



Your Child, Your School, Your Voice

Assistant Heads Up!

Dear Parents and Carers,

What a difference a day makes - 24 little hours

As you will be aware through previous letters and newsletter articles, we take attendance seriously at JMS. Beside the social benefits of regularly attending school, the impact that regular school attendance can have on academic progress is unquestionable.

When we look at the amount of learning time lost due to absence, this is clear to understand why:

95% Attendance - 2 weeks off per year - 50 lessons missed (50 hours learning missed)
90% Attendance - 4 weeks off per year - 100 lessons missed (100 hours learning missed)
85% Attendance - 6 weeks off per year - 150 lessons missed (150 hours learning missed)
80% Attendance - 8 weeks off per year - 200 lessons missed (200 hours learning missed)

As a school, we have set an attendance target of 96%. We would like all students to have attendance at or above this percentage.

You may be aware that we have previously held termly 'attendance coffee mornings' for parents, carers and students who have attendance under this target. This term, we have decided to launch a school wide drive on attendance instead. We will be asking teachers and tutors to communicate more effectively with each other when a student is absent so that the teacher can plan for the learning upon the student's return and also do whatever they can to recover the knowledge gap that will be caused by missing the lesson.

That is our commitment towards helping an absent student not fall behind academically. As a result, you can expect more regular contact from staff when your child is absent. This may include being sent work from every lesson that your child is due to miss.

But we also need your commitment and your child's commitment to raising attendance. We appreciate that students fall ill but we are looking to build the resilience of young people and the character to attend school, even on an off day. I am sure we can all think of days that attending work is more challenging than other days but we still do. We still get up (albeit more slowly!) and pull on the uniform ready to face the daily challenges. Often, once we are at work in these circumstances, we forget our illness and go on to have a productive day and have not missed important meetings or work. That is the determination we want to see from our students- and we know they can show this.

As a school, we have systems in place for when a student's attendance drops below the 96% target. These include:

- Tutor discussion regarding regular absence and any patterns emerging. This includes ensuring a smooth return to school.
 - Tutor contacting parents to express concerns and discuss support.
 - Mentoring sessions with student managers- weekly attendance mentoring sessions to discuss attendance concerns and progress made.
 - Letters of concern - issued by student managers explaining levels of concern and the possibility of parents being invited in for a meeting.
 - Parent Contract- a formal process that requires parents to work closely with the school to improve attendance. If targets for improvement in attendance are not met then a formal referral to the County Attendance Service will follow.
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- Penalty Notice - issued to any parents if their child's unauthorised absence equates to 3 or more days in any 30 school day period.
- Formal referral to County Attendance service - the service will set their own targets for improvement and if no positive progress is made then they are required to commence legal proceedings as per their statutory obligations. This could involve Parents attending court hearings and fines being issued.

This drive fits nicely with my assembly theme for the week of 20th March. 'What a difference a day makes- 24 little hours'. We are asking all students to pledge to spending 24 hours making a difference to their academic progress. These hours can be split into smaller chunks on revision, a research project, catching up missed work or simply doing further reading but all with the intention of making a difference to their academic progress in 24 hours. These hours can be logged on their individual tracking sheet issued by their tutor and stuck in their planner. We would like students to share this experience by uploading photos and encouragement to each other or sharing successful methods. These can be uploaded on twitter on either @teachaspiration or @HeadteacherJMS. Please discuss this with your child and share the experience. We hope that you can see our ambition to improve attendance and academic progress and would like to thank you for your continued support.



Mr Mat Davies, Assistant Head

Teaching & Learning

Focus on the English Faculty

KS4 trip to see Shakespeare's 'Macbeth'



"Fair is Foul and Foul is Fair" – just one of the many quotations pupils in year 11 are learning by heart at the moment in preparation for their GCSE Literature exams. And what better way to revise than by watching a performance? This month we were lucky enough to be able to take 60 pupils in Years 10 and 11 to a fantastic performance of Macbeth at St Hilda's College Oxford. Seeing the complete and unabridged version of the play enabled pupils to really appreciate the change which occurs in the character of Macbeth through his dramatic rise and fall from power. His transformation from loyal "kinsman and ...subject" to emotionless "butcher" was brilliantly brought to life. Equally, his "fiend like Queen", who first appears rocking her dead child, was powerfully played and left the audience feeling sympathetic as she rubbed invisible blood from her hands. Performed in the Jacqueline Du Pre Building, the intimate space enabled pupils to become immersed and they left with a better understanding and appreciation for this timeless text which is crucial to their GCSE exam.

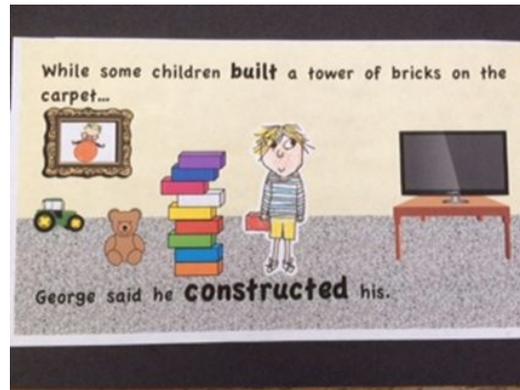
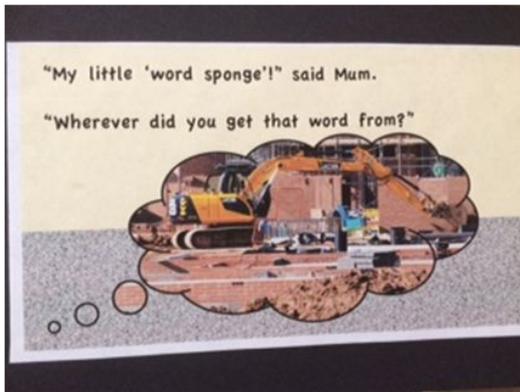
Writing for an audience: Year 8 visit to St Nicholas Primary School

Last term some of the year 8 pupils created their own books for a younger audience. The unit started with a class debate about Maurice Sendak's book "Where the Wild Things Are" and whether or not it should have been banned. This gave students a clear understanding of the expectations of books for young children. Students then became very nostalgic in discussions and analyses of their favourite and most memorable books from childhood. The final task, to use all this knowledge to produce their own book, elicited some amazing and beautifully produced and crafted books that we are very excited about taking in to St. Nicholas Primary School to share with Reception and Year 1 students.

Amongst the most exciting and intriguing titles, we have:

- Word Sponge
- Penelope and the Polar Bear

- Small Paul
- Freddy and Teddy
- All I Want to do is Fly
- Harry the Hermit Crab
- Ed the Earthman's Excellent Adventure



We hope that the children in St. Nicholas enjoy reading them as much as students at JMS have enjoyed writing and illustrating them.

Accelerated Reader Competition

As always we are extremely proud of the progress pupils at John Mason School are making with their reading. One key competition this year is between houses for the most number of words read. The results so far as follows:

Thames has pulled ahead of the pack with a combined word count of 48,626,998

Stert House places 2nd so far with 45,799,650.

Ock House is currently 3rd with 40,580,289.

Additional congratulations go to Ock's 7AJT with almost 12 million words read: an outstanding accomplishment.

Ms Sally Butler, Head of English Faculty

Effective Revision Strategies

Unfortunately it is possible for students to work very hard for their exams, putting in hours and hours of intensive labour and still underachieve. One reason for this could be that they have poor revision techniques. Research can help us to identify those techniques which are most likely to work for and maximise the rewards for all that effort.

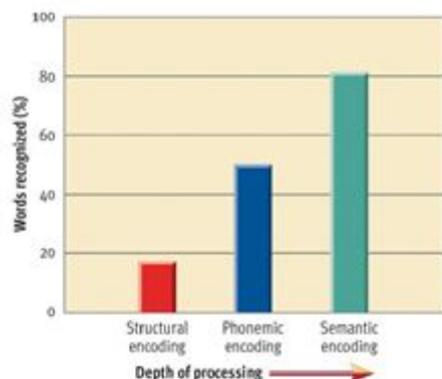
The Psychology Behind Effective Revision

In the early days of research into memory, psychologists believed that our long-term memory had an infinite capacity and that information lasted forever, once learned. The key to memory was rehearsal and many of you will remember 'drill' or 'rote' learning activities from school where large amounts of information were repeated endlessly until stored away forever. It is not that this never works, I can still remember long chunks of lists of kings and large sections of Rudyard Kipling's *If*, for example! The exact value of this information hasn't always been entirely clear, but it is certainly still there. However this approach to memory is labour intensive and doesn't give students the kind of mastery of information or flexibility when applying it they need in modern examinations.

Some key psychological insights can help us to plan revision techniques that best support successful, time-effective revision.

KEY FACT ONE: How you learn information has a big impact upon how much you remember.

Craik and Tulving (1975) demonstrated that different methods of learning information lead to different levels of retention:



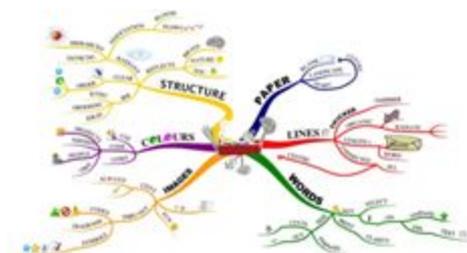
Craik and Tulving's results clearly showed that semantic learning supported far greater recall than other types. Structural and phonemic learning are known as 'shallow processing'. They include reading over notes and repeating information again and again. They do lead to some recall; but we can do better for our time. We do better if we engage in 'deep learning'. Semantic learning is 'deep learning' and here we focus on building our understanding of meaning – we think about what the information means, and how it relates to other information we already have.

Implications for Revision – Semantic Revision Techniques

Revision techniques where students have to think about and focus on the meaning of the material they have to learn therefore best support their deep learning.

Mind Maps

Mind maps support effective revision by having students focus on how information links, which involves thinking about the meaning of the words and drawing connections. The use of images and colour can further reinforce this as they translate complicated concepts into core meanings developing understanding and thus recall.



Summary Notes

TAKING LECTURE NOTES

Why taking lecture notes?

- So you don't have to rely on your memory
- So you can focus better during class

Good note-taking habits

1. Review notes (after lecture)
2. Paraphrasing the textbook (if time)
3. Review notes (summary + prepare questions)
4. Be concise
5. Use a good note-taking system

you CAN:

- use a good note-taking system

you should take notes of:

1. Things on board
2. Definitions
3. Examples
4. Diagrams
5. Summaries
6. Key points
7. Questions
8. Answers
9. Conclusions
10. Final thoughts

Cornell + Outline?

Cornell: Active learning

- Encourage you to think for yourself

Outline: Active learning

- Encourage you to think for yourself

Simply reading over notes or information is 'shallow processing'. Even with highlighting, although a good tool in the first instance, the depth of meaning is not explored and so best use is not made of time. Rewriting notes into ever simpler forms helps students to really focus on the meaning and key concepts. Notes can include visual summaries, arrows connecting ideas, different colours for different themes and can certainly be messy. Students should focus on organising information to capture its meaning and identify the key points then 'capture' these. One challenge for students is to produce ever smaller summary notes: first an A3 sheet (perhaps a mindmap), then an A4, then A5 then a single post-it.

KEY FACT TWO: Recall is not perfect, we reconstruct our memories each time we use them.

Loftus' research into memory is amazing, innovative and a little bit terrifying. Working since the 1970s, Loftus has increasingly effectively demonstrated that our memory does not work like a photograph but much more like a sketch artist. Every time we draw on our memories we are not, strictly speaking, 'recalling' what we had before but rebuilding the information. We can alter our memories, fill in the gaps with fictions we tell ourselves, and import information from one area of our memory to distort another. The terrifying bit? Loftus' research has shown that other people can do this to us! By phrasing her questioning in a certain way, such as introducing the word "smashed" to people who had watched a video of two cars hitting each other, she was able to implant memories of broken glass over the street that simply didn't exist. Find out more about the implications for justice by watching her TED talk here:

https://www.ted.com/talks/elizabeth_loftus_the_fiction_of_memory#t-224497

Implications for Revision – Practise recalling information

The implications here are significant. Simply learning material doesn't guarantee success in exams if when we recall (or reconstruct) the information we get muddled and are unable to deliver it in a timely, effective fashion. Therefore, another part of successful revision is to practice retrieving the information in an effective way to ensure that our recall does not let us down in the exams. Some techniques which might help students prepare for this include:

Past Papers/Questions



Not often fun, but VERY important. By completing past papers we practise recalling the information we have learned in a suitable format to ensure that we achieve our target grade. Many students realise they should be doing these, but the number one complaint amongst teachers is always that they are not doing enough. This is because the odd one doesn't do the job. Students should be doing a range of past papers, and bringing them in for assessment. Make sure you have not just learned the information but practiced recalling it.

Redrafting Work

Having done a piece of work once, it can take some real motivation to start it again and have another go. But this is vital if we are to achieve our targets; very few of us get it the first time round and if we do it is often because we are setting our goals too low. The more we practice the better we get; and guess what, if we practice lots of papers at a low level, we become really good at ... getting a low level! Students need to take the work they have done, a good step on the journey to an amazing grade, and try it again, lifting the outcome and building their skills at recalling their information in a useful way.



Team work

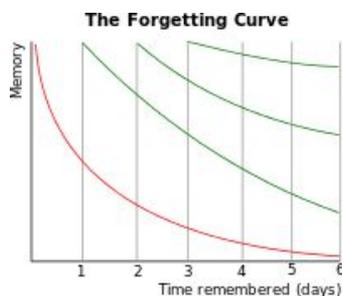


Because of the problems with accurate recall, checking work is VITAL. With each draft answers can get further and further from the original learning. One good way to support revision is to work in pairs or small groups. Explaining answers to each other, testing each other's recall of flashcards and 'cross-cueing' where students help prompt each other's recall, are all shown to help students learn and retrieve information accurately. One reason there are so many revision classes in school is to provide students with opportunities to work together on their revision material; they can carry this on at home with great effect.

KEY FACT THREE: Forgetting is easy

Sadly our brains are simply not wired for the job of recalling large quantities of varied information in the way that exams require us to. They are designed to remember where the best herbs or edible fruit can be found, which plants are likely to kill us and whether that tribe member will try to cheat us if we share our meat. Honed by generations of story-telling, it is all too easy for our minds to let us down at a crucial moment e.g. in the GCSE exam. However there are some insights that can support us in preventing this happening if we apply them to revision. This has also contributed to our memory becoming heavily context dependent. You know that smell you haven't smelled for a long time, or a visit to a place that "brings it all back"? There is a reason for this. Our memory relies on contextual cues to help retrieve information. This means that the setting in which we learn information can be a great help, or a great hinderance...

Implications for revision – minimising forgetting Flashcards / Regular testing



Sadly Craik and Tulving's 80% recall for semantic learning is only on fairly immediate retesting. Research shows that just a couple of days later the figure drops dramatically and continues so to do thereafter. However, regular retesting of learned material can help prevent this. In class and at home students should be doing lots of little tests to recall key information; a few days after learning, a few days after that, a couple of weeks later, a month after that. Each retest helps prevent neural pathways from decaying and supports maximal recall in the final reckoning. Ebbinghaus's forgetting curve is not fixed; the speed of forgetting can vary depending upon the type and complexity of the material. But the principle applies to all our revision – regular retesting supports learning.

Context-suitable revision



Exams are silent. They are times of pressure; timing pressure, anxiety and the intensity of sitting in a hall with your whole year group. And they are intense; some over 2 hours long. Therefore revision completed with music blaring, Snapchat and Instagram popping up on the screen every 2 minutes, Google to hand and texts pingback and forward does very little to support that context. Whilst there is some research to suggest that revising to classical music can support recall, generally distractions are just that and make the eventual job of recalling information harder than it needs to be. A quiet study area, with clear set times and steadily increasing lengths of focus time helps prepare for the exam context; and will help with maximum recall on the day.

So, whether you are a teacher, parent, supportive friend or student make USE of the psychological research to plan revision strategies that work and deliver maximum accurate recall for the time invested. The work will still be hard, and, let's face it, boring at times – but at least it will be effective and that will make it all worthwhile.

Wednesday 15th March Vale Year 8 Netball Tournament

The Year 8 netball team travelled to King Alfred's to take part in the Vale Netball competition. With 6 other teams entered the girls knew it was going to be a tough competition. Quick games of 7 minutes one-way, oval shaped rings and the sun made each game even harder. The team played extremely well together, with some great movement down the court shown. They beat Larkmead, both Fitz's teams and Matthew Arnold's, a 3-3 draw against a tough King Alfred's team and our only defeat was against the eventual winners, Farringdon. This meant that the team finished on points joint second.

Well done girls a great result (especially as we were the shortest team there!). Also a thank you to "team costa" for your support at all the girls matched, I know they do appropriate.



Miss Gibson

Staffing Update

We are delighted to announce the appointment of Ms Chloe Phippen who will be joining us in September as Deputy Director of English and Kevin Brinkley will be joining the science team.

Dates for your Diary

Parents' Forum - Monday 20th March 2017 - 6pm in the Learning Resource Centre - topic will be feedback from our recent Ofsted inspection. Please let us know you are coming - events@johnmason.oxon.sch.uk.



SALE
second hand
uniform

John Mason Association (JMA) and School Council

Saturday, April 1st 2017
9am - 12noon
John Mason School

Please donate your slightly used jumpers, trousers, shirts, skirts, PE kit etc. from March 13th - March 29th.

All donations to be brought to reception.

All funds raised will be used to purchase **OUTSIDE SEATING** for our students!

John Mason School
Excellence Through Creativity

Comic Relief Non-Uniform Day - Friday 24th March 2017

Second Hand Uniform Sale - Saturday 1st April 2017

Year 10 Parents' Evening - Wednesday 5th April 2017

Non School Uniform day in aid of Clic Sargent - Friday 7th April 2017

Term ends at 1.10pm - Friday 7th April 2017

Easter Holidays - Saturday 8th April - Sunday 23rd April 2017

May day Bank Holiday - Monday 1st May 2017

Summer GCSE Exams - Friday 12th May 2017 to Thursday 29th June 2017 - click [here](#) to view the skeleton timetable

Community News



earth trust Emma's Ewesful Acres

Earth Trust, Little Wittenham, OX14 4QZ

Lambing Weekends

25th & 26th March
1st & 2nd April
11am - 4pm

Visit the new spring arrivals down on the farm including **lambs, piglets, goats** and more! Plus...

- Bale climbing
- Craft activities
- Refreshments available

£6 adult, £4 child, £16 family
FREE entry for Earth Trust Friends

Discount for online tickets!

More information:
01865 407792 or admin@earthtrust.org.uk
www.earthtrust.org.uk/lambing

All funds raised go towards supporting the Earth Trust's work. Charity No. 1095057 Company No. 4381522

Lambing Weekends

25th-26th March and 1st-2nd April, 11am-4pm each day
Come and join Earth Trust for some baa-rilient farmyard fun at our annual Lambing Weekends! You'll have the opportunity to meet the new spring arrivals - lambs, piglets and goats – and try bale climbing, tractor and trailer rides (weather permitting), a sheep hunt and quiz, craft activities and more! Refreshments will be available from Poem Tree Café and a BBQ. It's £4 per child, £6 per adult and £16 for a family of four and there's a discount for online tickets; please visit <http://www.earthtrust.org.uk/explore/lambingweekends> for further details. We look forward to seeing you there!
Earth Trust, Little Wittenham, OX14 4QZ

Non School Uniform Day in aid of Clic Sargent

On Friday 7th April we are holding a non-school uniform day in aid of Clic Sargent. Phil Rose, the father of one of our Year 10 students is running the London Marathon to raise funds for this great charity and he has asked for our help so we have planned a non-school uniform day – students will pay £1 for the privilege of not wearing their uniform and these funds will be donated to Clic Sargent.



Here are some words from Phil:



In May 2013 Maizie our 27 month old daughter was diagnosed with Neuroblastoma, a rare childhood cancer. As you can imagine our lives were turned upside down. Although the John Radcliffe children's hospital were amazing and looked after Maizie and us really well there were some things they cannot do due to lack of funding. One of those things is a nurse to come out to our house for simple blood tests that have to be taken every day. Imagine your child having cancer being very ill and not having to travel everyday to hospital - well Clic Sargent pay for that to happen. Some families have to travel 2 hours to the hospital and 2 hours home. Clic also helps families with day to day life such as bills - they don't stop because of cancer, they have also bought a house near the hospital so parents don't need to travel all the way home in the evening and then back again in the morning; they also assign social workers to help you.



All this help from Clic comes at a huge cost that's all funded by the public donations. As Maisie is now in remission I wanted to give something back to them so on April 23rd I'm running the London marathon for Clic Sargent. Training hasn't gone to plan with a few injuries including a slipped disc in my neck but as you can imagine I am so motivated to do this for them. I need to raise a minimum of £1,800. The money raised from the non-school uniform day will really help towards this and if anyone feels they would like to sponsor me, they can do so at [Phil Rose Just Giving Page](#).
Thank you, the Rose Family

Bridge House has talent!

Bridge House Care Home is hosting its very own Talent Show! Whether it's 'Sister Act' or a balancing act, we would like to invite you to come along to showcase your special talent. Auditions will be held at Bridge House from 3 – 5pm on the following dates:

Wednesday 15th March	Wednesday 22nd March
Wednesday 29th March	Wednesday 5th April

The finals for Bridge House Has Talent will be held on **Friday 12th May** at 3pm, where our panel of judges will award the winner with an amazing cash prize of **£200!**

To enter into the competition or for more information on the event, please contact the Lifestyles Team on **01235 520 439** or email: lifestyle@bridgehouseabingdon.co.uk

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Bridge House Care Home, Thames View, Abingdon, Oxfordshire OX14 3UJ

Bridge House Care Home