

15th January 2025

Dear Parents/Carers and Students,

Welcome to 2025 and the Spring Term at Highcliffe School. I wish everyone in our Highcliffe School community a happy and successful year ahead.

Water Beads/Orbies

I wouldn't usually start a letter with a topic like this but it is important I draw everyone's attention to the fact that Water Beads (or Orbies) are not permitted on the school site under any circumstances and are never to be brought into school by any student. If you have heard of them before you may be aware that medical experts advise they can be a threat to human health if swallowed or placed into ear or nose cavities, because they are intended to swell in size significantly. You can find out more about water beads, and why they are therefore not permitted on our school site under any circumstances, in the UK Government Product Safety Alert found via the link below. Please discuss the important information in it with your son or daughter and ensure they understand why Water Beads/Orbies are not safe. Thank you.

[https://www.gov.uk/product-safety-alerts-reports-recalls/product-safety-alert-water-beads-psa7#:~:text=This%20is%20a%20Product%20Safety,asphyxiation%20\(suffocation%20or%20choking\).](https://www.gov.uk/product-safety-alerts-reports-recalls/product-safety-alert-water-beads-psa7#:~:text=This%20is%20a%20Product%20Safety,asphyxiation%20(suffocation%20or%20choking).)

Christchurch Foodbank

You may recall that before Christmas, with very short notice we changed the final day of term Mufti Day from a 'free' one to a 'charitable donation' one following the theft from the Christchurch Food Bank. I need to let you know that the response from our parent, student and staff community was incredible, and on that last day of term we raised £1337 for the Foodbank which I had the pleasure of passing over to Tracey Blick, Projects Manager. Thank you so much for your kindness and generosity.

Love for Reading Initiative

On the first day of this term we launched our new initiative promoting a love of reading in Year 7 to Year 10. Every day, for 15 minutes during Period 5, these students now either read a book of their own, listen to a teacher read, or do another activity about a piece of reading intended to foster enjoyment of reading and enthusiasm to stay reading at other times of the week. A key element of this is that students take personal responsibility for having a reading book on the go which they have ready to hand at the start of Period 5. Parents were asked to set the tone at home before Christmas by ensuring your son or daughter comes to school with a book every day. This does seem to have happened – we estimate around 98% of students had a book ready for Period 5 on day 1 and the percentage has gone up since then. Thank you so much to parents and students for actively supporting reading for pleasure in the school.

Stakeholder Surveys

In further evidence of strong parent and student support for the school, huge numbers of parents and students completed their surveys sent out in December. The combination of staff, student and parent surveys generated a huge amount of written information and data to support the governing body, school leaders and staff in continuing to move the school forward. There is so much data that it will take some time to feedback key findings, but we intend providing feedback to you by February half-term. Two things really stood out across all 3 stakeholder groups. Firstly, that in the categories probed in the surveys, Highcliffe School scored at least as well as or better than 'similar schools' i.e. schools of a similar size and student profile, and often much higher. Secondly, from parents and students there was an extraordinary outpouring in the free comments section of expressions of thanks for staff, praise for the school ethos, for the quality of communication and the standards promoted in the school. This feedback is giving staff a real morale boost as we head into 2025 – thank you for that.

Governor Vacancies

We have two vacancies for Parent Governors coming up. A sincere thank you to Mike Ellis and Neil Sykes for their more than 6 years apiece of service to the school as Governors. Although volunteers, our Governing Body is a well-informed, well-trained and proactive group considered a strong and successful one by the Trust we are in. To strengthen the Governing Body, we would prefer parents with knowledge and skills from either:

- Experience working in healthcare OR
- Experience working in a primary age setting OR
- Experience of commercial management in medium-sized business

However, we would also very much welcome interest from *any* parent interested in joining and supporting our Governing Body, no matter your experience.

Further information about the work of Governors at Highcliffe School and how to express interest in joining it will be circulated soon.

Best wishes,



Patrick Earnshaw
Headteacher

