



WEEKLY NEWSLETTER

16th Jan 2026

Dear Parent/Carer,

I am sure that many of you will be celebrating the age old tradition of the Straw Bear Festival this weekend. Students have received an assembly this week about the origins of this event, unique to our town. Thank you to Mr Tomlin for preparing and delivering these assemblies. I am sure that your child/ren will be happy to share what they have learnt with you. Year 7 students were also lucky to receive a visit from the Straw Bear storyteller today.

PE extra-curricular clubs have resumed again following the Christmas break. A timetable of the clubs that are on offer are included within the newsletter and we hope to see many students making the most of these opportunities. Revision timetables have also been published and I would encourage Year 11 students to take full advantage of the sessions.

I am very excited to report that our Year 10 football team are competing in the final of the Peterborough Schools Football Competition on Thursday. We would like to wish them the very best of luck!!

It is fantastic that we have 68 students that have signed up to take part in the Duke of Edinburgh Award. On **Friday 23rd January**, students will meet with a representative from the award for an induction to the DofE app, which is used to manage and evidence their progress through the award. We are looking forward to following these students as they progress through the award and celebrating their successes with them.

The annual trip to Paris is fast approaching at the end of this month. For any students that are taking part in this, a reminder that passports, Global Health Insurance Cards (GHIC) and any required medication must be given to reception no later than **Thursday 29th January**.

Our Reception Team are receiving an increasing number of queries from parents regarding missing items of school uniform and PE kits. However, in a large number of cases these items have not been labelled with the student's name, making it incredibly difficult to reunite any items handed in to Reception with their owner(s). Please can I ask that you do label your child/ren's uniform and PE kits to help minimise this moving forwards.

Best wishes for the weekend.

Dawn White
Principal



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ASPIRE
LEARNING
TRUST

Straw Bear Storyteller

On Friday 16th January, Patrick Ryan, storyteller and folklorist, visited our library as part of Whittlesey's annual Straw Bear Festival programme. This is a wonderful opportunity every year for our Year 7 students to listen to traditional folk tales, told by a professional storyteller. We were very lucky this year to have been offered the storyteller as part of the Straw Bear Festival Charity, for which we are incredibly grateful.

The Straw Bear Festival is one of Whittlesey's best loved traditions. No one quite knows where it came from, but it became the custom on the Tuesday following Plough Monday (the 1st Monday after Twelfth Night) to dress a farming man of the plough in straw and call him a 'Straw Bear'. A newspaper of 1882 reports that "... he was then taken around the town to entertain by his frantic and clumsy gestures the good folk who had on the previous day subscribed to the rustics, a spread of beer, tobacco and beef".

The last mention of the Straw Bear was in 1909, until local man Brian Kell, reinstated the festival in the 1980s. The procession now contains over 250 dancers, musicians and performers from various parts of the British Isles performing traditional 'Molly', 'Morris', 'Clog' and 'Sword'. A decorated plough is pulled by 21st century plough boys and is now an established part of the procession.

Traditional folk tales and storytelling is also an important part of the festival. Patrick Ryan has told stories and led storytelling workshops professionally for over twenty-five years. He tells traditional folk tales, legends, myths, and ghost stories from around the world, but mostly from the Central and Southern Regions of the USA where he grew up and from Ireland and Britain, where he has lived for most of his adult life. Students have thoroughly enjoyed listening to the stories today. Patrick also spent an hour with selected Year 7 students, leading a workshop, where students learned the craft of storytelling.

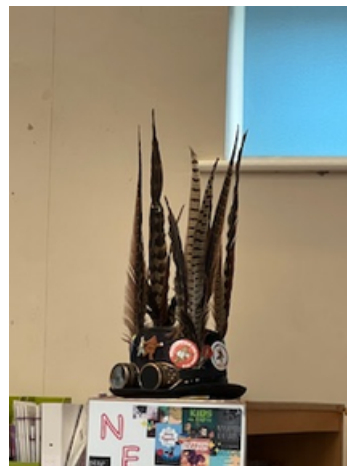
Year 7 student Barnaby, said: "The storyteller did a really great job of telling us stories and, as well as this, he gave us riddles to solve and activities, like turning a tea towel into a chicken!" Year 7 student Elsa, said: "I enjoyed the stories, they were really interesting, and it was fun trying to solve the riddles. My favourite part was learning how to turn a tea towel into a chicken!"

Patrick said "I had a great time telling stories to the Year 7 students today. I came to Sir Harry Smith Community College as part of the Whittlesea Straw Bear Festival, where I'm telling stories to the public at the Methodist Church on Saturday. The students were great and listened so well! Each session I told different folk tales, fairy tales and ghost stories from all different cultures around the world. Some of the stories related to the work of writers like William Shakespeare, Bram Stoker and Charles Dickens. We also had a workshop where I showed students ways of remembering and telling stories and making up stories. They went away with at least one story they could share with family, friends, and the other year groups. I think it was a great way to start Whittlesea Straw Bear 2026!"

Whittlesea Straw Bear Festival is taking place this weekend. Patrick Ryan will be telling stories in the Methodist/URC Church, with sessions at 12 noon, 1 pm and 2pm. Admission operates on a first come first served basis.



Straw Bear Storyteller



Year 11 Revision Sessions

Revision sessions for Year 11 are well under way. Students should check with their subject teachers or form tutors for a full timetable of sessions available to them. Information for after-school sessions available to all students is below.

Monday	Tuesday	Tuesday
Food Prep -	Sport - GR05	Drama -
Sherwood	English -	PR05
German -	OR01	D&T -
BL15		Sherwood

Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Science -	Maths - GL01	French - BL12
Cobalt		(Lunchtime)
		Art - MG09

PE Extra-Curricular Activities

We have a range of extra-curricular clubs running in the PE Department this term. Please see below for details.

DODGEBALL TERM 2

DO YOU WANT TO REPRESENT THE SCHOOL?




WHEN: MONDAY AFTERSCHOOL

WHERE: SPORTS HALL

WHO: MISS TYSON

TOURNAMENTS:

- INTERHOUSE DODGEBALL (FEB)
- PETERBOROUGH TOURNAMENT (MARCH)

MONDAY
3:15-4:15PM



TRAMPOLINING TERM 2

DO YOU ENJOY JUMPING/GYMNASTICS? THIS SPORTS FOR YOU!


WHEN: MONDAY AFTERSCHOOL

WHERE: GYM


WHO: MISS PONDER

COMPETITIONS:

- INTERHOUSE (TBC)
- PETERBOROUGH COMPETITION (TBC)



COULD YOU BE THE NEXT BRYONY PAGE?



MONDAY
3:15-4:15PM

KS4 BADMINTON TERM 2

YEAR 10 AND 11



WHEN: TUESDAY AFTERSCHOOL

WHERE: SPORTSHALL

WHO: MR ROTHERY

COMPETITIONS:

- 12TH JAN (SINGLES)
- 15TH JAN (DOUBLES)

TUESDAY
3:15-4:15PM



RUGBY TERM 2

ALL YEARS

WHEN: TUESDAY AFTERSCHOOL




WHERE: ASTRO/ FIELD

WHO: MR TYMON

COMPETITIONS:

- TBC

COULD YOU BE THE NEXT HENRY POLLOCK?

TUESDAY
3:15-4:15PM

PE Extra-Curricular Activities

We have a range of extra-curricular clubs running in the PE Department this term. Please see below for details.

CHEERLEADING

DO YOU ENJOY GYMNASTICS OR DANCE?
WHY NOT JOIN THE TEAM?

WHEN: WEDNESDAY AFTERSCHOOL

WHERE: GYM


WHO: MISS PONDER

COMPETITIONS:

- SHOWCASE (JUNE)
- BOURNEMOUTH (TBC)

ALL YEARS WELCOME

WEDNESDAY
3:15-4:15PM




KS3 BADMINTON

YEAR 7, 8 AND 9

WHEN: THURSDAY AFTERSCHOOL


WHERE: SPORTSHALL

WHO: MS HUNT

COMPETITIONS:

- 19TH JAN (SINGLES)
- 22ND JAN (DOUBLES)

THURSDAY
3:15-4:15PM



GIRLS FOOTBALL

ALL YEARS

WHEN: THURSDAY AFTERSCHOOL

WHERE: ASTRO

WHO: MR SMITH

TOURNAMENTS:

- PETERBOROUGH LEAGUE
START DATE 23RD FEB

COULD YOU BE THE NEXT LIONESSE?

THURSDAY
3:15-4:15PM




LUNCHTIME CLUBS

NETBALL (ALL YEARS)	BASKETBALL (KS3)	BASKETBALL (KS4)
WHEN: MONDAY	WHEN: WEDNESDAY	WHEN: FRIDAY
WHERE: SPORTSHALL	WHERE: SPORTSHALL	WHERE: SPORTSHALL
WHO: MISS PONDER	WHO: MISS TYSON	WHO: MR TYMON

LUNCH
1:20-1:55PM

Useful Information



Whittlesea Straw Bear Festival is taking place this weekend. The procession begins on **Saturday 17th January** at 10.30am, at the Manor Leisure Centre. Dances troupes will be entertaining all day around the town until 3.30pm. The burning of the bear is on **Sunday 18th January** at midday at Decoy Lakes.

Thank you to all Year 11 parents and carers who attended Parents' Evening last night at Sir Harry Smith Community College. We really appreciate you taking the time to come in and engage with staff about your child's progress.

Your support makes a significant difference, and both the students and staff value the opportunity to work in partnership with you as we continue to support our Year 11 students through this important stage of their education.

We would also like to remind parents and carers of Year 9 students that their Parents' Evening will take place on Thursday 29th January.

Appointments are now open for booking, and we encourage you to book early to secure your preferred times.

Thank you again for your continued support.



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 TO RETURN TO ROUTINE

Most of us look forward to the school holidays as an opportunity to slow down and relax, stay up later, sleep in and generally approach life in a more leisurely fashion. However, this does mean that returning to normal school-day routines can feel like an uphill battle. Here are some practical tips to ease that transition, reduce stress and set children up for success.

1 START SMALL AND EARLY

Begin reintroducing elements of the school routine a week before term starts. Gradually adjust bedtime, wake-up times and mealtimes to be more in line with school-day rhythms. Small changes can make a big difference in avoiding last-minute panic and helping children to readjust smoothly.

2 REVISIT THE SCHEDULE

Involve your child in mapping out their daily routine so they understand what's going to change. Visual tools like charts or calendars can help keeping to that schedule feel more engaging. When children understand and anticipate their personal timetable, they feel more secure and in control.

3 CREATE A SLEEP PLAN

Sleep can present one of the biggest challenges, as children can sometimes become night owls, prone to staying up late during the holidays. Limit screen time before bed and encourage winding-down activities like reading or listening to calming music. A restful night's sleep improves focus, mood and overall wellbeing, making mornings much smoother.

4 ENCOURAGE FRIENDSHIPS

Help your child to reconnect with school friends by organising playdates, catch-ups or arranging to go to after-school clubs. Re-establishing social bonds can make the return to school more exciting and less intimidating, allowing youngsters to focus on the positive aspects of the new term.

5 GRANT RESPONSIBILITY

Give children control over some aspects of the morning routine. Maybe they could be in charge of waking everyone up, serving breakfast or choosing the radio station that everyone listens to while getting ready. Something that gives them a sense of ownership over their morning schedule can help them view the task as one they've chosen to do, rather than being told to do it.

6 FOCUS ON NUTRITION

Make sure children are receiving balanced meals (with regular healthy snacks to boost energy and concentration), putting them in the best possible state to return to education. A nutritious breakfast is particularly crucial for a positive start to the day. Involve children in meal planning to make it enjoyable and collaborative.

7 COMMUNICATE OPENLY

Talk with your child about how they're feeling about returning to school: whether they're excited, anxious or a mix of both. Validating their emotions helps them feel supported and understood. Try asking them about the things they're looking forward to at school, such as seeing their friends again. Focusing on the positives can be useful for children struggling with change.

8 RECONNECT WITH LEARNING

Ease children back into a learning mindset by incorporating fun, educational activities into their home life. Reading a favourite book, playing games that involve maths or discussing an interesting topic can gently reawaken their focus and prime their minds to learn, which can have helpful impacts on their academic performance.

9 PREP TOGETHER

Turn preparation into a shared activity, to shoulder the responsibility together and provide support where needed. Pack school bags, lay out uniforms and plan lunch the night before. This not only reduces early morning stress but also gives children a sense of ownership over being ready for school.

10 BE PATIENT AND FLEXIBLE

Transitions take time, and every child adjusts differently: so, it's important to stay calm and supportive, especially if they're reacting adversely to the change in their daily life. Be ready to tweak routines as needed, and work with the child to make the return to education easier possible for them. Patience can go a long way to setting a positive tone for the new school year.

Meet Our Expert

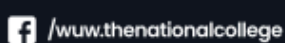
Becky Dawson is an education expert with a focus on mental health and wellbeing. Passionate about empowering adults who spend time with and care for young people, Becky specialises in creating practical strategies that promote wellbeing and resilience in children during life's transitions.



#WakeUpWednesday

The National College

Source: See full reference list on guide page at:



Users of this guide do so at their own discretion. No liability is entered into. Current as of the date of release: 01.01.2025

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.

