



# Christ Church Cathedral School News

9th January 2026



## Message from the Headmaster

Dear Parents,

Friday night is newsletter night and many of you have told me that you look forward greatly to its arrival. Given that we obviously have an enthusiastic clientele (I have even heard of regular readers in Australia), I have decided that we should include some more sections in the publication. From this issue onwards, therefore, we will have two regular articles written by a member of staff talking through their areas of responsibility, providing some explanations and thoughts about them. Hopefully this will mean that you will learn something more about the school. It should also mean that you have more varied voices. There will also be a section focussing upon our enrichment programme. In terms of enrichment, every term is unique – some activities are repeats of popular choices, but there are also new options. This term, for instance, we have started a fencing club and several of our staff are now qualified fencing instructors – for life, following a training course over the Christmas holidays! I commend these articles to you and hope that you will find them a fascinating insight into some of the varied aspects of our busy school.

A song from my childhood keeps recurring to me – “If you go down to the woods today you’re in for a big surprise!” I suspect that many of you will recognise this as the opening words of the ‘Teddy Bears’ Picnic’, a wonderful 1930s song. I am reminded of it because I went down to the woods on Wednesday – in particular to our Woodland School – and had a big surprise. The recently appointed Head Gardener of Christ Church and his wonderful team are in the process of transforming the wood into an even more brilliant Woodland School. Hedges are being built, wigwams made from willows, cooking areas, bug hotels, a pond, several seating areas are being constructed – it is going to be extraordinary and will be a most wonderful resource for us.

I am very grateful to the Christ Church gardening team and for Mr Robards who is overseeing the project. We will bring you news as it happens but over the course of the next few weeks and months you will see the transformation of the place. Part of this will happen naturally as many of the features will come into being through plant growth. Do go and have a look when you come to watch a match or have a walk round the Meadow.

On Monday evening I went to the Wigmore Hall in London to see the Cathedral Choristers perform at the beginning of a year in which we celebrate the 500th anniversary of the foundation of the Cathedral choir in 1526. Not a spare seat was to be had in that beautiful auditorium. The major piece that they performed was John Taverner's Western Wynd Mass. Taverner was the College's first organist and the premier and most famous musician of his day - Wolsey would only have the best for his new foundation. The mass was composed very soon after his appointment and was composed for his new choir. It is a very lengthy complex mass based upon a common song of the time which many people knew with a simple but haunting words:

"Western wind, when wilt thou blow/That the small rain down can rain/Christ, that my love were in my arms/And I in my bed again!"

Taverner takes this tune and weaves a highly complex mass from it – throughout one can hear the tune being passed around, being modulated and weaved between different parts in the most complex and creative way. It was a joy to see our boys performing alongside the adults of the back rows, singing some of the most complex music written to a professional standard. As this major year in our history begins, I thought it worth reflecting upon the extraordinary legacy with which we have been entrusted to help maintain and what a wonderful example it is of what boys of this age are capable of achieving if they are believed in and if they believe in themselves.

This week I have been the proud possessor of the ski trip's emergency phone. That has meant I have the privilege of being on the Whatsapp group and have therefore received all the photos of the trip. It is clear that the pupils (and indeed staff from what I can see) are having a wonderful time, skiing, sledging and consuming amongst other things. As I sit here in the rain and the dark, I look with envy at the snow, at the sun and feel the crisp mountain air. Thank you so much to Madame Loyer, Mr Boarder and Mr Davies for all their hard work in ensuring that the mountain fun continues.

At lunchtime today I asked one of the boys whether they had had a good Christmas. They told me that they had received a lovely present from Santa. I asked rather innocently how Santa had known what present to choose. The boy looked at me rather witheringly. "I didn't ask Santa because he doesn't exist." "Oh," I responded sounding slightly disappointed. "As you would know." He continued. "How would I know he didn't exist?" I asked "Because Santa is your parents and you are a parent." I suppose, upon reflection, that I should have known!

**Mr Richard Murray,**  
Headmaster

## School Contacts

School Office: 01865 242 561 (8am - 5pm)

Prep Line: 07719 109433 (5pm to 6pm)

Mr Mirko Minibus: 07736 148199

Mr Quen Minibus: 07346 224937

# School Calendar

Monday 12th January - Sunday 18th January

MONDAY 12 JANUARY

TUESDAY 13 JANUARY

2.00 - 4.15: U8/U9 Football v Oratory - Home

WEDNESDAY 14 JANUARY

THURSDAY 15 JANUARY

FRIDAY 16 JANUARY

8.45 - 9.30: Cathedral Assembly, Speaker - Miss Helen Pike, Master, Magdalen College School

1.30 - 3.00: Brass Funkeys Visit

## Upcoming Events



### **Be a Chorister for an Afternoon**

**Saturday 24th January 2026**

**2.30 - 7.00pm**

Christ Church Cathedral

If your son is in Year 2 or 3 and has a voice of an angel, then you should sign up to our upcoming 'Be a Chorister' event.

Your son will spend the afternoon enjoying a singing lesson with our Director of Music, Ms Biddell, as well as our world-famous Organist, Mr Peter Holder, who has notably performed at the funeral of Queen Elizabeth II, and the Coronation of King Charles III and Queen Camilla.

The boys end the day with a performance at Evensong in Christ Church Cathedral.

Our invitation is extended to friends and family of the School community with boys in Years 2-4, so please spread the word! Families can sign up [here](#).

# Curriculum and Learning at CCCS

In this article I am hoping to explain a little about how we plan for pupils' learning across the different subject areas and age groups at CCCS. This is the first of a series of articles designed to explain what we do and why, which we will be writing over the next couple of terms.

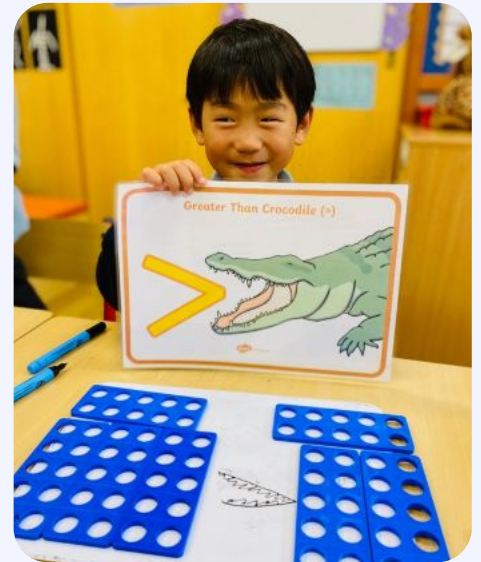
Of course, we are an Independent school. This means so much more than just not being state-funded: it gives us the freedom to do things differently. There is a great deal of excellent practice in the National Curriculum, so we use that as our starting point, but our aim is to go further and deeper. We have a few advantages which enable us to do this: we are a small school with small class sizes; we do not have children with very significant difficulties in learning; and, of course, we have more resources.

Some of the first things people notice about our school are the small class sizes and the large number of specialist teachers. Class sizes start small and tend to grow as they move up the school, but not to more than about 20 pupils... and for the subjects where class size matters most, we divide groups even further. From Year 5, boys are taught in half-size classes for English, Maths, Art and Design Technology. Latin and French are included in this from Year 7. Therefore, and very unusually even in the Independent sector, CCCS pupils are rarely taught these subjects in groups much larger than 10. This means that teachers are able to tailor the learning to individual pupils and to provide support or stretching quickly when they are needed. Because of this (and that from Year 5 we have specialist teachers who understand the full journey into senior school), our pupils make rapid progress in English and in Maths.



The principal role of a primary school is to make sure pupils learn English and Maths well. Mainstream state primary schools do this by giving about two-thirds of the school day to these subjects, and it works – but there are usually only about nine hours per week left for the other eleven subjects. Combine this with the fact that almost all the teacher's efforts go into these two main subjects (and that no teacher is an expert in thirteen subjects) – and the rest of a child's learning can end up (through no fault of the teacher's) being thin and uninspiring.

At CCCS, we are able to be different. Our pupils learn English and Maths so well that we can have more time for everything else. The subjects which a generalist teacher might struggle to teach well are taught by specialists, who have both a deep knowledge of and a passion for what they are teaching. Even our Reception children have specialist lessons in Music, Art, French and Physical Education. The number of subjects taught by specialists increases as children become more independent, until all subjects are specialist-taught from Year 5. It is in these areas that the CCCS difference is most apparent: our Year 3s use real tools in woodwork; our Year 5s use Bunsen burners in Science; and our Year 7s can write a full-page letter to a French child and program a game in Python. Our Year 8s leave us as confident, knowledgeable young men who are well ahead of their peers in most subjects – and this is before I even mention Music. Most of our pupils take advantage of the world-class Music tuition we have on offer here, either as a chorister or by learning an instrument (or two, or three...). It is easy for those of us who have been at CCCS for a while to forget how unusual it is to reach Grade 8 by the age of thirteen, or to sing to an audience of over 1000 for a Christmas service.



Our teachers have the interest and the knowledge to teach for depth, breadth and excitement. We give them the freedom to go beyond the National Curriculum and to plan a curriculum to suit the pupils we have at CCCS. We know that if the pupils and the teachers are excited, and are not limited by things beyond their control, there is no end to what they can achieve. Over the next few weeks, my colleagues and I will write about what we do (and why) in more detail. I would be very interested to hear your thoughts.

Anna Fairhurst (Deputy Head Academic)



# Nursery dive straight back into term

It has been a busy start to term in Nursery! A parent kindly gifted us a Poinsettia to plant in the Nursery garden. Thank you very much! We are looking forward to nurturing the plant and watching it grow.



Here is a photo of one of our children matching letters to sandpaper letters. It's wonderful moments like these, where we can see their growing confidence, progress, and independent learning.

HB



# Pre-Prep's Budding Artists

In Art, Reception and Form 1 were learning about Vincent Van Gogh this week and creating their versions of his self portrait and creating their own portraits too. They did a fantastic job of mark making with oil pastels.

Form 2 also had a go at being Van Gogh, this time using his 'starry night piece'  
Well done Form 2!

EE



## Young Art Oxford Competition 2026 'Little Things That Matter'

CCCS pupils (Reception to Form 8) are invited to enter this year's Young Art Oxford Competition.

All the information you need and details of how to enter can be found in the email sent today from the School Office.  
Good luck!

# Hands on Science Fun

Year 1 have been busy exploring materials in Science this week, and their curiosity has been wonderful to watch.

We began by comparing materials in different ways, thinking about size, colour, shape and purpose, before the children set off around the classroom to find objects that matched fun descriptions such as “something taller than you”, “something red”, or “something that fits into your hand”.

They then looked closely at pictures of everyday items, identifying what material each object was made from and explaining how they knew, for example, by noticing its colour or whether it was transparent.

To finish, the children created their own ‘feely boards’, selecting a range of materials and describing their textures, deciding that sandpaper felt “bumpy”, bubble wrap was “squishy”, and fabric was “soft”. It was a hands-on lesson that they thoroughly enjoyed and engaged with brilliantly.

MH-W



# Form 4 Moulds the Planet

Form 4 have had fun with plasticine this week, discovering more about the structure of the Earth. They have learnt all about the different layers, in preparation for more volcanic investigations!

EP



# Worcester Choristers perform with Bracknell Choral Society

On 21st December, Ludo, Hugo and Alexander travelled to Royal Holloway University, to sing in the chapel alongside Bracknell Choral Society and harpist Gwenllian Llŷr at a concert conducted by Mr Hallam, the singing teacher for our Worcester choristers.

All three boys were a huge credit to the school. Not only were the adult musicians impressed with their singing, but also their professionalism throughout both the rehearsal and performance.

The evening began with Benjamin Britten's famous 'Ceremony of Carols', with the boys processing down the length of the chapel whilst singing the first movement unaccompanied. They then sang the solo sections in 'That Yöngë child', 'Ballulalow' and 'In Freezing Winter Night', before rounding off the evening with the 'recessional' accompanied by the harp.

Mr Hallam writes: 'I couldn't have been prouder of them all; it was first-class singing, and they received a huge number of well-deserved compliments after the performance.'

Ms Biddell is so grateful to Mr Hallam for giving this unmissable opportunity to our pupils, as singing outside Oxford alongside adult professionals is a wonderful way to develop their musicianship and confidence. Very many congratulations to all three singers - and to Mr Hallam!

SB



# Music Examination Success

Ms Biddell was delighted that a large number of our instrumentalists gained very pleasing exam results at the end of Michaelmas term. It was especially heartening to have several entries for the highest grades, so many congratulations must go to Leo (Grade 8 Saxophone, Distinction), Patrick (Grade 8 Oboe, Merit) and Ian (Grade 7 Piano, Merit). To tackle exams at this level whilst still at Prep school is an unusual and impressive achievement, so all three boys should be very proud of their excellent results.

SB



# Cathedral Choristers at Christmas



Once again, Christmas for the choristers arrived not as a season of repose but as a festival of industry, exuberance, and disciplined good cheer. Festivity, in this context, was something to be earned. The boys accumulated some twenty-five hours of rehearsals, while their already demanding round of Evensongs, Eucharists, and Matins was augmented by a formidable array of carol concerts - including appearances for Music @ Oxford, the Friends of Christ Church Association, and the formidable rite of Nine Lessons and Carols. It was a schedule that would have daunted adults twice their age, and it was met with resolve and remarkable enthusiasm.

Yet these boys, having worked hard, remain determined to play just as hard. One of the more memorable diversions was a visit to HMS Victory in Portsmouth. The ship, currently in the midst of an immense restoration, its starboard side dismantled, its masts removed, and its body swaddled in scaffolding and plastic, proved unexpectedly hospitable, particularly as we had contrived to arrive on what can only be described as the wettest and stormiest day of the year. Shelter aside, the boys were treated to a tour of this magnificent vessel: a technological marvel when launched in 1775, home to some 850 men and, crucially, 104 cannons - more firepower aboard half a dozen such ships than in all the armies assembled at Waterloo. Moored nearby, in a quietly humbling contrast of scale and age, lay HMS Prince of Wales, the Royal Navy's modern 80,000-ton leviathan.

The season also allowed for pleasures of a more domestic variety: cinema trips, climbing, and a truly stupendous afternoon tea courtesy of the Headmaster. All of this culminated, on Christmas Eve, with supper at the Head of the River, a perennial favourite, and one where the boys are received each year with great warmth. Following an excellent meal, it was back to school for the time-honoured rituals of dormitory decoration and Secret Santa, conducted with seriousness and mischief in equal measure.

Christmas morning itself began in proper fashion, with Thomas Franks providing a full English breakfast while the boys opened their stockings (Christmas hats, strictly speaking, but serving the same purpose). Later that morning, the boys worked alongside the Thomas Franks team to prepare and pack Christmas lunches for those in Oxford and London experiencing food poverty: a practical reminder that generosity, like music, is best expressed in action rather than sentiment.

I will conclude with sincere thanks and congratulations to the boys for their extraordinary efforts throughout the season. My gratitude extends equally to the Cathedral music team, particularly Mr Holder and Mr Moore, the boarding staff, day tutors, kitchen staff, and, of course, the parents. Their collective support ensured not merely the success of Christmas, but its proper spirit: industrious, joyful, and deeply humane.

JR



## Christ Church at Christmas

Incase you missed any of the wonderful CCCS Christmas activities, you can catch up on them here:

- [Nine Lessons and Carols](#)
- [Christmas Matins](#)
- [Choristers Feed Oxford](#)

# Cathedral Choristers perform at Wigmore Hall

## The Program

As part of our 500th Anniversary Celebrations, the Cathedral Choir performed at Wigmore Hall on 5th January with a recital program tracing a remarkable multi-century arc of English choral music, beginning with John Taverner's early 16th-century works *Christe Jesu, pastor bone* and *Weston Wynde Mass*. Taverner is among the most significant composers of the early Tudor church and was also the first appointed Organist of the Cathedral. His music laid foundations for English polyphony with its rich, flowing lines and deep spiritual resonance.

In the second half, the programme moved through the 20th century with William Walton's *Make we joy now in this fest* and Peter Warlock's carol *Bethlehem Down*, pieces that reflect the distinctively English synthesis of folk-influenced lyricism and modern harmonic language. Simon Preston's *There is no rose bridges old and new*, renewing medieval textural traditions in a contemporary idiom, while Giles Swayne's *Magnificat* and Errollyn Wallen's *of her Magnificat* (of which this concert was also the London première) brought a distinct, contemporary flourish to the program.

Closing with another Taverner motet, *Mater Christi sanctissima*, the programme not only celebrated five centuries of choral tradition specifically related to Christ Church but underscored how this lineage continues to inspire living composers.



## Wigmore Hall

Wigmore Hall in London is one of the world's most celebrated venues for chamber music seating up to 545 audience members. As a result, the hall is renowned for its crystalline acoustics and intimate atmosphere. Built in 1901 and located in the heart of the West End, it was originally named Bechstein Hall (as it was built by the German piano manufacturers). Owing to anti-German sentiment, the name was changed to Wigmore Hall in 1917 (following its seizure by the British Government in 1916).

Over its history, Wigmore Hall has become a revered platform for premieres, historic performances and the celebration of vocal and instrumental excellence. Whilst many buildings around it were damaged during World War 2, Wigmore Hall came out unscathed and therefore retains all its original architectural and decorative features. Particularly noteworthy is the building's Renaissance Revival style and the ceiling artwork in the hall depicting 'The Soul of Music'.

JR



# CCCS Enrichment Programme

In September 2024, the school introduced a new Enrichment Programme, inviting all pupils from Years 3–8 to choose activities to participate in during the final two lessons of each week. The programme has been hugely successful and has continued to evolve over the past year and a half.

The Enrichment Programme was designed to provide pupils with a broader range of experiences and to help develop their characters, offering opportunities to harness skills that will allow them to flourish in 21st-century life while fostering new interests beyond those traditionally provided in schools. Life skills are an essential part of education, and CCCS has a duty to ensure that pupils are prepared, not only for life in their senior schools, but also for the world they will inherit. We strongly believe that pupils should look back on their time at CCCS as one that equipped them with the skills to thrive in later life.

Our Enrichment Programme involves activities based around four strands:

- **Creativity and Performing Arts**
- **Challenge and Adventure**
- **Culture and Discovery**
- **Social Responsibility and Life Skills**

Alongside already popular activities such as Making the Most of Oxford, Squash, and CCCS News, this term the programme includes the following exciting options:

- Embroidery Club
- Racket Ball
- Woodland Art
- Cookery
- Silent Movie Making Club
- Music Composition
- Table Tennis Club
- Fencing
- DT Club

Each term we aim to include new activities alongside popular choices from previous terms. We hope you'll agree that the CCCS Enrichment Programme has been a vital addition to the curriculum - one that pupils look forward to every week.



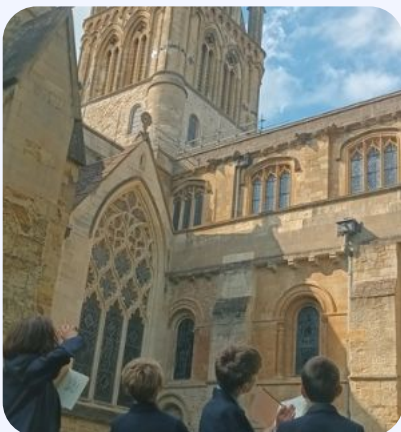
Feedback from pupils has been overwhelmingly positive. Many have discovered new passions, developed confidence in unfamiliar areas, and built friendships through shared interests. Teachers have also noted improvements in teamwork, creativity, and resilience, which are invaluable skills for life beyond the classroom.

The success of the programme is thanks to the dedication of our staff, who bring their expertise and enthusiasm to each activity. From fencing to music composition, their commitment ensures every session is both educational and enjoyable. Their creativity in designing new activities keeps the programme fresh and inspiring.

We are excited about the future of the Enrichment Programme. Plans are already underway to introduce activities such as coding and robotics, photography, and outdoor survival skills. Our goal is to continue offering opportunities that reflect the changing world and prepare pupils for life beyond school.

We love hearing from our community. If you have ideas for new activities or feedback on the programme, please share them with us. Together, we can ensure that CCCS remains a place where pupils not only learn but thrive.

Nick Harrison (Deputy Head Pastoral)



# School Photobook



# School Photobook



There will be more from our Ski Trip in Flaine in next weeks' newsletter, until then, you can catch up on all the fun on [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#)



## Help us keep the school community safe

If your child has an upcoming birthday and would like to celebrate with their CCCS friends, please place a cake order with our Chef, giving at least three days' notice. You can email Chef Peter directly at [franks@cccs.org.uk](mailto:franks@cccs.org.uk)

Please do not bring any outside food into the School.