VERNHAM DEAN GILLUM'S C.E. PRIMARY SCHOOL

✦ SCHOOL NEWSLETTER & COMMUNITY BULLETIN ✦

Autumn Term 2026 | Issue 3 | Date: 16th October 2026

✉ MESSAGE FROM MR HICKMAN

Dear Families,

Staffing Update

As communicated earlier in the week, Miss Pauk will be leaving us next month to move on to pastures new. Recruitment for her successor is underway and I will update you when I am able to.

We do however have a new member of support staff joining us after half term; Mrs Tracy Lambert will predominantly work in Key Stage 2, but also across the school to support children's learning and deliver pastoral support through ELSA programmes. We look forward to welcoming her to the Vernham Dean family!

The Mighty Conker: Autumn's Ultimate Treasure

As autumn sets in, many parks and fields (including our school site!) transform into a treasure hunt for one of nature's finest creations: the shiny brown horse chestnut, better known as the conker. While cracking open a spiky green shell to find a perfectly polished conker inside is satisfying enough, these glossy seeds carry a rich history and a few surprising secrets:

- **Before the Chestnut**: The very first recorded game using horse chestnuts took place on the Isle of Wight in 1848. But before horse chestnuts caught on, children played the exact same game using snail shells or hazelnuts!
- Secret War Effort: In 1917, during World War I, the British government called on school children to collect millions of conkers. They were sent to factories to produce acetone - a crucial chemical used for making cordite explosives.
- **Moth Repellent (Sorry, Spiders!)**: Conkers really do keep clothes moths away thanks to a natural compound called saponin that releases a pest-deterring scent as it dries. However, the famous myth that they scare off spiders? Scientists have tested it, and spiders aren't bothered by them at all! You can read about a study conducted a few years ago by some school children from Cornwall here: https://www.rsc.org/news/2010/july/pupils-scoop-prize-for-unravelling-conker-theory
- **Toxic Treats**: They might look a bit like sweet chestnuts, but don't be tempted to roast them: horse chestnuts are poisonous to humans and pets. Deer, however, have special digestive chemicals that let them snack on conkers with no trouble.

So next time you spot a conker peeking through the fallen leaves, pick it up - you're holding a little piece of nature's history!

Have a great weekend.

Mr Hickman

✉ SAFEGUARDING

Helping Parents Navigate Online Gaming

LGfL has published a useful new guide for schools on helping parents understand online gaming.

The advice is practical rather than technical. It encourages parents to:

- ask what their child is playing;
- check whether games are age-appropriate;
- talk about who their child plays with;
- discuss what information should not be shared;
- agree rules around spending;
- talk about bullying and what to do if something goes wrong;
- review safety settings together;
- agree reasonable limits around play.

The guidance also makes an important point about age ratings: a higher PEGI rating does not mean a game is more difficult — it means the content may be less suitable for younger children.

Link to the guidance: https://safeblog.lgfl.net/helping-parents-navigate-online-gaming-guidance-and-advice-for-schools?utm_source=chatgpt.com

SCHOOL CHRISTIAN VALUES

Our core Christian values guide everything we do across our school community:

- **Courage:** Overcoming challenges and standing up for what is right.
- **Compassion:** Showing kindness, care, and empathy to everyone.
- **Creativity:** Exploring, discovering, and celebrating our God-given talents.

This Month's Theme: Truthfulness

This half-term, our spotlight is on the Christian value of Truthfulness. Our daily acts of worship are centered around truthfulness, helping children explore honesty, integrity, and building strong, trusting relationships.

"Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth."

- 1 John 3:18

CLASSROOM UPDATES

Robins Class

This week in Robins, we've been putting our phonics knowledge into practice, blending sounds together to read our very first word books! In maths, we've been exploring the number 3 with a little help from the Three Bears. We've also been working on something very exciting for next week's Harvest Festival—we can't wait to show you all, but for now, it's a surprise!

Kingfishers Class

In English, we have been reading Little Red Riding Hood by Lari Don and honing our descriptive writing skills by crafting expanded noun phrases for both Little Red Riding Hood and the Big Bad Wolf. Meanwhile, in our topic lessons, we have been exploring food chains and building our scientific vocabulary with terms like herbivore, carnivore, and omnivore. Finally, in RE, we have

been reflecting on why God is central to Christian beliefs while celebrating the special people who make a difference in our own lives.

Owls Class

This week the class have settled back to being together. We spent the first two day of the week thinking about creation in RE,Y3/4 focused on valuing the Earth whilst Y5/6 discussed different views and opinions including the Big bang theory- discussion raised a lot questions! In Topic we have been thinking about light and how it travels.

Well done to Y5/6 who spent the week at PGL with Mrs B, Miss Nicoll and Mr Nicoll. The children approached all their activities with positivity and supported each other well. It was a fantastic week full of new experiences including staying away from home, trying new foods, ferry rides and seeing red squirrels! Mrs B is so proud of them all.











The children that stayed at school with Miss Richards worked brilliantly as a team, focused on money work and creative writing.

HARVEST FESTIVAL

Our annual Harvest Festival will take place on Thursday 22nd October at 2:30pm at St Mary's Church. All parents and carers are warmly invited to join us for this special service.

We will be collecting donations for Andover Foodbank to help support families in need within our local community. If you are able to contribute, we would be extremely grateful for non-perishable food items and toiletries such as:

- Tinned goods (soup, vegetables, fruit, meat/fish, baked beans)
- Dried pasta, rice and cereal
- Tea, coffee and long-life milk
- Toiletries and household essentials

Please drop off any donations into the school office. Every contribution, big or small, makes a real difference!

You can also Support Andover Foodbank by buying tickets to the Thruxton Glitter and Glow Firework Festival! Andover Foodbank is thrilled to be this year's charity beneficiary of this fantastic event, organised by Andover Community Events at the iconic Thruxton Race Circuit. With spectacular fireworks, a disco, market stalls, food, light-up tractors around the track, a bonfire and a fairground rides, it's

set to be a brilliant family night out! Every ticket purchased helps support Andover Foodbank, so get yours today and enjoy a fabulous evening while making a difference in our local community.

https://thruxtonracing.co.uk/event/firework-festival



A PLEA FROM MRS B

We have one box of second hand uniform ready to go and are looking for a parent volunteer to act as our Uniform Rep to help manage and distribute it.

If you would be willing to coordinate this small service for our school community, please get in touch with the school office. Thank you for your support!

ATTENDANCE UPDATE

Our overall school attendance currently stands at 95.2% - a fantastic effort from our whole school community! Regular attendance is crucial for children's learning, wellbeing, and building strong friendships, so we want to say a huge thank you for your ongoing support in getting your children into school on time every day. Let's keep up this brilliant momentum as we move through the rest of the term. Every day in school really does count!

REMINDERS

School Uniform: Please ensure that all items of your child's uniform are clearly labeled with their name to help us return any misplaced clothing quickly.

PE Kit: Please send your child to school with their full PE kit on Monday morning. Kits will stay at school for the week and will be sent home on Friday afternoon for washing.

Coats: With the weather turning noticeably colder, please ensure your child comes to school every day with a warm, waterproof coat suitable for outdoor play and learning.

Water Bottles: Please ensure your child brings a named water bottle to school every day.

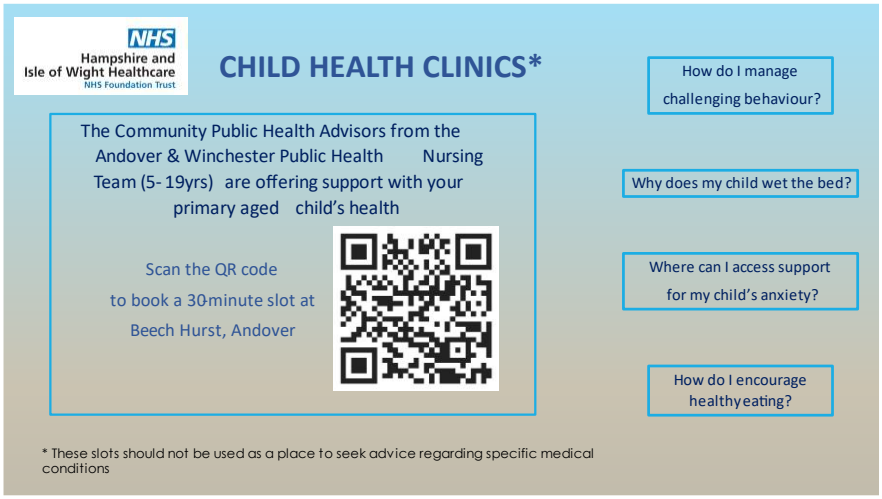
INFORMATION FOR PARENTS











DATES FOR THE DIARY

DATE	EVENT DETAILS	TIME / LOCATION
20 October 2026	Work Showcase	3:10pm - 3:30pm
22 October 2026	Harvest Festival	2:30pm
22 October 2026	YR 2027 Open Morning	10:00am - 11:00am
22 October 2026	Individual Pupil Photographs	09:00am - 10:00am
22 October 2026	Harvest Festival Celebration	2:30pm
26 October 2026	Half Term	All Week
02 November 2026	INSET Day (Staff Training)	All Day (School Closed)
5 November 2026	Robins & Kingfishers trip to Marwell Zoo	All Day
12 November 2026	YR 2027 Open Afternoon	1:30pm - 2:30pm
13 November 2026	Children in Need	All Day
23 November 2026	Nasal Flu Vaccine (Whole School)	TBC
3rd December 2026	Christmas Craft afternoon YR 2027	TBC
4th December 2026	Whole School Pantomime Trip	Newbury Corn Exchange
17 December 2026	Christmas Tree Festival	TBC