ISSUE NO. 3 JULY 2026

JT MATters For Families





















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Foreword

CEO's foreword

Dear Parents and Carers,

Welcome to the 3rd issue of JTMATters for Families, July 2026, containing newsworthy features and highlighting the breadth of activities happening across the Trust in recent months.

We have some articles which relate to the Trust as a whole, including the creation of John Taylor Training (featured on page 5). Here, we have sought to bring together our separate and distinct staff development elements: the John Taylor Teaching School Hub; the John Taylor SCITT; the Staffordshire Research School (featured on page 20) and our own in-house professional development offer. In so doing, we aim to develop a more coherent and holistic approach to staff development, opening further training opportunities for our staff colleagues.

We also have the latest results from our Subject Excellence programme (featured on page 8) where children and staff across both primary and secondary schools come together for subject specific projects, allowing collaboration between our schools and some fantastic work from the children, facilitated by external partners.

There are many other articles in this issue, which showcase some of the activities and achievements which have been taking place over the past few months. From primary school success with the OPAL scheme for Whittington and Winshill Village Primary and Nursery Schools, to original performing arts and music productions for Rykneld Primary School, Paulet High School and 6th Form College and John Taylor Free School, these are just some examples of the great work happening across our family of schools.

As both this term and our current academic year draws to a close, I want to take the opportunity to thank you all for supporting these activities in our schools – both those showcased here and the many, many more that are not. Your continued support and partnership makes all our schools the very special places they are. I would also invite you to give feedback on this magazine - we are always keen to hear thoughts from our wider community and you can find a link on the back cover to get in touch directly.

With very best wishes,



Mike Donoghue OBE

CEO of John Taylor MAT

Introducing John Taylor Training

Internal and External CPD

John Taylor Training was established in February 2026 as an umbrella entity to bring coherence and synergies between various strands of staff development across the Trust. These include The John Taylor SCITT (providers of teacher experience programmes and initial teacher training), John Taylor Teaching School Hub (provider of Appropriate Body services for Early Career Teachers, support for ECTs and their mentors, and the delivery of a wide-ranging suite of National Professional Qualifications [NPQs], the Staffordshire Research School (at the heart of disseminating the best research, and supporting its adoption into school strategy) and our own in-house staff development programmes.



The vision and the values of John Taylor Training are the same as the Trust, but by capitalising on the individual areas of expertise that currently exist across these different entities, John Taylor Training aims to offer a centre of excellence in education.



Get involved - spread the word!

We'd love as many people as possible to like, share and follow John Taylor Training on social media please to help us spread the word and encourage people to book our training sessions. Use the QR code to visit the website for further information.



Helping students to THRIVE

Blythe Bridge High School

At Blythe Bridge High School, we are proud of the strong personal development provision already in place for our students. Over recent months, we have taken time to review our personal development provision to consider where we can go even further to support our young people, not only during their time in school, but also as they prepare for life beyond the classroom.

We want every student to leave BBHS with the knowledge, confidence, character and skills they need to thrive in their community, future studies, employment and wider life.



This is where our THRIVE approach has developed. THRIVE brings together the different strands of personal development into a clear and ambitious framework. Each strand focuses on an important part of a young person's growth:

- ***T – Thinking and choices:*** helping students make informed decisions about their future, careers, money and online choices.
- ***H – Health and wellbeing:*** supporting physical health, mental health, resilience and positive habits.
- ***R – Relationships:*** helping students build respectful, safe and healthy relationships.
- ***I – Identity and equality:*** encouraging students to understand themselves, respect others and value difference.
- ***V – Voice and citizenship:*** supporting students to take part, contribute and understand their role in society.
- ***E – Ethics, democracy and law:*** helping students understand values, rights, responsibilities and how society works.

The work behind THRIVE has involved looking closely at what we already do well, identifying opportunities to strengthen our curriculum, and considering how we can make personal development more visible, joined up and meaningful for students. Rather than seeing personal development as something separate from school life, THRIVE aims to bring together lessons, wider opportunities, enrichment, student voice and community involvement under one shared language.

As we move forward, staff across school will continue to develop expertise within specific THRIVE strands. This will help us build an even richer and more ambitious personal development curriculum, where staff confidence grows and students benefit from carefully planned, high-quality experiences.

Our aim is simple: for students to leave BBHS not only with qualifications, but with the confidence, values and skills to make positive choices, contribute to their communities and truly THRIVE beyond the curriculum. This is only the beginning of our THRIVE journey, and there is still more to come as we continue to develop opportunities that help every young person grow, contribute and flourish.

Celebrating a Platinum Play Award!

Whittington Primary and Nursery School

Huge congratulations to the team and wider community at Whittington Primary and Nursery School who have recieved a Platinum Award for their OPAL (Outdoor Play and Learning) provision!

This prestigious recognition reflects the dedication, enthusiasm and creativity of our entire school community in developing an outstanding outdoor play environment for our children.

Over the past year, we have worked hard to grow and enhance our OPAL provision, continually adding, tweaking and refining what we offer. Our aim has always been to ensure that children have the richest possible play experiences, with opportunities to explore all 16 different types of play.



This journey has been one of ongoing development, and we remain committed to providing the very best for our pupils. The success of our OPAL provision is truly a community achievement, and a huge thank you must go to everyone who has supported us along the way. Whether you have donated resources, collected materials, or given up your time to help build features such as our mud kitchen or pirate ship, your contributions have made a real difference.

Our lunchtime supervisors have played a vital role in the success of OPAL, fully embracing the approach and helping to create a positive, engaging play environment for all children every day. Their enthusiasm and willingness to support new ideas have ensured that playtimes are rich with opportunity and enjoyment. A special mention must go to Natalie, whose creativity and dedication have been truly outstanding. She continually brings forward fantastic new ideas and works tirelessly to ensure that OPAL runs smoothly on a daily basis, making a lasting impact on the quality of play experiences for our children.

We were also incredibly pleased with the feedback from our recent parent survey. Responses were overwhelmingly positive and highlighted the impact that OPAL has had on our children's enjoyment and development. We have carefully considered the suggestions shared and have already begun to implement changes to further strengthen our provision.

As our journey has progressed, we have also been proud to share our OPAL experiences with other schools, supporting them as they begin or develop their own provision. It has been a privilege to contribute to a wider network of schools committed to improving play opportunities for children.





Achieving the Platinum Award is a fantastic milestone, and one we are incredibly proud of. However, we see this not as the end, but as part of our continuing journey to provide high-quality, engaging and meaningful play opportunities for every child.

JTMAT Subject Excellence Update

Spring 2: Science Project led by Rangemore CE Primary School and John Taylor High School

The JTMAT Subject Excellence Spring and Summer projects have been linked to Science and Geography, and the children have done their schools proud in terms of the quality of work that has been submitted and the incredible amounts of effort, thought and care with which they have approached each project. Each participant has received a certificate for taking part; we do not envy the judges who have had to decide the winners each time!

On behalf of the Trust, a big thank you to the project coordinators who have enabled the students to explore and flourish in their different subject areas and to all the colleagues in school who have worked hard to coordinate the entries.

Across our primary schools in the second half of the Spring Term, children were encouraged to think about their environment, for the Science project led by staff at All Saints CE Primary, Rangemore.

The competition was judged by The Director of Operations and Finance at EV Battery Solutions at Cox Automotive.

The project attracted a really pleasing number of entries from across the different schools and the pupils submitted some really excellent work.

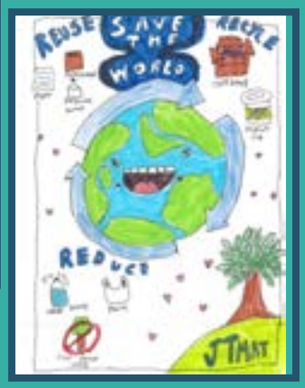


The winners were announced as:

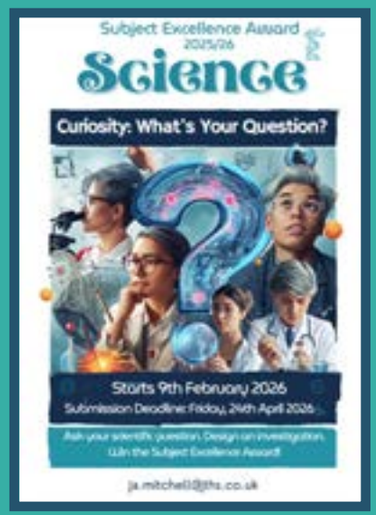
- ***EYFS: Oliver, Church Gresley Infants School***
- ***KS1: Fradley Park – Y2 Whole class entry***
- ***KS2: Darcie, Whittington Primary and Nursery School***







For the secondary Science project, staff from John Taylor High School tasked secondary pupils with honing their skills in science by asking scientific questions; and inviting them to explore their curiosity and freedom to explore new ideas, which could then lead into scientific investigations and evidence.



The winner was announced as ***John S from John Taylor High School*** with ***Phoebe W from Kingsmead School*** coming a close second.

JTMAT Subject Excellence Update

Summer 1: Geography Project led by Shobnall Primary School and Kingsmead School

The 'My Town', My Place' project was coordinated by the staff at Shobnall Primary School in collaboration with staff at Paulet High School. The project attracted an impressive number of entries from children across the Primary schools.

The children were encouraged to reflect on a special place and think about what that place means to them. The project coordinators liaised with Jacob Collier, Member of Parliament for Burton and Uttoxeter, through his office, by providing the project outline and the entries for him to judge,

"***Every piece of work was truly outstanding, and it was a privilege to read the children's thoughtful descriptions of how they feel and experience their favourite places. Each piece of work offered a unique perspective, and it was clear how meaningful and important these places are to them. Their creativity, insight, and sense of connection to their chosen locations made selecting winners a very difficult task.***"

The three winners were announced as:

- ***EYFS winner- William, Fradley Park Primary and Nursery School***
- ***KS1 winner- Mila, Thomas Russell Infants' School***
- ***KS2 winner- Shayaani, Shobnall Primary and Nursery School***

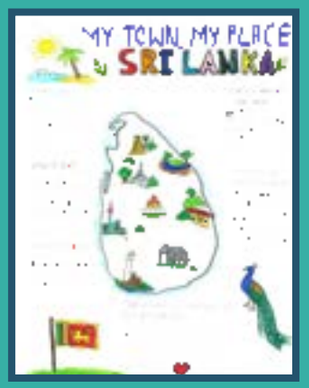
Kingsmead School co-ordinated the Secondary Geography Competition. This was titled "Costumes for the Earth", was hosted by the 'Great Imagining' and challenged students to design and create eye-catching costumes that explored geographical themes such as plastic in the Oceans and Fast Fashion. The Geography competition provided a valuable opportunity for students to work together and raise environmental awareness.

The costumes created through the competition will have an exciting future beyond the competition. Designs will be showcased at Seeds of Change, an exhibition taking place at Winterbourne House & Gardens, University of Birmingham, in September.

A huge congratulations goes to the team from John Taylor Free School, who were crowned overall winners of the competition.

A member of staff who ran this event said, 'This event highlights the importance of students collaborating and working towards a better future. Students represented their schools incredibly well. They had clearly put a lot of time and effort in to preparing and presented their ideas clearly. Thank you to all staff who supported the students throughout the event'.









NEWSFLASH!





On June 12th, an event was held at Rugeley John Taylor School in which Ms. Powell, Executive Headteacher and Mike Donoghue OBE, John Taylor MAT CEO, hosted a Celebratory Tour for Trustees and colleagues from Staffordshire County Council to celebrate the completion of the build of Staffordshire's first all-through school, the achievements of the staff and secondary pupils throughout the first year of opening, and to provide a tour of the school in anticipation of the school opening to its first year of primary and nursery pupils.

Councillor Janet Higgins, Cabinet Member for Education and SEND (Lichfield and Lichfield Rural West), was accompanied by senior colleagues from Staffordshire County Council and Trustees: Gareth Moss MBE, Colin Hopkins MBE, together with colleagues from across the Trust and school for a tour led by the pupils, who also gave a very impressive account of their first year at Rugeley John Taylor.

At ***Branston Locks Primary and Nursery School***, we've had a jam packed few weeks! One of our highlights was when Nature's Burrow came into school and brought some of their animal friends along with them. We got to meet a lesser tenrec, a bearded dragon, rabbits, guinea pigs, millipedes, hedgehogs, and even tortoises.

The children were incredibly attentive and learned so many new facts about the creatures they saw. Not only did the children show just how curious they are, they also handled the animals with care and kindness. What an incredible experience!





Do you know someone who is considering a **career in teaching?**

Find out more about our teacher training programme at **jtscitt.co.uk**

The John Taylor SCITT

Six months after the grand opening of our new art studios, the art department at ***John Taylor High School*** were excited to hold their first exhibition of the year in the newly refurbished space. It was great to see teachers, pupils, families and community members attending and admiring the work of A-Level and BTEC art students.

The exhibition showcased artwork from some phenomenally talented students with a variety of paintings, drawings, mixed media pieces, digital creations and more. It was fantastic to have such a range of creative technique and talent on show. The Head of Faculty for Creative Arts, commented on 'how the new studios have encouraged creativity for this cohort and how the bright and contemporary space has really brought the students artwork to life.'

Well done to every pupil whose artwork was displayed at the exhibition. It was great to see pupils speak so passionately about their pieces and gain a further understanding of their creative journeys. We wish them all best in their next endeavours.



The pupils in Year 3 from ***Fradley Park Primary and Nursery School*** were selected to take part in this year's Music Share concerts in conjunction with Lichfield Cathedral School. They have been visited by a professional singer to carry out engaging workshops to improve their singing skills - working on their posture, diction and breath control. They have all really looked forward to these sessions and have developed as really confident singers!



On the day, the pupils were very excited to enter the impressive Cathedral building - many had not been inside before. They enjoyed rehearsing with all of the other schools, adding actions and singing in different parts. Later in the day, we were lucky enough to take part in the Evensong, hearing the actual performance was a magical experience and we were so lucky to have been chosen to take part in this wonderful event and we hope, as a school, to be able to take part again in the future.

Winshill Village Primary and Nursery School is proud to have achieved the prestigious OPAL Platinum Award, the highest accreditation available through the Outdoor Play and Learning programme.



Achieving Platinum status places Winshill among the top 1% of schools in the UK for the quality of play opportunities they provide.

Schools awarded Platinum demonstrate excellence in the leadership, planning, resources and evaluation of their play provision, creating safe, inclusive and engaging outdoor environments that support children's physical health, resilience, creativity, social skills, confidence and wellbeing.

A special thank you goes to Mr. Worth, who has led our OPAL journey with passion, vision and dedication. His commitment has been instrumental in transforming our outdoor provision and helping the school achieve this outstanding recognition.

This award celebrates our belief that play is a vital part of every child's education and development.

We look forward to building on this success and continuing to provide outstanding play opportunities for all our children.

NEWSFLASH!

We have been pleased to be able to introduce coached rugby sessions at ***The Mosley Academy.*** A rugby coach from Stoke Rugby Club has been working with our pupils over a period of 14 weeks, offering T1 rugby sessions. These sessions provided the children with the physical rugby skills but also emphasised the core values and laws of the game. The Rugby values of teamwork, respect, enjoyment, discipline and sportsmanship link closely with the Mosley school values and our school motto of Be the Best You Can Be!

The year 4s and 5s have excelled in these sessions, and although some were a little nervous to begin with, showcased resilience, talent and enthusiasm. Notably, five Year 4 girls have been so inspired by their rugby sessions that they attended the first-ever Under-10 girls' "Pitch Up and Play" event at The Burton Rugby Club. The girls even enjoyed a unique opportunity to pose with the Women's Rugby World Cup.

Following the course of weekly sessions, a rugby festival was organised for all the children to enjoy a few games, supported by their parents. Our Pastoral TA at Mosley, not only played a key role in promoting the rugby sessions and organising the festival, but also gained sponsorship from the former president of Staffordshire Rugby. Mr McDermott also visited us during the afternoon to watch the children play their matches and was so impressed he has agreed to continue to support us with further tournaments in the new academic year.



The children were awarded medals, trophies and enjoyed some refreshing snacks mid game. It was a superb afternoon celebrating the commitment of the children, but also for the school community to come together for an afternoon of rugby! We are very proud of all of our children's achievements in their rugby sessions and during the festival and we hope to be able to continue to work with Burton Rugby Club and Staffordshire rugby coaches into the next academic year. Great work everyone – a successful collaboration of school and community sport!

The children at ***Thomas Russell Infants' School*** had a fantastic experience earlier in the term when we had an outside provider lead a drumming workshop in school. The workshop taught the children about West African drumming and provided enough djembe drums for everyone to join in and have a go. We were very fortunate that Reverend Wood (a former vicar in the village) kindly left money in his will to provide a musical experience for our children. We felt it would be nice to do something a little different and chose an African drumming workshop.



A group of primary senior leaders from John Taylor MAT recently attended a SEND conference which focused on creating truly inclusive schools for learners with SEND. It was shaped around three powerful themes: inclusion, dignity, belonging and high expectations.

It was truly inspirational to hear Dr Pooky Knightsmith lead two keynote sessions exploring how schools can be intentionally designed to support neurodivergent learners, and how to translate inclusive values into confident, equitable practice. It was equally motivating to listen to Paul Dix, whose work on relational practice and adult behaviour has shaped school culture in settings across the country. Colleagues across the Trust were able to collaborate between sessions and discuss how this may impact developments in our own schools.



In May, pupils from The Forest Family were honoured to take part in the National Memorial Arboretum's 25th Anniversary celebrations, performing on stage as part of a special programme of events attended by hundreds of visitors.

The anniversary celebrations brought together 11 schools from across the region to mark 25 years of remembrance, reflection and education at the Arboretum. Representing both their schools and their communities with pride, the children of Yoxall, Needwood and All Saints Rangemore delivered three different performances with confidence and enthusiasm, contributing to a memorable day of celebration.



Ahead of Pride Month celebrations, a group of pupils from ***Chase Terrace Academy*** travelled to Birmingham City Centre to take part in the annual Birmingham Pride celebrations. The festivities begin with the Big Community Event on the Friday – a family-friendly celebration held within the main festival site.



Accompanied by several members of staff, students wore bright clothing, along with badges and flags. During the journey, they took the opportunity to apply rainbow face paint and glitter, adding to the celebration.

The pupils enjoyed a range of engaging performances from local activists, dance groups, choirs, and drag performers. A particularly moving dance piece addressed the stigma surrounding the HIV crisis of the 1980s, featuring local drag performer Twiggy. Throughout the event, speakers highlighted the importance of breaking down barriers, challenging homophobia and transphobia in modern society, and advocating for greater inclusion and visibility for all.

It was a really positive experience for everyone involved, and a great opportunity for pupils to see the importance of Pride and what it represents.

NEWSFLASH!



On May Day Bank Holiday Monday, ***Needwood CE Primary School*** took pleasure in being part of a community wide event, the May Day Fete in Newborough. Newborough is a very small village with an active community who always work hard to create a day to remember. Our May Queen, King and Attendants took part in the May Day church service in which the May Queen was crowned. They processed around the village wells, following a bagpiper and at each well Canon Paul from Hoar Cross' Church of the Holy Angels blessed the well and the community sang a hymn. Shortly afterwards our KS2 children performed their Maypole Dancing for the whole community).



Our Friends of Needwood ran stalls to raise funds and the Fete committee donated some of their proceeds to school to support us with the purchase of new ipads.

We couldn't be more grateful to be part of this wonderful community. In addition to our participation in the May Day event, we are also supported by the local coffee shop, The Old Bakers Cottage Village Tea Rooms, who provide a prize every week to our Writer of the Week. We are also lucky enough to have parents who run some after school clubs for us in Toot, Band and Art. We feel so lucky to have this support and appreciate everyone that works with us to provide the best opportunities for the children.

Families, staff and children came together recently at ***All Saints' CE Primary and Nursery School, Alrewa***s for a fantastic PTFA Charity Football Match, showcasing the strong sense of community that sits at the heart of All Saints'.



The event provided an afternoon of fun, teamwork and friendly competition, with pupils and parents enjoying the opportunity to play, cheer and spend time together outside of the school day. We were also delighted to welcome Little Kickers, who supported the event by helping our young footballers develop their skills and confidence. Several local businesses were kind enough to donate prizes for the raffle, and we even had a signed pair of Harry Maguire's boots for a silent auction!



As well as raising valuable funds for the school, the event strengthened the relationships that help our community flourish. We are incredibly grateful to our PTFA for their hard work in organising such a successful event, and to everyone who took part, volunteered or came along to support. A wonderful example of community, partnership and belonging in action.

Making a Mark with Art!

Church Gresley Infants' School

Church Gresley Infant and Nursery School celebrated Take One Picture Week, marking a special milestone as we reach the halfway point in our Artsmark journey. This was our second Take One Picture event, and it was once again a wonderful opportunity for creativity, curiosity and cross-curricular learning across the whole school.

Take One Picture is a national programme created by the National Gallery in London. Each year schools focus on a single artwork and use it as inspiration for learning across many subjects. By exploring one painting in depth, children develop their imagination, critical thinking, and creativity.



This year, our chosen painting was Surprised! by Henri Rousseau. Throughout the week, children across the school spent time carefully exploring the painting. They looked closely at the details and shared their thoughts, observations and questions. The classrooms buzzed with curiosity as pupils asked questions such as What is happening in the jungle? Why does the tiger look surprised? What might happen next?

These discussions helped develop the children's oracy skills, encouraging them to express their ideas, listen to others and build on each other's thoughts. The painting became a starting point for conversation, imagination and storytelling.

Children took part in a wide range of cross-curricular activities inspired by the artwork. In drama, pupils stepped into the jungle scene, acting out what the animals might be doing and how they might react to the storm. In geography, they explored rainforest environments and learned about the types of plants and animals that live there. In English, the children used the painting as inspiration for descriptive writing, storytelling and creative vocabulary linked to the sights and sounds of the jungle.

The creativity didn't stop there. The following week, we proudly showcased the children's work in a whole-school exhibition. Families and visitors were invited to join us on a 'Jungle Adventure!' Our school corridors were transformed into a vibrant tropical rainforest, filled with greenery, colour and the children's incredible artwork inspired by the painting. From dramatic jungle scenes to imaginative interpretations of the animals and weather, every display showed the effort, creativity and enthusiasm our pupils had put into their work.



We are incredibly proud of all our amazing young artists, and the Take One Picture event was truly enjoyed by everyone across the school community. It was a fantastic celebration of creativity and learning, and a wonderful step forward on our Artsmark journey.

The role of a Research School

Staffordshire Research School Team

The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) is an independent charity dedicated to breaking the link between family income and educational achievement. They do this by supporting schools, early years settings, and colleges to improve teaching and learning through better use of evidence. There are three branches to the work of the EEF: Evidence Generation, Evidence Synthesis and Evidence Mobilisation.



The Staffordshire Research School is 1 of 32 Research Schools across the country who support the third strand, that of Evidence Mobilisation. The 32 Research Schools are spread across the country and represent a range of phases and expertise. As part of our work here, we have several partnerships underway at any one point.

We have four main projects underway this academic year and these are:

- St Bart's MAT, Stoke: Focused on Key Stage 2 Maths.
- Vale of Glamorgan, Wales: Focused on Implementation and effective Professional Development.
- Sandwell Local Authority: Focused on teaching and learning in a collaborative inquiry group model, with emphasis on challenge, adaptive teaching, metacognition and feedback.
- Warwick District: Focused on developing a Pupil Premium network.

There are 3 members of the core team at the Staffordshire Research School:

Research School Director
Stacey has over 25 years' experience in education. Much of her career has been spent in Sandwell, working in schools serving communities with high levels of deprivation. She also works as a School Improvement Advisor and Leadership Coach.

Operational Lead
Charlotte has over 15 years' experience in education, including 10 years in senior leadership in primary schools, where she has led English, Maths and foundation subjects with a focus on improving outcomes for disadvantaged pupils.

Research School Administrator
Emma has worked at St Peter's, Yoxall CofE Primary School for 9 years and thoroughly enjoys being part of the community in a small rural school.

There are also 22 ELEs (Evidence Leads in Education), who contribute blogs, podcasts, lead twilight sessions and deliver CPD training.
Our regular work with JTMAT includes facilitating collaborative inquiry groups for both primary and secondary phases on challenge, disadvantaged pupils and adaptive teaching.

You can sign up here for our half-termly Briefings and Newsletters to receive the latest research updates, training, blogs, and podcasts.

Fundraising with Dance Mania!

Rykneld Primary School

One of Rykneld's amazing Teaching Assistants, along with her wonderful family, regularly organises fundraising events for The Cystic Fibrosis Trust. This charity is very close to their hearts, as one of their close family members lives with the condition. Through their efforts, they aim to support vital research that helps develop new medicines and treatments to improve the lives of those living with this lifelong illness. Over the years, this family have raised more than £12,000 for



The Cystic Fibrosis Trust, and this incredible total continues to grow. In recognition of their dedication, the family is now acknowledged as one of the Trust's top charity fundraising volunteers. Their fundraising ventures have included fun days, bingo nights, bake sales, Yellow Days in school, abseiling challenges, themed dance workshops, breakfast mornings, and afternoon tea events, among many others.

However, their biggest fundraiser to date has been a fantastic collaboration with Rykneld Primary School: the spectacular Dance Mania 26 show. The event featured many of our wonderful Rykneld pupils from Years 2–6, who formed the cast of this exciting production. The children dedicated six months to rehearsals to make the show as magical as it was, and they were joined by performers from the local dance school, Joanna's Dance Academy.



The event was supported by members of our school staff and parents, who generously volunteered their time to help backstage, design the programme, and capture incredible photographs of the show. The support from the Rykneld school community was truly fantastic, and the cast performed to a wonderful audience of proud families and friends.

Thanks to the performance itself, along with additional mini fundraising activities organised alongside the show, an incredible £1,916.97 was raised for The Cystic Fibrosis Trust. Following the huge success of the event—and the children's and team's shared love of dance—it is something that will definitely be repeated in the near future. A huge congratulations goes to our TA and the wonderful team who continue to support her in raising vital funds for this incredibly important charity.



Windows, Mirrors, Doors

Walton on Trent Primary and Nursery School

We believe that it is very important to provide all children with a range of opportunities to help them develop spiritually. We believe that spiritual development may not be synonymous with RE and Collective Worship and can be explored through many different curriculum areas and as part of our personal development offer.

At Walton, we use the Windows, Mirrors and Doors model to support spiritual development.

Windows – Learning about life

We give children opportunities to become aware of the world in new ways; to wonder about life's 'Wows' (things that are amazing and unexplainable as to why they evoke such a response) and 'Ows' (things that upset us and cause us to be uncertain). In this, our children are learning about life in all its fullness.



Mirrors – Learning from life

We give children opportunities to reflect on their experiences; to meditate and reflect on life's big questions and to consider some possible answers. In this, they are learning from life by exploring their own insights and perspectives and those of others.

Doors – Learning to live life

We give children opportunity to respond to all of this; to do something creative as a means of expressing, applying and further developing their thoughts and convictions. In this they are learning to live by putting into action what they are coming to believe and value.

We are really proud of a number of our children who, following an assembly about saving our planet (the window part), they decided they wanted to save our local environment (the mirror part) so joined the Walton On Trent Annual Litter Picking Day, which was organised by the Parish Council (the doors part).

All of the families had a superb day and the children are now continuing with their litter picking habits in school, ensuring that our environment stays safe for us and also for all of the natural wildlife that surround our lovely school.





Murder, Mystery and a Major Twist!

Paulet High School & 6th Form College

Paulet High School raised the curtains on Blackheart Manor recently- a completely original musical whodunnit written, composed and brought to life by our very own Performing Arts department!

The ambitious journey began back in August 2025 when the script was first penned. Following packed open auditions in October, the show was cast and rehearsals kicked off in November. Months of intense dedication culminated this week in a theatrical triumph that left audiences captivated, laughing, and guessing until the very final scene.

The gripping story follows the wealthy, eccentric recluse Lord Reginald Blackheart, who invites 13 guests; each harbouring a dark, secret tie to him - to a dinner party at his gloomy mansion. As a fierce storm rages outside,



a massive lightning strike plunges the manor into total darkness. When the lights flicker back on, Lord Blackheart is found dead! Armed with an inimitable style, D.I. Boston interrogates the suspects one by one to unmask the killer. While justice is seemingly served as the culprits are led away, no classic “Who Dunnit” is complete without a jaw-dropping final twist and Blackheart Manor certainly didn’t disappoint! The musical also struck beautifully poignant chords. Audiences were treated to stunning vocal performances too from many cast members.

This marks the third time in 16 years that Paulet High School has staged a completely original production written by our own Mr. Ryder, following the incredible successes of Checkout! in 2010 and The Last Letter in 2013.





Reflecting on the night, Mr. Ryder shared: “From the lighting crew to the backstage support, this was a monumental team effort and a sheer pleasure to produce from start to finish. Being part of a cast and crew teaches our young people vital life skills; teamwork, commitment, leadership, problem-solving and responsibility. Above all, making new friends and being part of something to be proud of does wonders for our students’ self-esteem.”

The Performing Arts department extends its deepest gratitude to the school leadership team for their unwavering support of the arts, providing the time and resources needed to bring this vision to the stage.

Putting on a JTFeStival!

John Taylor Free School

This week was the highlight of the performing arts calendar at JTFS, as students from across the year groups performed two concerts to the public.

On Monday, the JTFS Singers and the JTFS Band collaborated with the Entrust Music Centre ensembles for the Burton Music Centre summer concert. We were honoured to be invited to perform alongside musicians from across the region who rehearse at JTFS each Monday evening throughout the school year.



Many of the children involved in the bands this evening come from schools in JTMAT, and JTFS would like to extend a warm welcome on behalf of the music service to every child interested in joining the ensembles. There are groups suitable for students of all ages, abilities and instruments. It is a great opportunity to connect with students from other schools and ages to create music together. Search 'Entrust Burton Music Centre' for details.

At the very height of midsummer, JTFS held our second annual "JTFeStival". Under a beautiful sky, our Student Leaders took a key role in managing the stalls and activities for our visitors. Students, families, colleagues and visitors from the community joined us for an evening of food, music and entertainment across two stages. The Singers and Band played a set at either end of the evening, with smaller groups and soloists also taking the limelight through the evening. Many of our year 11 students returned to support their younger bandmates as well as performing solos. A particular highlight of the evening was the set from Nina, Pia and Laura, who performed their own compositions with a beautiful summery feel. Mixing up the programme on the other stage, we had our dance troupe and musical theatre group performing highlights from West End hits including Wicked.

We are very proud of all JTFS performers this year, whether it is their first or fiftieth time on the stage. We are very much looking forward to what the new term will bring, especially with so many talented young musicians joining us in year 7. We are also excited about taking our band on the road again to visit our primary partners before too long!





Learning Through Play - OPAL

Shobnall Primary School

At Shobnall Primary and Nursery School, we firmly believe that play is not a break from learning – it is learning! This year, we have continued our exciting journey with the Outdoor Play and Learning (OPAL) programme, transforming playtimes into rich opportunities for creativity, collaboration, resilience and personal development.



We were delighted to welcome parents and carers into school for our OPAL Parent Stay and Play afternoon. Families joined their children outdoors to experience first-hand the wide range of play opportunities available during our lunchtimes. From den building and imaginative role play to mud kitchens, loose parts play and creative construction, it was fantastic to see children and adults playing side by side.

Parents were able to see how play supports children's social skills, problem-solving abilities, confidence and wellbeing while strengthening relationships between home and school. The feedback from the over 100-strong families that attended was overwhelmingly positive, with many commenting on the enthusiasm, creativity and independence demonstrated by the children. It was a joy to see so many smiles across the playground!

Our commitment continued with a successful PFA Parent Planting Day. Families generously volunteered their time to help improve and develop our outdoor spaces, planting flowers, shrubs and greenery, helping to create a more natural and inviting environment. The day not only improved our grounds but also strengthened the sense of community that makes Shobnall such a special place to learn and grow.



The impact of OPAL across our school has been significant. Since introducing the programme, we have seen improvements in children's engagement at playtimes, increased levels of physical activity and stronger friendships across year groups.

Children demonstrate greater independence, creativity and resilience, while staff report calmer transitions back into learning and a reduction in minor playground incidents. Most importantly, our children tell us that they LOVE playtime! They feel trusted, valued and empowered to make choices, take managed risks and explore their interests in a safe and supportive environment.



A special thank you goes to Miss Brewin, who has led this whole-school initiative.She has been instrumental in driving the development of OPAL at Shobnall, inspiring staff and engaging families.

CEO's Blog

CEO's Blog: June 2026 - "Stop Making Stupid People Famous!"

I attended a conference (which I rarely do these days) up in Manchester last month, and one of the keynote speakers was a very distinguished and highly-regarded Mancunian CEO from a Trust based in the North West. He opened his talk by stating that he increasingly thought of himself at events such as this as "a 60 year-old grumpy uncle at a 21st birthday party". What he then spoke about was his world-weariness and cynicism, but also his sense of mild disapproval with the direction of travel he witnesses in so many areas.

This is a sentiment that I can, at least sometimes, sympathise with and share. It only takes around 30 seconds of exposure to "Love Island" or similar on television for me to feel a little disconnected, and irritated. Far from being particularly "high brow" in my cultural leanings, I just think we can do better – and perhaps we should seek better for the young people in our lives too. I've expressed the above not out of a need for catharsis or an attempt to judge, but as a way of framing something that I want to share in this month's blog.

Almost five years ago, I featured in my blog the writings of Carl Sagan ("Pale Blue Dot" – July 2021), and I return to his work here. I stumbled across a classroom discussion between him and some American college students which, from the hair styles and the fashions, I would date at around the late 1980s. It was a film clip short enough for me to transcribe its contents here below:

"How much science and technology, for example, do we see in the mass media? Every newspaper in America has a daily astrology column. How many have even a weekly science column? Why is this?

How much science do you see on television? When somebody wins a Nobel Prize, do we ever get a coherent explanation of what he won it for? What was this discovery that was important enough to win a Nobel Prize? Well, the basic sense of television is that the American people are too stupid to understand. That it takes concentration, and therefore in the quest for small differential advantage in the competition between the networks, that it will be a means of losing ratings to spend time explaining what science is about.
Short term advantage for the network company – long term disaster for the country."
(Carl Sagan calls out mainstream media)



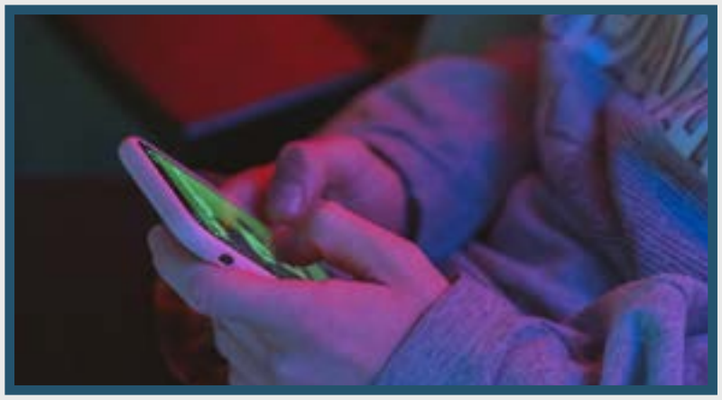
Sagan made those comments when the United States, like the United Kingdom, had a comparatively modest number of national networks, all of which could expect millions of viewers to tune in and all of whom (unlike the UK) relied on advertising revenue to survive and prosper. He himself

hosted the most popular science-based TV show in America ("Cosmos", 1980) that brought astronomy and cosmology to the masses through stunning visuals at the cutting edge of what was possible at the time combined with Sagan's man-in-the-street style of clear and engaging delivery. The original thirteen-episode series can still be streamed, and I would highly recommend it to anyone.

Today, the clamour for viewers' attention is even more manic, with mainstream media competing with each other, with cable and internet channels and social media formats such as TikTok and Instagram for the time, and marketing potential, of a global audience. In such a world, is there still a place for the hour-long science show? In an age where composers of new music are advised that their introductory "hook" should be no more than five seconds long to avoid Spotify listeners skipping to the next track, is there still space in our attention for the next "Money for Nothing" (intro time: 2 minutes 4 seconds) or "Bat Out of Hell" (intro time: 1 minute 55 seconds)?

We do still see the occasional documentary make it big in the ratings. As national treasure Sir David Attenborough celebrated his 100th birthday last month, his work can still command millions of viewers in Britain and beyond. Programmes such as Life on Earth and Blue Planet remain popular, thanks to a combination of public broadcasting and the engagement and photogenic magic that worked also for Carl Sagan. However, even though broadcast at peak viewing times Planet Earth III had fewer viewers than I'm a Celebrity….

As I look to what our children and young people will be watching and listening to, I have the excitement of knowing that there are new discoveries to share with them via new media channels and with amazing new filming techniques (drone footage, microscope cameras etc.) tempered with a concern that the plethora of alternatives will turn their heads, their attention, and their wallets toward other, more easily consumable media product.



The removal of access to mobile phones in schools may help young people to embrace and concentrate upon the world immediately around them and, in so doing, should help kindle the spark of curiosity for our understanding world and our universe that is inherent in every child. Of course, beyond school we all can play our part in supporting our young people to navigate between the real and the deep fake, the substantial and the froth, the beneficial and the harmful.

Carl Sagan died in 1996. I'm sure he would have been astonished at the inventions, innovations and discoveries humanity has accomplished in the last thirty years. However, were he alive today, I'm not convinced that he would retract a single word he said to those American students back then.

Thanks, as always, for reading.



Mike Donoghue OBE

CEO of John Taylor MAT

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