



Harmony

CHRISTMAS 2024

Helping young people reach their potential



WELCOME

**.....to the second edition of the
Harmony newsletter!**

This term has been action packed as usual with a varied, fun and productive curriculum that I hope all have enjoyed!

Additionally, we have had successful transitions back into mainstream and specialist placements – we are always excited by these moves but sad to say goodbye.

Frustratingly, our search for another premises has come to a dead end once again but who knows what 2025 will bring!

We would like to thank all our staff and families for their continued support and we wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

See you in 2025!

Victoria and Sarah



**CHRISTMAS
GREETINGS
from
LOKI, TILLY &
BETSY! x**

NEW TERM STARTS: *Tuesday 7th January 2025*

Primary Life Skills Group



Earlier on this half term, the Primary Life Skills group had the pleasure of welcoming Nicky Crabtree from Training First to work with them on their first-aid skills. First-aid education is a great way to develop a young person's self-confidence, self-esteem and ability to cope with emergencies, as well as develop an understanding of risk which is good to learn from a young age. As serious as delivering first-aid can be, learning first-aid can be a fun and rewarding experience for young people and helps them develop relationships, understand their bodies and work in a fun way with a partner or team.

Sarah B x



What's Cooking?

This term for our savory recipes we have been making pasta dishes – starting with basics like macaroni cheese and tomato sauce, ending up with Spaghetti Bolognese and carbonara.

It's been great to see the progression in the students with core skills such as preparing onions and garlic.

For the last few weeks we'll be making some festive sweet treats, including this simple and yummy Gingerbread biscuit recipe. Next term we'll be cooking dishes from around the world, like risotto from Italy, sausage & mash from the UK, and paella from Spain; we'll also be learning about different types of cake from a Victoria sandwich to a Swiss roll.

Have a fabulous and delicious Christmas!

Liz x



Gingerbread biscuits

Ingredients

- 50g butter
- 35g brown sugar
- 70g golden syrup
- 160g plain flour
- ¼ teaspoon bicarbonate of soda
- ½ teaspoon ground ginger



Heat the oven to 180 degrees (160 degrees fan)

Method

1. Weigh sugar and syrup into a small bowl and place to one side.
2. Melt butter in a saucepan, then remove from heat, add sugar and syrup and mix well.
3. Place Flour, bicarb and ginger in a mixing bowl and mix well together.
4. Carefully add the warm butter mixture and mix until it becomes a thick dough.
5. Tip onto a floured surface and knead gently for a couple of minutes adding anymore flour as needed until the dough is no longer sticky.
6. Roll out gingerbread to approximately 3mm thick, then using a cutter of your choice cut out shapes, placing them on a baking tray.
7. Reroll any left-over dough until it has all been used up.
8. Bake for 10-15 minutes, until firm to touch, the dough will crisp as it cools.

Friday well-being sessions

On Fridays, we have started up a new 'well-being' session. In the long term this is about giving our students tools to help regulate themselves when they are feeling overwhelmed.

As an introduction to this we are providing students with a range of activities that require a degree of concentration and therefore help them to be mindful of what they are doing.

When we are really engaged with an activity, it helps to quiet whatever else may be going on in our heads and therefore helps us to find a sense of calm.

So far, we have looked to find this through Lego building and paper construction activities such as origami, starting our session with some breathing exercises. The plan is to introduce yoga and activities to help develop positive thinking. It has been great to see students who can find it difficult to stay engaged in academic learning really engrossed in these calming activities.

Anna x

Green Fingers

The Gardening Gang on a Monday has made a lot of progress since their debut in September. The front garden now has some structure and despite the weather we have flowers and shrubs growing. Lots of bulbs have been planted and we have grown micro greens, taken some cuttings and run a plant surgery for our indoor plants.

Megan x



GCSE PSYCHOLOGY



12.30 – 3.30PM

on

MONDAYS

For more information
or to book a place,
please email:

victoriab@harmonycbc.co.uk

www.harmonyaec.co.uk

Exciting News!

A big welcome to Lola who will be joining the Harmony family in January 2025 on Mondays to teach GCSE Psychology.

How exciting to be able to extend the range of subjects we are able to offer our students!

Touch typing is the key to success for KS3

Why bother learning to touch type when your DIY method is quick enough?

The challenge has been set and KS3 are on a mission to learn to touch type by Christmas. We're aiming to prove that touch typing is quicker and more accurate than any DIY method some of our committed gamers have been using! Like riding a bike, touch typing is a skill that looks easy, but takes time and patience to master. It relies on muscle memory, not visual cues – once learned, like throwing or catching, our fingers automatically know where to go – like GPS for our fingers.

Touch typing uses our subconscious memory, so all our conscious thoughts can go into WHAT we are writing, not HOW we are doing it.

So many of us at Harmony are dyslexic or find writing a challenge or chore best avoided. Touch typing has been proved to reduce our cognitive load – that means we don't need to use as much brain power to get it done!

What's more, touch typing is the ultimate multisensory approach to learning: we see the words on the screen, hear the sounds of typing and feel the keys under our fingers! Using our senses – sight, sound and touch, reinforces our learning and helps us to remember it.

While we're touch typing increasingly difficult words and sentences, the on-line programme corrects us if we mis-type. This way, while we're learning to touch type – we're also subconsciously learning how to spell the words correctly – a double victory!

For those of us with ADHD, sitting still and focusing can feel like trying to herd cats. With both hands occupied on the keyboard, we've been exploring other fidgets to self-regulate, including sucking lollies and boiled sweets (Victoria's stash is going down by the day). It's actually easier for us to focus on a task because we need only look at the screen – not flick between screen and keyboard.

Danielle x

Congratulations to:
Alacia, Alex, Alfie, Charlotte,
Demi, George & Leia who
completed the touch typing
course in 3 weeks, with
scores ranging from 13-38
words per minute with 99-
100% accuracy....
So proud of you!



All I want for Christmas is.....Sprouts!

This year's Christmas cracker joke.... What do Brexit and Brussel sprouts have in common? A recent survey at Harmony revealed that opinions regarding this yuletide staple were poised on a knife's edge with a nail-biting 52% of respondents giving these critters the festive thumbs up. While the overall top of the pops award at Christmas dinner time goes to the inimitable pig in blanket, to honour these little green miracles, our resident Harmony laureate, Lou [Year 11] has penned a deeply moving and poignant tribute simply entitled....

Ode to a Sprout

Perched, at the edge of the plate
Draped in your most delectable finery,
Those delicate layers of verdant green
Conceal the bitterness that hides within.
That irresistibly uneven silhouette,
Both ragged and beautifully smooth,
Only serves to further your allure.

The fork slips;
You slip with it
Opening slightly to reveal another emerald layer.
Upon this stage
There is no star but you.

Again, you turn,
Around,
And around.
Breath catches in my throat
Fingers tremble
And gaze stills
Truly, upon this stage
There is no star but you.

The final dance reaches a crescendo
Your silent cry:
So brilliant,
Yet so desperate
Both enraptures and terrifies me.

The fork lifts
With you upon it
The last pirouette goes unseen
As you sink into the darkness.
Your subtle bitterness is released.
Wracked by guilt, I mourn you.
I mourn the death of a beautiful star,
The passing of a single sprout.

Sarah T & Lou x

The Perfectly, Imperfect Christmas

It's that time of year again when we are all bombarded with Christmas adverts all showing us how to have the perfect Christmas. It's worth remembering that it's not always an easy time for everyone, especially those with additional needs and those supporting them.

Some of you know, and some of you may not, that I am a proud parent of two adult-ish sons. Sam was diagnosed with Autism at age five and as the years went by his diagnosis became longer. Although not diagnosed, Zak, has questioned if he may also be on the Autistic Spectrum. Given that Zak is the only grandchild from his father's side without formal diagnosis, this is very probable.

Christmas was a challenge for us in those early years, when the usual rules we teach our children about strangers and keeping secrets all go out of the window. Santa coming down the chimney with presents, without an invite, being one of them. Sam could never sleep on Christmas Eve at the thought of someone unfamiliar being in our house. Sam used the annual trip to Santa's Grotto to get further clarification from Santa on lots of the finer details of his yearly visit to our house including his mode of transport, bad gifts and how someone with a tummy so big could fit down our very tiny chimney. After one very red faced visit to the grotto, Sam and Zak felt that the very patient Santa was quite a nice chap and more than knew his stuff...!!

When Sam was in mainstream school, he dreaded Christmas week, going off timetable made him feel unsettled. Christmas Jumper Day was a nightmare as we navigated aisles of jumpers, looking for the least itchy. Sam would often wear his uniform with a tinsel tie as an alternative.

"Bring a boardgame to school day" was the worst for Sam and the inevitable "who will want to play it with me?" always broke my heart. In Sam's forever school, Manor Green, they understood Sam so well and Christmas week became his favourite week of the year because everyone could just do it their way and whatever that was was okay. Sam once sang a Christmas solo in front of the whole school when previously he had never been able to stand up to receive a certificate in assembly as he hated people looking at him. There is so much to be said for a place that makes you feel safe and understood. One of my personal reasons for joining Harmony.

So fast forward to 2024.

Noel, my now husband, joined our family bringing with him his understanding of Autism and just loving all of us, just the way we are. Now Sam loves Yuletide and over the years has developed a love of Christmas dinner with all the trimmings, doesn't mind the odd Christmas jumper and will also give the occasional hug to close relatives. Sam has found coping strategies that work for him but in the early years, we allowed him to do things his way and how he felt most comfortable.

So I know only too well the challenges that Christmas can bring if you have a child with additional needs.

So today, I raise a glass to all who are doing Christmas their way, be it chicken nuggets or under the table and celebrating the perfectly, imperfect Christmas.

Sarah S x



Helpful approaches for a PDA profile of autism at Christmas

Christmas can be an overwhelming time for autistic people. We've put together some general suggestions of helpful approaches for PDA families & individuals.

www.pdasociety.org.uk

Perspective & Preparation

- ~ Try not to let tradition or pressure from others determine your plans
- ~ Redesign Christmas to work for your household
- ~ Plan collaboratively with flexibility for plans to change as needed
- ~ Incorporate lots of downtime and where possible continue usual routines and activities



Events & Gatherings

- ~ Keep small, short & spaced out
- ~ Make safe spaces & sensory support available
- ~ Agree exit options



Festivities & Decorations

- ~ Make the most of opportunities when they arise rather than at specific times and accept that some things can't be done



- Gifts** ~ Make & share a wish list of gift ideas & delivery preferences e.g. stocking not in bedroom* or gifts placed somewhere rather than physically handed over
- ~ Reduce uncertainty & overload e.g. say what gifts are coming, wrap in one parcel/clear cellophane or don't wrap, open gifts at a comfortable pace
 - ~ Consider giving one or more gifts early if waiting causes anxiety
 - ~ Reduce expectations around saying thank you for gifts



*inform Santa too

Food

- ~ Put less focus on Christmas dinner
- ~ Offer choice around where, when and what to eat
- ~ Make familiar/preferred foods available



Traditions

- ~ Traditions can feel like demands
- ~ Creating your own family's routines, Christmas-themed or otherwise and with room for flexibility, can be helpful



Recognising & Reducing Anxiety

- ~ Be aware of anxiety cues - it may not always 'look like' anxiety
- ~ Sudden emotional changes can occur more frequently when anxiety is high
- ~ Humour, rest & taking a break from Christmas-themed activities can be helpful
- ~ Keep calm & try not to take anything personally
- ~ Be aware of masking and how this affects anxiety later on
- ~ Build in lots of recovery time and personalised regulating/calming activities