition to new activities, we have introduced a new '**reset room**' to allow children to regulate and reflect on their behaviour choices if needed at lunch time. Staff on duty may request that children take 5 - 10 mins to **reset** if they feel that this is needed. The aim will be to hold a restorative conversation, and to swiftly return them to their play after having a chance to calm, and think positively.

Our current wish-list is for donations of: plastic drain pipes / guttering, tarpaulins, and 'traffic' cones!

You'll find more about OPAL play, including some great photos, on the next pages.



Sports and Achievements

Left: Eliza in Hazel Class collected her ultramarathon wristband for completing 50 junior park runs! Well done Eliza!

Right: Blossom from Sycamore Class completed her 100th junior parkrun just before Christmas. She was really focused on doing this before Christmas and was only the 3rd person to achieve the 100th wristband!



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Jack Frost has visited our EYFS classes this week!

Our reception classes have had an exciting start to the new term with a magical visitor leaving a silvery, frosty, icy trail in their classrooms. Whilst the children were outside playing, Jack Frost *swift* through school and left behind a poem for the children. What an exciting start to their new winter topic and poetry study!



As you know, last year we introduced OPAL play at Withycombe Raleigh Primary School. OPAL (Outdoor Play and Learning) is an approach that helps children make the most of their playtime by encouraging rich, active and imaginative outdoor play every day. Children are given more opportunities to explore, create, problem-solve and collaborate outdoors in a safe, well-managed environment. See how much the children have enjoyed their break and lunch times this week!



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New Term Wellbeing: Start the Day in a Calm Way

Many parents find the rush of the morning before school hectic and sometimes stressful. Our children may feel this stress too, particularly when having a busy morning routine after a school break.

Some children may feel anxious about attending school and not want to leave their parents/carers. For some children this is called separation anxiety.

How can we start the day in a calm way and reduce our child's anxiety?

It starts with the night before! Review your child's bedtime routine. Is it as calm as it could be? Predictable activities help - tea, talking time, bath, story, bed.

Plan ahead. Prepare as much as possible the night before eg. get uniform ready, packed lunch done, breakfast laid out for the morning - anything to reduce the busyness of the morning.

Create a visual timetable or checklist. Children function best with a predictable routine. Create a checklist together with your child about what needs to happen next - get dressed, have breakfast, brush teeth, visit the toilet, get a bag ready, put shoes on, out the door. Using pictures can help young children.

Reward reluctant or anxious children when they are fully ready to leave the house. Keep rewards simple, cheap and short – a 5-minute cartoon after school, or read a short story together.

Be positive. Talk about all the good things that your child enjoys at school, no matter how small. Keep conversation light, short and upbeat. If your child sees that you are ok with their anxiety, they may feel more confident. Look happy and smiley yourself!

Manage anxious talk. Children may want to talk about school worries in the morning, but doing this may only increase their anxiety. Encourage them to talk about their worries the day before. Create a Talking/Worry Time for your child each day after school. Choose a time when they are not hungry or tired, perhaps after tea. Keep the time short – aim for 15 minutes at most. Use paper and pens if your child likes writing or drawing. Tell them this is a time to chat about anything, but also to talk about any worries for the next day.

Distract, Distract, Distract! On your journey to school, help distract your child's worry thoughts. Play I-spy, use songs or rhymes, use your senses (tell me 5 things you see, hear, smell, touch), use exercise if you walk (do 5 hops, 4 jumps, 3 skips etc).

Use transition objects. Give something to your child to help them know you are thinking of them when they separate from you to go into school - something they can keep safely in their bag just to know it is there. A picture of you, a piece of soft material that you have both cuddled, or a little note to say you love them. If your child has packed lunch, you could put a different note in their box each day saying something lovely about them.

Keep to time. Being late can increase anxiety in children; they may feel rushed and will miss the start of the class structure and routine, which can help settle them. They may feel embarrassed to walk into class after the register, when everyone else has begun the lessons. Being late adds more pressure to the day.



Create a quick and positive good-bye ritual together with your child. 'One kiss, one hug, a 'high-five' etc. Remind your child you will see them very soon. If you have something to look forward to after school, remind them of that. Prolonging the good-bye, or waiting around too long after dropping off, will only serve to increase anxiety. **Keep it short and sweet!**

Stories can help – we recommend 'The Invisible String' by Patrice Karst. You can find this story for free on YouTube. It looks at how a child is always connected with their parent/carer, even if they are not together.

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Safeguarding: 'Game Safe Guide' Helping Young People Game Safely Online – *Post Christmas!*

The 'Game Safe Guide' from Internet Matters helps parents support safe, balanced online gaming for young people. It covers age-appropriate content, managing screen time, setting parental controls and staying alert to online risks like in-game chats and spending money. It also encourages open conversations to promote safe and positive gaming experiences. Take a look here: <https://www.internetmatters.org/resources/game-safe-guide-to-help-young-people-game-safely-online/>

APPS AND THEIR AGE RATINGS

13+		16+	
 Facebook	 Snapchat	 WhatsApp	
 Instagram	 Twitter		
 TikTok	 Kik		
 YouNow	 Yubo		
 House Party	 Monkey		

Apps and their Age Ratings

Do you know the age ratings of some of the more popular apps? In addition to checking the age rating, the likes of PEGI (Pan European Game Information) provide further content descriptors which will give you an indication of the type of content that your child might encounter e.g. there may be degrees of violence, or bad language within a game.

Look for the PEGI rating and descriptors on the app store, or game packaging!



It's important to note that while PEGI ratings are a great guide, they don't necessarily determine whether something may or may not be appropriate **for your child**. Your child maybe within the age range for a PEGI 7+ rated game, but:

- ✗ do they struggle with nightmares after playing games with mild jump-scares?
- ✗ are they susceptible to peer pressure to buy in-game loot boxes for themselves or their friends?
- ✗ is there user-created content which falls outside the PEGI rating?
(eg although Roblox is rated PEGI 7+ the App Store rates it 12+, reflecting that the platform contains user-generated elements only suitable for older children).

parentzone

ParentZone is also a really popular site for helping families to assess whether a game or app is right for your child. It clearly sets out why a game is so popular, which features may be inappropriate, what 'traps' children could fall into (eg 'real money' loot boxes / in-app spending) and how to set up parental controls specific to that app or game to protect your child. When searching **ROBLOX** for example, it explains that the most important setting in terms of content is the Account Restrictions option, where you can limit the content available. With this enabled, children will only be able to play games curated by Roblox themselves, rather than accessing unmoderated, independent user-created content.

It's good practice to take a look at these guides for any new game or app before you buy or download it, to make sure it is right for your child.

With best wishes for a Safe and Happy New Year!

Mr Smith, Designated Safeguarding Lead

The Mental Health Support Team in Schools (MHST) is a new NHS service commissioned to work with a number of schools across Devon. They offer early intervention to help children and young people with their mental health and emotional wellbeing.

This new service will work with us at Withycombe Raleigh Primary School to support our pupils, staff and families to help every child in our school to feel safe, supported, and able to do their best. The MHST offers early help and practical support for children who may be experiencing issues such as worries, low mood, difficulties with behaviour, or managing emotions.

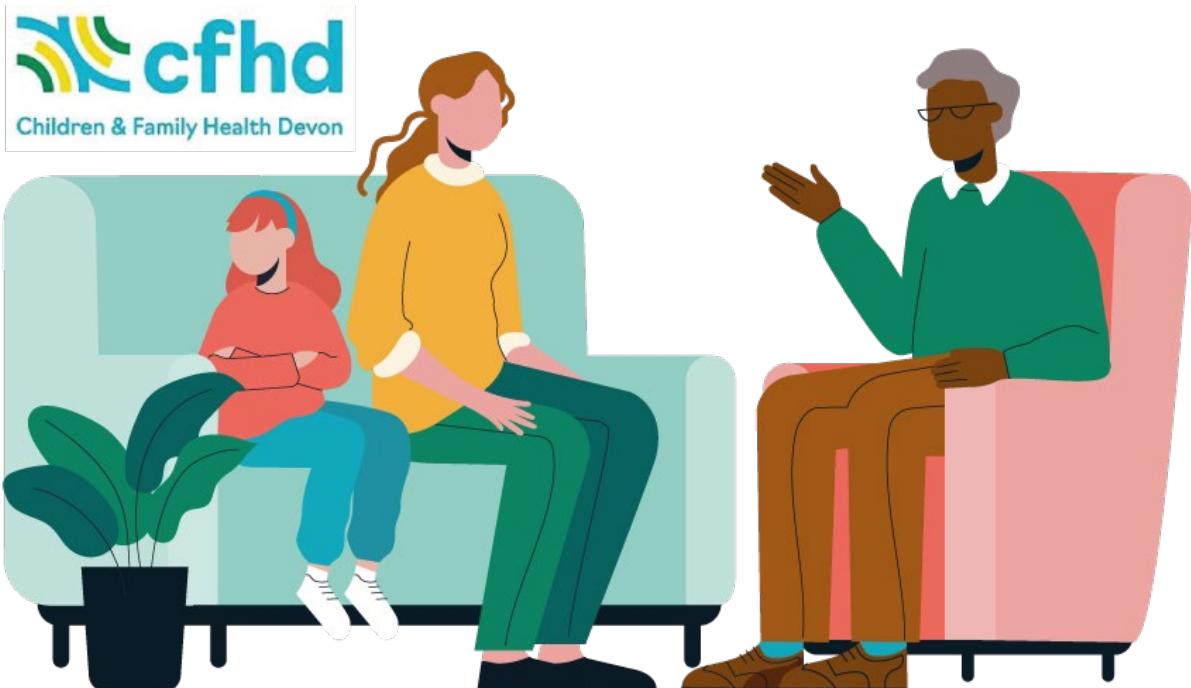
They are looking for your views to help them to understand what the school community needs.

We invite all our parents and carers to fill in their short, anonymous survey.

It's very quick - just 15 short questions with yes/no/don't know tick-boxes for your responses.

Survey link: <https://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/PG88MK/>

Or scan the QR code:



You can find out more about the MHST, including how to fill in referral forms, on their website:
<https://childrenandfamilyhealthdevon.nhs.uk/>.

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WORLD WAR TWO DAY
Saturday 31st January 2026

Military vehicles
Rationing
Code breaking
Object handling
... and more!

Adults: £9.50, child: £3
Museum members: £4.75, child: £2

TIVERTON MUSEUM
of Mid Devon Life

Tuesday - Saturday, 10:00-4:00
www.tivertonmuseum.org.uk
Beck's Square, Tiverton EX16 6PJ
01884 256295
Registered charity 118190

f **g**
FOLLOW US
@TivertonMuseum



CORNWALL & DEVON
School Age Immunisation Service
Provided by Kernow Health CIC

NHS

Flu Vaccination
School Age Reception - Year 11

Drop In Clinic

Saturday 17th Jan 2026
10:30 - 13:30

The Church of Jesus Christ
of Latter-day Saints
Wonford Road
Exeter
EX2 4UD

For more information
please speak with a
member of the team
Call us on
01392 342678
kernowhealthcic.schoolimmsdevon@nhs.net

Primary Teacher Training programmes (starting in September 2026)

As a partner school with Exeter Consortium Schools' Alliance, we are proud to support their Primary Teacher Training programme. If you've ever thought about becoming a primary school teacher, this school-based training offers classroom placements across Devon, expert guidance and hands-on experience from day one. Applications are **now open** for training starting in September 2026. Find out more here: www.exeterconsortium.com/train-to-teach



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