



1st December 2023

Dear Parents/Carers,



I am delighted to announce that we are now the proud holders of the SENDIASS award! We are delighted that our commitment to fostering an inclusive and supportive environment where every child's unique qualities are celebrated has been recognised.

Let the festive season begin..



On Thursday the children were full of excitement and good cheer as they decorated our beautiful tree. Thank you to FoMH and all our families for enabling this magical moment!

The post boxes are out and the school has been filled with singing as the Merry Hill team work with the children to get our Christmas productions ready. We look forward to welcoming you in to watch these performances.

EYFS – Friday 15th December – 9:30am and 2:00pm

KS1 Singing and Celebrating Progress – Monday 18th December 9:00am and 2:00pm

Mastering Number Workshops

Thank you to those who were able to come to the maths workshops this week, it was lovely to see so many of our parents and children working together! Thank you to Mrs Ineson who delivered the workshops and our wonderful group of parents who put together the packs to make these sessions such a success. If you were unable to attend, the recordings are available on our school website www.merryhill.org.uk. All children in Reception to Year 2 will have come home with maths packs this week so you can begin the home learning whenever you are ready.

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'Healthy Learners' – how we ensure we are ready to learn

Supporting children with SEND during the festive period

Christmas can be a magical time, but it is important to remember that not all of our children find Christmas a time of fun and excitement. For some it is overwhelming and induces anxiety. If you are decorating at home, please do this with the children so that their safe environment does not suddenly change. This is a step we take at Merry Hill when decorating the classrooms and we also stick to timetables and routine as much as possible, ensuring we give advanced notice of change. This helps support our children to feel safe and reduce anxiety. Attached to this newsletter is a 12 step guide which can support children with Autism as well as any child who finds change overwhelming. I hope you find this useful.

'Ambitious Learners' – how we act when we learn

Growth Mindset

On Monday, children in KS1 contributed to an assembly that recapped the importance of having a *growth mindset*. Having a *growth mindset* means you believe your brain can grow and you can learn many new things. At Merry Hill Infant School you will often hear the children saying sentences such as, "I can't do that yet, but if I keep trying I will be able to".

We talked about the importance of having resilience when something is tricky and the children came up with great words of encouragement which can help us all to develop our growth mindset, e.g. "I can do this, I just need to keep trying", "Mistakes are good because they can help me to learn", "I believe in myself", "It's good to try new things", "I can ask my friend to explain how they did it.", "I can try another strategy" and "Trying hard makes me feel proud".

This is a real testament to the strong learning behaviours established across the school and can be seen in all classrooms.

'Curious Learners' – what we learn

Please click on the link below to have a peek at some of the wonderful learning that has taken place in your child's classroom this week:

<https://merryhill.org.uk/our-learning-community/year-group-blogs/>

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Advent Assembly

On Wednesday Father Burton led an assembly which taught the children about Advent. We discovered that for Christians, the time leading up to Christmas is called Advent. Christians mark the four Sundays in Advent as a way to prepare for the coming of Jesus. Lots of the children talked about calendars they have at home or have seen in shops which count down the days until Christmas.



Cost of Living

Every week, we aim to feature a suggestion for a free (or inexpensive) family activity that you can enjoy together. If anyone has any tips or ideas of free or inexpensive activities you would like to share with our community, please let the office know. I hope you find these activities enjoyable and valuable for quality time together.

Bentley Priory Nature Reserve

What:

Following on from Bentley Priory Museum last week, I thought we should mention their extensive grounds which also include the deer park. The Bentley Priory Nature Reserve comprises of nearly 70 hectares of ancient woodland, scrub and wetland and has many trails to take.

Where:

There is access from Common Road, Priory Drive, Aylmer Drive, Embry Way, Old Lodge Way, Bentley Way and Masfield Avenue. There is no designated car parking as all entrances are in residential streets, but a car park in Warren Lane at Stanmore Common is within five minutes' walk.



Try out one of the many trails signposted around the grounds.



To the east of Heriot's Wood and alongside the public footpath is a private Deer Park with a herd of approximately 20 Fallow Deer.



See if you can spot the "Master", a mighty oak with a trunk 9m in circumference estimated to be over 400 years old. It is located to the west of Summerhouse Lake and is reputedly the



Can you spot the old military pillbox erected as part of the perimeter defences of RAF Bentley Priory, probably around 1940-4?

I hope you all have a wonderful weekend.

Sincerely,

Ms Melissa Adams
Headteacher

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12 Tips for an autism-friendly Christmas

Christmas can be a magical time, but if someone in your family is on the spectrum, there's extra pressure to get it right. These simple pointers may help:

- 1 Have a designated place to relax and retreat, especially if you plan to have a houseful of guests. You could even label it as a 'quiet room'.
- 2 Be clear about when friends, family or neighbours may visit. Write up a schedule and stick it on the fridge or somewhere it is easily accessible.
- 3 Use advent calendars to your advantage – a countdown can be really beneficial to make people aware of upcoming events.
- 4 Some families opt for a one-day Christmas, when decorations and lights are put up and taken down in the same day.
- 5 Alternatively, how about decorating a designated 'Christmas room' to limit the impact of changes to other rooms in the house.
- 6 Look at the world through the eyes of your loved one – what aspects of Christmas do they enjoy? There are no rules – Christmas can be whatever works for you and your family.



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12 Tips for an autism-friendly Christmas

- 7 Have some Christmas-free time away from the festivities – this can be helpful to reduce anxiety. A quiet stroll in the park or feeding the ducks could help, if this is what you normally do to relax.
- 8 Father Christmas can cause anxiety. Prepare your loved one by showing them pictures, or perhaps Father Christmas could drop off presents at a family member's house instead.
- 9 Find out about local events, such as autism-friendly grottos and pantomimes. Decide which events your loved one would enjoy and book in advance.
- 10 Christmas dinners can be individual, so stick to what you know will be popular. Who says it has to be roast turkey?
- 11 On Christmas Day, try and keep to a routine that suits your family. If you need to make changes, then prepare in advance, using photos or social stories to explain what is happening.
- 12 Christmas is about enjoying yourself. It's your time, too, so always ask for help from family and friends if you need it.

 Wishing you a very merry Christmas and happy New Year!

Autism Together's children and families service offers parenting courses, social groups, activities for little ones and support groups for families. And we do so much more!
Read about us at www.autismtogether.co.uk.

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