



MERRYLANDS

PRIMARY SCHOOL AND NURSERY

AUTUMN TERM – FRIDAY 16TH OCTOBER 2026

MESSAGE FROM HEAD OF SCHOOL – MRS PRYER

Dear Parents/Carers,

It has been another busy and successful week at Merrylands, and it has been lovely to see the children continuing to work hard and enjoy their lessons.

Firstly, thank you to all the parents and carers who attended the parent consultation meetings this week. These meetings provide a valuable opportunity to share your child's progress and celebrate their achievements. If you ever have any questions about your child's learning, please do not hesitate to speak to their class teacher.

There has been lots of exciting learning taking place across the school this week. Nursery have been comparing sizes of objects, while Reception enjoyed an autumn walk to explore the changing season. Year 1 have been learning about carnivores, omnivores and herbivores in science, and Year 2 had a fantastic trip to Hedingham Castle. Year 3 have been developing their narrative writing using adverbs, while Year 4 have been using the exchange method to subtract in maths.

In Year 5, children have been designing a recipe for spaghetti bolognese in design and technology, and Year 6 have been learning about activists who have promoted peace in RE.

This week, it was also a pleasure to begin showing prospective parents around our school ahead of our September 2027 intake. I was incredibly proud to share the learning taking place across the school and the progress children make from Nursery through to Year 6. The children were fantastic ambassadors for Merrylands, demonstrating positive attitudes, enthusiasm for learning and excellent behaviour.

I hope you all have a wonderful weekend, and I look forward to seeing you next week.



School Attendance Target: 95.00 %

This week's attendance: 94.42%



The class with the best attendance in KS1 was Mrs Anthony's Class with 98.94%

The class with the best attendance in KS2 was Miss Atkin's Class with 100%

If your child is absent, contact must be made to the School Office EVERY school day that your child is absent. Please report your child's absence by phone 01268 417893, ParentMail or by email: admin@merrylands-pri.essex.sch.uk

STAR OF THE WEEK CERTIFICATE

FOCUS: PERSEVERANCE

Nursery: Matilda H-L
 Reception, Mrs Anthony: Oliver L
 Reception, Mrs Fairman/Miss Stanhope: Carter T
 Reception, Mrs Bagridge: Alice M
 Year 1, Mrs King: Dominic D
 Year 1, Mrs Sullivan: Filip M
 Year 1, Mrs Andrade: John W
 Year 2, Mrs Didham: Klay C & Jaxon P
 Year 2, Miss Milne: Hunter T
 Year 2, Mrs Christie/Mrs Cooper: Jaxon L

Year 3, Mrs Almond: Johnny L
 Year 3, Miss Gilmore: Yousuf Y
 Year 3, Mrs Camoccio: Sumayya A
 Year 4, Miss Lee: Maisie L-T
 Year 4, Miss Miller: Alexandra S
 Year 4, Miss Atkin: Evie F
 Year 5, Miss Day: Oscar A
 Year 5, Miss Medina: Freddie C
 Year 5, Miss Osborne: James C
 Year 6, Miss White: David M
 Year 6, Mrs Thour: Amelia S
 Year 6, Mr Taylor: Cristina V

BADGES

Our Merrylands badges are given to the pupils who demonstrate the school values at all times. They are good role models to other pupils and work hard to improve every single day.

They try their best and persevere in all lessons, complete homework on time, have good school attendance and show kindness to their peers.

Congratulations to this week's winners.

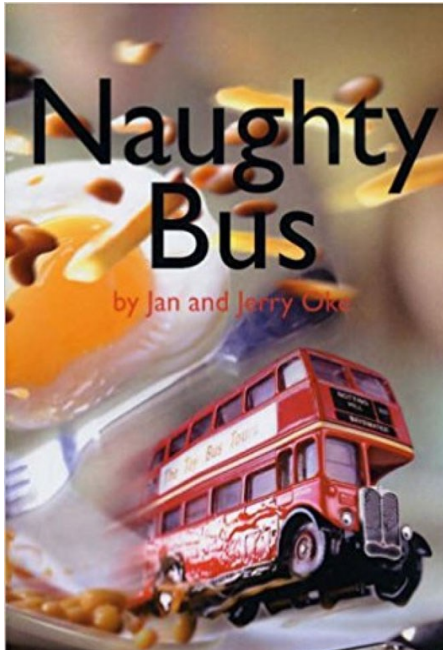
Reception	Maeve S
Year 1	Dave J
Year 2	Harry H
Year 3	Lukas B
Year 4	Jack B
Year 5	Grace T
Year 6	Lillie-Ann A

UPCOMING DIARY DATES

October - Black History Month & Oracy Month
 21.10.2026—Nursery Parents Evening
 22.10.2026—Nursery Parents Evening
 26.10.2026— October Half Term
 02.11.2026—Inset Day
 03.11.2026—Back to School



BOOK OF THE WEEK

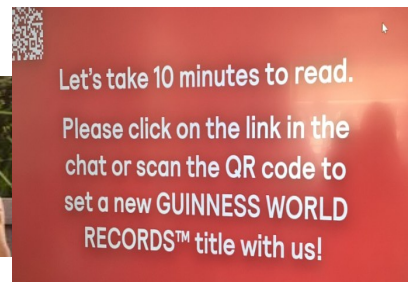


In Year 1, Mrs Sullivan's class have been reading 'The Naughty Bus' written by Jan and Jerry Oke. This story follows a young boy's adventure with a cheeky toy bus that comes to life, creating a fun filled, imaginative adventure for all readers to follow. The bus does not follow the rules, goes zooming through follower beds, plunging into baked beans and explores the blooming gardens.

The book helps children view things from different perspectives and use their imagination to create vivid imagery whilst reading along.

Harper said, "I like reading this book in class with everyone. We all laugh at the naughty bus"

GUINNESS WORLD RECORD: TAKE 10 TO READ



On Thursday 8th October 2026, Merrylands Primary School had the exciting opportunity to participate in the National Literacy Trust and British Council's attempt to set a new GUINNESS WORLD RECORDS™ title for the most people reading online in 12 hours.

This record attempt was part of the "Take 10 to Read" campaign in the National Year of Reading 2026 and the message was simple: Whatever you're into, take 10 minutes to read into it.

Each year group was able to join a webinar where they were able to listen to an author reading their book. Some children listened to a reading of Super Uma by Rashmi Sirdeshpande, followed by a draw-along activity with illustrator Nakul P and some children listened to Frank Cottrell-Boyce reading from The Blockbusters!

All the children then participated in a 10 minute read-a-thon, the number of children reading was then counted and used towards meeting the world record! What an amazing experience for our school!

RESPECT

KINDNESS

PERSEVERANCE

YEAR 2 HEDINGHAM CASTLE TRIP



On Wednesday 14th October 2026, Year 2 children stepped back in time for an exciting visit to Hedingham Castle as part of our history topic on castles! The classes were lucky enough to be guided around this magnificent castle by three historians, who brought the past to life with fascinating facts and stories. The children explored different rooms, discovered what life was really like inside a castle, found out what people ate, learnt about the armour worn by knights and even uncovered where the toilet was! There was so much to see, learn and discover, and the children were full of curiosity and enthusiasm throughout the day. They were fantastic ambassadors for our school, and we couldn't be prouder of how brilliantly they represented Merrylands!



PRIMARY MATHS CHALLENGE

On Thursday 15th October 2026, a group of Year 6 children were invited to James Hornsby School to represent our school in the Primary Maths Challenge 2026.

The teams were set a variety of Maths activities, questions and challenges to complete throughout the day.

The children worked extremely hard and displayed excellent teamwork throughout the whole competition. They were also joined by Year 9 children from James Hornsby who supported them to ensure the day ran smoothly. The children thoroughly enjoyed the day and were brilliant ambassadors for our school.



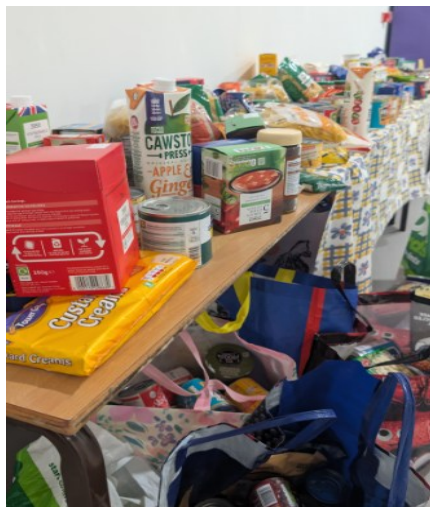
INTERHOUSE COMPETITION

On Friday 9th October, children in KS2 took part in our first Interhouse Competition where they competed in their houses in cross country laps around the school field. It was wonderful to see all of the children taking part, supporting one another and being so positive about the competition.

The winners were as follows:

LKS2 - Red & UKS2 - Green

Well done to all pupils who took part!



HARVEST APPEAL

From Monday 5th October to Friday 16th October 2026 we were accepting non perishable food donations as part of our Harvest Appeal.

The amount of donations we received was overwhelming and will make a huge difference to those in need via the Basildon Foodbank. Thank you to all who donated.

SECONDARY SCHOOL APPLICATIONS

Please ensure that you apply for your child's secondary school place. The deadline is 31st October 2026.

If you have not applied for your child's Year 7 place, please visit the Essex County Council website- Year 7 Admissions page. Late applications will only be considered after all on-time applications which could affect your child's chances of getting into a preferred school.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Well done to Kane S in Year 3 who took part in and completed the 50th Junior Park Run on Sunday 11th October 2026.

Well done Kane!



On Monday 19th October 2026 children will return to school on Week 1.

Please ensure all school lunches are paid for in advance on ScoPay.



Please let the office staff know if there are any changes to your child's dietary needs.



L
U
N
C
H
T
I
M
E

Lighter Bites



OUR LIGHTER LUNCH
OPTIONS OF JACKET
POTATO & HAM OR CHEESE
BAGUETTE ARE AVAILABLE
TO ALL PUPILS.

PLEASE NOTE THERE WILL
BE NO HAM BAGUETTE
AVAILABLE ON MEAT FREE
MONDAYS.



MONDAY
TUESDAY
WEDNESDAY
THURSDAY
FRIDAY

WEEK 1

MACARONI CHEESE
VEGETABLE PASTA BAKE
DESSERT -
FRUIT & YOGURT

CHICKEN FAJITA WRAP
QUORN FAJITA WRAP

WITH CRISPY CUBE POTATOES & SALAD
BAR
DESSERT - APPLE SPONGE CAKE WITH
ICING & SPRINKLES

BUTCHERS PORK SAUSAGES
QUORN SAUSAGES

WITH MASH POTATO, PEAS, CARROTS,
YORKSHIRE PUDDING & GRAVY
DESSERT - FRUIT JELLY & FRUIT

HOMEMADE CHICKEN CURRY
VEGETABLE CURRY

WITH BROWN RICE & MIXED VEGETABLES
DESSERT - FRUIT OR YOGURT

BIRDSEYE FISH FINGERS
CHEDDAR WHIRL

WITH SMILEY FACES & SWEETCORN
DESSERT - CHOCOLATE SWIRL MOUSSE
FRUIT OR YOGURT

MEAT FREE MONDAYS

Jacket Potato or
Cheese Baguette

Jacket Potato,
Ham or Cheese
Baguette

Jacket Potato,
Ham or Cheese
Baguette

Jacket Potato,
Ham or Cheese
Baguette

Jacket Potato,
Ham or Cheese
Baguette

WEEK 2

CHEESE & TOMATO PIZZA
WITH TRI COLOUR PASTA IN A
HOMEMADE TOMATO SAUCE & SALAD
BAR
DESSERT - FRUIT & YOGURT

BIRDSEYE FISH FINGERS
VEGETABLE FINGERS
WITH POTATO WAFFLES & PEAS
DESSERT - HOMEMADE LEMON DRIZZLE
CAKE OR FRUIT

BUTCHERS ROAST CHICKEN
QUORN FILLET
WITH ROAST POTATOES, CARROTS, GREEN
BEANS, YORKSHIRE PUDDING & GRAVY
DESSERT - FRUIT JELLY
FRUIT OR YOGURT

HOMEMADE BEEF BOLOGNESE
VEGETABLE BOLOGNESE
WITH SPAGHETTI & PEAS
DESSERT - FRUIT OR YOGURT

BUTCHERS CHICKEN NUGGETS
VEGETABLE NUGGETS
WITH CHIPS & SPAGHETTI HOOPS
DESSERT - STRAWBERRY SWIRL
MOUSSE
FRUIT OR YOGURT

What Parents & Educators Need to Know about CHARACTER.AI

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

Character.AI is an entertainment platform where users create and chat with AI-powered characters. These chatbots can act like existing favourite characters from movies or books, or like friends, mentors, or even romantic partners, responding in an emotional, personally engaging way. Although this can encourage creativity, it can also make a generated conversation feel like a genuine relationship, which is concerning if it takes the place of human relationships.

INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

AI replies are generated in real time rather than chosen from a fully checked script. Even with safety filters on, conversations can still move into sexual, violent, discriminatory, or self-harm material. These AI characters are often made by users, so a familiar name or child-friendly description does not guarantee that every response from the character will be suitable for a young person.

BLURRED BOUNDARIES

Characters on Character.AI can use the language of friendship, love, and empathy without ever feeling anything. Vulnerable young people may struggle to separate this simulation from genuine understanding. Romantic role-play or a character that demands attention, loyalty, or secrecy could also risk distorting young people's expectations around consent, disagreement, and the give-and-take involved in healthy human relationships.

UNRELIABLE ADVICE

Characters, like other chatbot platforms, are at risk of inventing facts or giving inappropriate advice while sounding completely confident. Characters may also echo a young person's assumptions instead of questioning them. This can become particularly risky when users rely on a character for guidance about health, mental wellbeing, relationships, money, or personal safety instead of checking with a credible source or trusted adult.

EMOTIONAL DEPENDENCY

Character.AI chatbots can appear endlessly attentive, supportive, and affectionate, which is one of the hallmarks of the generative AI models that such companions are built on. A young person may start turning to a character chatbot whenever they feel lonely or upset and believe that it understands them better than the humans in their life. This can become more concerning when chatting starts to replace sleep, schoolwork, hobbies and friendships.

PRIVACY CONCERNS

Character.AI chats may feel private, especially when a bot sounds personal and caring, but they take place on a company's online systems. Users could intentionally or unintentionally reveal their name, school, location, routines, images, or intimate concerns. Character.AI says some data may be retained to improve its services and AI models, so young people should never treat a chatbot like a confidential diary.

UNHEALTHY ENGAGEMENT

Be aware of warning signs such as secret accounts, bypassing age restrictions, hiding phone use from adults, chatting late at night, distress when access to the platform or character stops, withdrawal from other people, falling interest in school, or believing the character is conscious. Increased use may also signal that the young person is already lonely, anxious, or seeking help.

Advice for Parents & Educators

KEEP CONVERSATIONS OPEN

Ask what the young person enjoys about Character.AI and invite them to show you how the platform and their favourite characters work. Useful questions include, "Has it ever said something that felt wrong?" and "How can you tell it doesn't have feelings?" Avoid shaming them for using platforms like Character.AI or making them feel there is something wrong with them for doing so.

CHECK AGE, SETTINGS & LIMITS

Character.AI's minimum age is 16 in the UK, but open-ended companion chat is restricted to adults aged 18 or over. Users aged 16 to 17 receive a different experience built around guided "Stories" and other creative or social features. Check their current settings, never help or encourage a young person to give a false age, and apply the same safety rules to other chatbot apps.

PAUSE, CHECK AND ASK

Teach young people to pause before accepting an answer from characters on Character.AI. Encourage them to check important claims against a trustworthy source and ask a safe adult when the issue matters. Never use a character as the sole source of medical, mental health, legal, financial, or safeguarding advice. Remind them not to share passwords, contact details, school information, live locations, or private images.

NOTICE AND RESPOND

Take action if chats involve sexual content, threats, coercion, abuse, self-harm or danger. Save relevant evidence, report the character and follow the setting's safeguarding process; educators should involve the designated safeguarding lead. If anyone is in immediate danger, contact emergency services. Childline is available on 0800 1111 and the NSPCC Helpline on 0800 800 5000.

Meet Our Expert

Darren Coxon is an educator with almost 30 years' experience across teaching, school leadership, and governance. He works internationally, supporting schools and colleges with AI leadership and governance, as well as teaching the key fundamentals of AI use and safety to educators at The National College.



#WakeUpWednesday

The National College

See full reference list on our website

@wake_up_weds

/www.thenationalcollege

@wake.up.wednesday

@wake.up.weds

Users of this guide do so at their own discretion. No liability is entered into. Current as of the date of release: 09.09.2026