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## A MESSAGE FROM THE HEAD OF SCHOOL

**Zoe Ramshaw**

*"It does not matter how slowly you go as long as you do not stop."  
 Confucius*

We are ending the term on an upbeat and busy note here at Orange Tree school. We have certainly felt the community feel here this month with coming together for Unity afternoon, celebrated Hanukkah and Advent and ended this week with a special lunch and beautiful wreath making today.

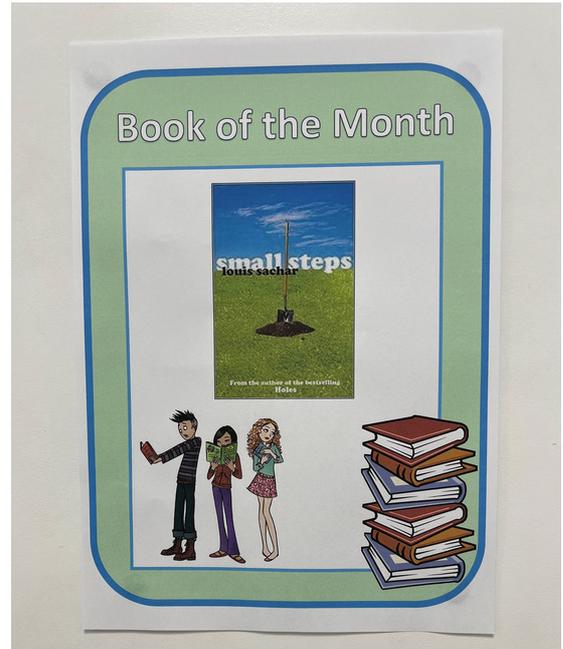
We would all like to thank the parental community of Orange Tree school for your support over the long Autumn term and I would also like to thank all of the staff who work hard to make sure we deliver the best support and education for the students. We hope you enjoy the December newsletter with an added blog regarding the difficulties around times of transition.

We look forward to seeing all of the students on 9th January at 10.30am. Happy Holidays!



# SUBJECT SPOTLIGHT: ENGLISH

In English, monsters have been unbound as year 10 have been responding to Jekyll and Hyde with their own monstrous creations, while the ghost of John F Kennedy has been invoked in year 9 retellings of Dickens's Christmas Carol. We are also happy to welcome the arrival of a whole batch of books in our school library! Next month's book of the month will be Louis Sachar's follow-up to Holes, Small Steps, and we will be updating the word of the week on a weekly basis.



# LUNCHTIME CLUBS: GARDENING

Since October we have planted spring flowering bulbs, potted up baby spider plants, planted seed potatoes, onion, garlic and sown chive, tomato, basil and lettuce seeds. The chives sprouted quickly and everyone enjoyed a sample.

We have been sustainable too. Waitrose provided flower stems at no cost that had reached their sell by date and we were able to make lovely arrangements with all the different stems. The scents and colours brightened up the afternoon.

The students have enjoyed preparing containers with soil, handling bulbs and seeds and starting to watch the green shoots emerge. Gardening skills learnt and experienced at club can be used towards achieving the ASDAN Lifeskills Challenge Awards.



## Lunchtime Clubs

### Monday

Crochet/ Running club

### Tuesday

Fishkeeping/Puzzle Club

### Wednesday

Art Club/ Running club

### Thursday

Gardening Club

### Friday

Touch-typing/ Running club

# PSHE AND SOCIAL LEARNING UPDATES

## Unity Afternoon

On our Afternoon of Unity at OTS, we celebrated diversity, peace and love. Staff and students brought in dishes from all over the world and we were serenaded with Michael Jackson's "Heal The World" by our very own OTS band brackets (Dante on drums, Asher on piano and Anders playing guitar and vocals). The students and staff then enjoyed a group meditation led by Bansi, followed by an afternoon of bracelet making, dove origami and creating a special piece of art focusing on what peace means to us at OTS. It really was a very special afternoon! Thank you to all!



## Social Learning

This term our students have been thinking about ways to label their feelings and extend their emotional literacy, as well as working together to solve different social scenarios.

We have also continued to explore different techniques for identifying and communicating feelings when it's hard to find the words to label them. Students and staff have been practicing using the emotion meter tool and blob tree tools in sessions.

## PSHE Updates

This half term in PSHE we have been working on topics within the Theme of Health and Wellbeing. Next half term all years will be looking at topics within the of theme Relationship and Sex Education. Our PSHE and Relationship & Sex Education policies have been reviewed and edited to reflect our new curriculum. The draft versions have been published on the OTS website and can found using the link <https://www.orangetreeschool.org/en-gb/policies>. We would like to invite all of our parents to review these and if you have any queries about either policy or content of the programme, please do not hesitate in contacting Vicki at school by emailing [reception@orangetreeschool.org](mailto:reception@orangetreeschool.org).

### More information on Social Learning tools:

- Blob Tree: <https://www.innerdrive.co.uk/reviews/blob-tree/#:~:text=Blob%20Tree%20is%20a%20tool%20that%20gives%20students%20the%20oportunity,%2Fguardians%2C%20or%20support%20staff.>
- Emotion/ mood meter: [https://unhconnect.unh.edu/s/1518/images/gid4/editor\\_documents/moodmeter-2020.pdf?gid=4&pgid=61&sessionId=a9e7d3a3-1eb7-4f1e-8ec0-2938406a8e18&cc=1](https://unhconnect.unh.edu/s/1518/images/gid4/editor_documents/moodmeter-2020.pdf?gid=4&pgid=61&sessionId=a9e7d3a3-1eb7-4f1e-8ec0-2938406a8e18&cc=1)

# IMPORTANT DATES

**Thursday, 21st December 2023**

**Last day of term**

Early finish at 1:00 pm.

**Monday, 8th January 2024**

**Inset day**

School closed to students,

**Tuesday, 9th January 2024**

**Start of the term**

Late start at 10:30 am.

**Wednesday, 17th January 2024**

**MacMillan Cake Afternoon**

From 1pm to 3pm, parents are invited to join and attend a session with PSHE and therapy teams.



## SAFEGUARDING TIP #1

The Christmas holidays is a time of great excitement and joy. We want all of our children and families to enjoy their time away from school and to be safe at this time of year. Fairy lights, festive candles and new toys and equipment can all present dangers to excited children.

Please all stay alert and safe.  
Happy Christmas Holidays

**Safeguarding tip #2:** The minimum age of use for WhatsApp is 16 years old. However, there is no age-verification process on WhatsApp, and some children may sign up for the app when they are younger than 16. We are aware that many of the children have access to WhatsApp and message each other regularly. It is parents responsibility to know if your child is using WhatsApp and to monitor use so it remains appropriate. If you would like any support with this, please do reach out to us.

## USEFUL RESOURCES

### **Transition Blog**

<https://www.beyondautism.org.uk/blog/>

Short blog with information on how to help children transition back to school after the holidays.

### **Autism, Identity and Me**

<https://www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk/information-about-autism/preparing-for-adulthood/making-friends-as-autistic-young-person>

A neuro diversity affirming workbook for teens to explore what their diagnosis means to them

# TRANSITION BLOG

ZOE RAMSHAW

It's holiday season so shouldn't we all be feeling more relaxed?

Change can be tough. Transitions are difficult, yet we face them all the time. It doesn't matter if it is a change we have wanted or looking forward to; ultimately everyone likes routines. They make us feel safe by giving us a predictability and a sense of control. The school is filled with children and staff counting down the days until the Christmas holidays for a much-needed rest, yet with that there is also an air of worry and uncertainly rippling through.

The long summer holiday feels like an age ago and the transition back to school a distant memory for some. Yet, when you think about it, we are constantly dealing with transitions daily, weekly, and termly that occur at school and in families. Our children wake up for school, travel to school, attend lessons set by a timetable, know when they're eating, socialising, learning, extra-curricular activities and finally, everyone gets settled... only for the holidays to approach again. Then we're faced with navigating our child through a transition into the holidays and back into school. It can feel never ending.

Orange Tree School recognises just how difficult this can be for some of our children if not all of them to some degree. As a school we adopt a more flexible approach at the beginning and end of the term to be able to support these transitions; as we do most Mondays and Fridays in some way to try and make things a little easier. The school's Speech and Language Therapist Helen Croucher has given us some of her top tips for helping pupils with holiday transitions. She explains how a structure falling away understandably causes anxiety, but it is possible to manage. She suggests from her experience and the guidance:

1. Prepare your child in advance – give them time to process the change so they can internalize the change taking place.
2. Create a plan with them. Decide on a routine and stick to it.
3. Have the plan written on a calendar so they can see it visually.
4. Set up milestones (events to mark a development) through the holidays to work towards. Let your child decide these milestones.
5. Keep things predictable. This will help minimize chaos and disorganisation.

In order to support the transition back to school, she shared the following:

1. Begin preparing your child to return to school in advance.
2. Start talking about school – show them photos. For example, you might have a photo of when the ice cream van came to school; this would be a fun memory to share.
3. Begin to move towards school bedtime and wake-up times.
4. Do a couple of test runs to school to prepare them for the route and journey.
5. Meet up with friends, and if they can't meet in person, try over Zoom or a phone call.

Of course, every child is different and what works for one will not always work for another and so guidance is just that; guidance. So that we really understand how this affects the children here at Orange Tree school, we asked them what transition to school holidays feels like and what helps.

The feedback was very helpful to us as a school but hopefully also to families. Students explained the following:

1. Most wish we were breaking up this week instead of next as they are exhausted and need a longer break.
2. They all like the early finish on the last day and hope to do something fun
3. Some said they would find it helpful to talk about school before they return
4. Some said they would like a plan for the school holidays
5. Most said they would need help to adjust their sleeping patterns before the first day of school
6. They worry about any changes at school they do not know about after the holidays
7. Most would like to have contact with school friends in the holidays
8. Some would like a visual countdown calendar to return to school
9. Everyone likes the later start on the first day
10. Everyone would like a soft start on the first day with a fun activity.

Transitions are very much a part of life, but clearly, they are not easy. Here at Orange Tree School, we keep this child-centered approach and voice at the heart of our work and always take student feedback seriously to better understand our students and inform our whole school approach.

Whilst we all need a well needed break, the students will not be far from our thoughts. We wish you all a joyful and restful break and hope that some of the suggestions in this article help in some small way to enjoy the time away from school but look forward to your return.

Happy Holidays!