



WEEKLY NEWSLETTER

9th Jan 2026

Dear Parent/Carer,

Happy New Year to you all! I hope that you had a relaxing festive break.

It is good to see the vast majority of students have returned to school rested and ready to learn. Attendance is still a massive priority for us and we all need a concerted effort to improve this. In particular, for those of parents and carers of students in Year 11 and Year 13, please can you ensure that your child attends school on a regular basis so that they are fully prepared for their exams. Students in Year 11 and Year 13 simply cannot afford to miss school at this crucial time. Please reach out to your child's Student Support Assistant or our Attendance Officer, Mrs Maddy, if you need any support.

With the unsettled weather at the moment, in the very unlikely event that the college was unable to open, you would be informed of this decision via email and updates would also be posted on our website and social media pages. This decision would not be taken lightly and would only ever be made as a very last resort as it is so important for students to be in school. It is looking increasingly likely that we will avoid the snow that a lot of the country is forecast, but I wanted to update you as to the process that communicating this message to you would take.

We have a lot to look forward to this half-term with trips to the Royal Opera House, Paris and Peterborough Cathedral amongst other school based visits and events.

A reminder that we break for February half-term on Thursday 12th February.

With best wishes for another cold weekend!

Dawn White
Principal



Year 7 Letters to Their Inspiration

We had some very excited Year 7 students in the library before Christmas who received a special delivery. As part of library lessons students learn the art of letter crafting and have the opportunity to write to someone famous they admire. This may be an author, sportsperson, actor or social media influencer. All letters are checked before sending and then it's fingers crossed for a reply!

These lucky students had all written to their favourite footballers and all received signed photos. We hope to receive many more replies over the coming months!



Straw Bear Festival Inter-House Competition!

Help Us Create the Best Straw Bear at Sir Harry Smith!

Sir Harry Smith Community College is delighted to announce that we will be taking part in this year's Straw Bear Festival—and to celebrate, we are launching an exciting inter-house Straw Bear Creation Competition!

Each house will be challenged to design and create their very own miniature Straw Bear, inspired by the famous Whittlesey festival tradition. We are asking families, students, and friends of the school to donate **clean, dry barley straw**, which will be used by the houses during the creative process.

What We Need

To help bring each house's creation to life, we are kindly requesting donations of barley straw. This must be:

- Clean
- Dry
- Suitable for crafting (no hay or wheat straw, please)

Please contact reception if you have some to donate so that we are able to organise a suitable drop off time.

The Challenge: Each house will use the donated barley straw to create their own unique Straw Bear. Creativity, craftsmanship, tradition and teamwork will all play a part as our students work together to produce something truly special.

A panel of judges will review the finished bears, and the winning house will be awarded house points and a special certificate—not to mention bragging rights for the year!

Why Barley Straw?

Barley straw has long been used for the traditional Straw Bear costume thanks to its golden colour and strength. By donating, you are helping our students take part in an important cultural event and continue a much-loved local tradition.

Thank you in advance for your support and generosity.

Let the creativity begin—who will craft the most impressive Straw Bear of 2026?



Useful Information



Staff and students donated a box full of wonderful presents for the dogs and cats at Merrylegs Charitable Trust prior to the end of term. Gifts were dropped off to the Shakespeare House Hub for collection.

The toys and treats were very well received by the furry canines and felines. This is the second fundraiser we have done for the charity and look to help them further into the New Year. They are a fantastic local charity that we love to support where we can. As you can see from the photos the charity are grateful for the help.



Selected students from our French Dept are travelling to France on **Friday 30th January** and travel home overnight on 2nd February, arriving back at school on **Tuesday 3rd February** at approximately 9am.

Useful Information

At The National College, our WakeUpWednesday guides empower and equip parents, carers and educators with the confidence and practical skills to be able to have informed and age-appropriate conversations with children about online safety, mental health and wellbeing, and climate change. Formerly delivered by National Online Safety, these guides now address wider topics and themes. For further guides, hints and tips, please visit nationalcollege.com.

10 Top Tips for Parents and Educators SUPPORTING CHILDREN GOING BACK TO SCHOOL

Returning to school after the summer holidays can be both exciting and daunting for children of all ages. Different routines, classes, schools, and academic pressures can cause anxiety or uncertainty. Parents play a vital role in easing this transition. This guide will help you support your child emotionally, mentally, and practically as they return to school.

1 RE-ESTABLISH ROUTINES

Gradually shift back to school-time routines a week or two before term starts. Regular bedtimes, wake-up times, and mealtimes can help children feel more secure and reduce the shock of change when school begins. Having a routine creates predictability and stability, helping to reduce anxiety while improving sleep and concentration.

2 TALK ABOUT FEELINGS

Encourage open conversations with children about their feelings. Ask them how they feel about returning to school, such as what they're looking forward to and anything they might be feeling unsure or worried about. Validating their emotions can help reduce anxiety and show them it's okay to talk about their emotional wellbeing.

3 SUPPORT WITH SLEEP

Children need adequate sleep for concentration, brain function, memory, and emotional regulation. Establish a wind-down routine without screens at least an hour before bed, and encourage relaxing activities like reading or listening to calming music.

4 LOOK OUT FOR SIGNS

Some children hide their anxiety. Watch for changes in their behaviour, such as withdrawal, stomach aches, and irritability. If worries persist, speak with their teacher or the pastoral team early to ensure your child receives support.

5 REFRESH SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

Help children reconnect with school friends by arranging playdates or video chats in the week before school starts. Familiar faces and social interactions help the transition and provide emotional comfort on that first day back.

6 CREATE A CALM MORNING

Mornings set the tone for the day. Plan ahead with a consistent morning routine that allows time for breakfast, getting dressed, and talking calmly about the day. Avoid last-minute rushing to reduce stress for everyone.

7 FOCUS ON POSITIVES

Talk about the fun and interesting parts of school - seeing friends, favourite subjects, or exciting activities. One simple but powerful change parents can make is swapping "How's your day been?" for "What's been good about your day?" This invites more of a positive, open response. Focusing on positives can help shift children's anxious thoughts and reframe school as a safe and engaging place.

8 VISIT OR VISUALISE SCHOOL

If possible, encourage visits to the school grounds before the first day, especially if it's a new school. Walking the route or even looking at photos of classrooms and teachers can make the environment feel familiar. The school website is always a great go-to place for this. This is particularly helpful for younger children or those with additional needs.

9 PLAN AHEAD TOGETHER

Involve children in preparing for school - buying supplies, packing their bag, or choosing lunch options. This gives them a sense of control and builds excitement. Use checklists or calendars to prepare together, helping reduce last-minute stress.

10 STAY POSITIVE AND PRESENT

Children pick up on your outlook. Stay calm, positive, and present, especially during drop-offs. Avoid lingering goodbyes, and let them know you'll be there at pick-up. A consistent, reassuring presence builds their confidence and resilience.

Meet Our Expert

This guide was created by Jo Morton-Brown, an Emotional Health Practitioner with nearly 15 years' experience supporting children and young people's mental health. She produces uplifting YouTube content for pupils and trains adults to better support young people's wellbeing, with a mission to help every child feel valued and understand their emotions.



#WakeUpWednesday

The National College

Key Information

Term Dates

SPRING TERM 2026	
START OF TERM	Monday 5th January 2026
Professional Day (college closed to students)	Friday 13th February 2026
Half Term	Monday 16th to Friday 20th February 2026
Last Day of Term	Friday 27th March 2026

SUMMER TERM 2026	
START OF TERM	Monday 13th April 2026
May Day Bank Holiday (college closed)	Monday 4th May 2026
Half Term	Monday 25th to Friday 29th May 2026
Last Day of Term	Friday 17th July 2026
Professional Day (college closed to students)	Monday 20th July 2026

Contacting Us

Please visit our website to find out the best way of contacting the person you would like to get in touch with. Please do remember that if you are contacting a member of our teaching staff, they will have teaching commitments during the day so please bear with them. If you would like to meet with a member of staff then please do arrange an appointment first.

In any cases of an emergency, please call the school on **01733 703991**.

Social Media

Please be sure to follow us on social media. We have Facebook pages for Sir Harry Smith Community College, Park Lane Primary School, New Road Primary School and the Aspire Learning Trust.

