



Red Balloon
LEARNER CENTRES
For the recovery of severely bullied children



Red Balloon Learner Centre Reading **NEWSLETTER #5**

July 2020

For the recovery of severely bullied and traumatised children



Tristan McGuinness
Headteacher

Headteacher Message

This will be my last article as Headteacher for the RB-Reading newsletter. I would like to take this opportunity to say thank you to everyone, staff, students and parents, for all the support that I have received during my 5 terms at RB Reading. I am leaving with mixed emotions. Myself and the team were on a high after the ISI Inspection in February with the outcome of Good. The Inspectors noted some areas of excellence. So I am pleased that it went so well. Then lockdown for COVID 19 has slightly taken the wind out of everyone's sails. I have particularly missed not being in the classroom and I know that we have all found it hard to switch to



Quote of the month

Start where you are. Use what you have.
Do what you can.

Arthur Ashe



virtual teaching and learning. This new normal has created a lot of extra work for us all but we, staff and students, have managed. I cannot tell you how pleased I was to be back in the Centre albeit for only one day a week whilst we all stayed in our bubbles. I know that as I move on the Centre will continue to go from strength to strength with Christina. I will stay in touch as I would like to know how students are getting on. Have a lovely summer break so that you are all ready for the start of the new term in September and the return to normality.

Tristan McGuinness

July 2020

ART

Students went virtually to

Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam and The National Gallery, London



Art students at Red Balloon-Reading continued the virtual experiences around Europe this term. They visited and explored the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam. The museum contains the largest collection of Van Gogh's paintings and drawings in the world. It is the perfect museum to observe and discuss the history and technique of this well known artist.

Students learnt about the life and work of Van Gogh, from a schoolboy, junior clerk at an art firm, teacher, bookseller, student and preacher; Vincent van Gogh was all of these

before he decided at the age of 27 to become an artist. Students also toured virtually the National Gallery in London, where we discussed the history of the museum and the centuries of art represented in the different galleries and levels of the building. We visualised and talked about the life and context of the artworks of Vincent van Gogh, including the famous painting of the Vase with Fifteen Sunflowers.



Reopening the Centre

Students and staff return safely to school

Our Centre re-opened from the week beginning 8th June. While only a small number of staff and students were able to come, we really did enjoy being back learning together in our building and garden. We also took advantage of the nice weather to have some lessons outside and around the town. One day we studied a poem about nature and change surrounded by the beautiful flowers and trees of the London Road University Campus.

And at a time when statues were very much in the news, we had a study of some statues around Reading to look at the physiology of hands. We are looking forward to when all staff and students can return to the Centre.



We studied a poem about nature.



Student grabs a tiktok video shot with staff.





National picnic week

Students and Staff celebrations

Students and Staff celebrations

At one of their lockdown online community sessions, students and staff took National Picnic Week 2020 as an opportunity to describe their favourite places to picnic, share their favourite recipes, some healthy-eating, others not-so and talk about who they like to picnic with.

Here, they share some of those thoughts, experiences and opinions.



Pam Walters
Teacher

My favourite place to have a picnic is at an outdoor music festival such as Rock The Moor or Kew The Music. We go to festivals every year and set out our space on the grass with a big picnic rug and folding chairs. It's not a quiet picnic, we are surrounded by thousands of other people and the music is pumping from the stage, but the atmosphere is fun and exciting; every so often we have to put down the food and just get up and dance! My favourite picnic foods are baguette with brie and salami, sausage rolls, stuffed vine leaves followed by pastry such as a pain au raisin and the important flask of coffee. I have a favourite coleslaw recipe which my friend Claire invented so we call it Claire-slaw. You grate up a raw, peeled sweet potato and a handful of a strong, mature cheese, mix them together with a vinaigrette made from balsamic vinegar, olive oil, garlic, salt and pepper.



Kew the Music in 2019
watching Alison Moyet.



Christina Pepper
Deputy Head

It's been a while since I've actually been on a picnic. But up until a few years ago I regularly went to afternoon teas. This wasn't only because I love an afternoon tea (although I do), but because I ran a home baking business that specialised in providing vintage afternoon teas with an American twist. So alongside the traditional sandwiches and scones, customers could choose baked goods inspired by my childhood like apple pie cupcakes and lemon meringue pie. As a mobile baker I had to bring everything from the crockery and bunting to 1930s music to give the experience a true vintage feel. Afternoon teas took me all around the Southeast and London, and I met lots of amazing people. I also did my fair share of Alice in Wonderland themed afternoon teas. I even dressed the part.

Alice in Wonderland
themed afternoon teas





CG
Student

My favourite place for a picnic is by the river with my dog and my family surrounded by ducks wanting our food. My favourite food for a picnic would be scotch egg sausage rolls and mini sausages, and I would make apple raisin and red cabbage coleslaw. I also like cucumber and ham sandwich and a 99 flake whippy ice cream to top it off.



Caroline O
Teacher

My favourite place to picnic is by the river. I find it very relaxing being near the water and like watching the boats go by, (except for the time that a dog ran over and snatched my sandwich from me - I was a bit upset about that!). My favourite picnic food is freshly baked rolls with ham, salad and mayonnaise followed by lots of snacky things - nuts, crisps, cucumber sticks with hummus and then after that, if the ice cream van is there, chocolate ice cream in a sugar cone (not one of those waffle cones that go all soggy!).



Tristan McGuinness
Headteacher

Richmond Park - The Isabella Plantation. Not Durdle Door!!! Corned beef and piccalilli sandwiches. A flask of strong Dorset tea. Dorset Apple Cake.



Ohana Rowen
Teacher

Any beach in Cornwall. Food: Egg mayo sandwiches, hummus, strawberries, crisps. Egg mayo with cress - lots of mayo.



MJ
Student

My favourite place for a picnic is at the Palmer Park in Reading. Food: Mac and cheese and for dessert fudge and eclairs.



Cindy Woods
Teacher

Meadow surrounded by woodland. Food: BBQ king prawns, salad, garlic bread.



Weird *food* combinations

One of our students, AM, created a challenge for staff to share some of their weirdest food combinations that have tried it before, here is a selection of some of the strangest food combinations.

Do you fancy trying them?

1 Corned beef and piccalilli sandwiches.

3 Dipping french fries into a chocolate milkshake.

5 Corned beef and brown sauce sandwiches.

6 Dry weetabix with loads of butter and marmite on top - delicious!

7 Home grown chillies dipped in melted chocolate.
Taste good, but not only if they're not too hot!

2 Chocolate and plain crisps at the same time.
(a bite of one and then another)

4 Waffles and maple syrup, with fried egg and bacon on top.

8 I used to love eating Dariylea Triangles with bacon rasher crisps together.





CB

My experience with Red Balloon has been amazing. I started here in 2018 and the first day I walked into the community room I was welcomed as if I had been a student for years. I soon came out of my shell and making friends here was almost effortless. The teachers at Red

Balloon encouraged me to take my GCSEs which I never thought I'd ever be able to take in my life. This school helps children like me that find mainstream school difficult and turns them into students that can excel in any subject they choose from Maths and English or even Design and Technology (but that's not a GCSE option here.) Surprisingly I found that this school was much more relaxed towards the Year 11's who are taking their GCSEs. We got let out for our breaks and lunchtime if we were trusted and had permission from our parents as long as we're back by the time break or lunch is over.



MJ

My best bits about being at Red Balloon were the lessons and the help that I got from the staff when it was my first time at the Centre. I also enjoyed the trips that were planned. My favorite trip was when we went to see Wicked. What I am looking forward to when I leave is moving to a school

where they have drama lessons. And I know some of the students that go there already and make some new friends while I am there. The things that I will miss about Red Balloon are the staff that I have known for a long time. Also the students that I will leave behind. Also the delicious food that we eat here. But most of all the Centre which I have been at for a long time.

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The things that I will miss about Red Balloon are the staff that I have known for a long time.

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KC

I started Red Balloon in April 2018. I think starting at Red Balloon was a good way forward for me and a new chapter in my life. Red Balloon gave me a chance to make new friends and meet new people. Red Balloon was a way to go out and explore new things and discover new

places. Red Balloon decided for a Year 11's leavers in 2019 to make a trip down to Thorpe Park that was a good day to spend with everyone. I think it is a great school and helps people become more confident in themselves and feel able to do more things and focus in lessons. Red Balloon I think makes good changes to people's lives for the better. My favourite lessons have been English. I also enjoyed Tech making crafts with Pam.

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Red Balloon was a way to go out and explore new things and discover new places.
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KD

As I move on to my college, I would especially like to mention how happy I am that I have been able to progress my art skills which I have enjoyed very much. I have always loved art but Eduardo showed me how to develop my talent and to be able to use new techniques that I didn't know before.



SCD

Red Balloon was a good experience because of the relaxed atmosphere, the understanding teachers and the activities. I especially enjoyed going to the gym regularly as well as trips to bowling and archery sessions. Being at Red Balloon has helped my mental wellbeing because

of my increase in physical activity as well as being taught how exercise can help my mood and physical health. The learning has helped me to be more disciplined and motivated to make positive changes.

2018

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I soon came out of my shell and making friends here was almost effortless. The teachers at Red Balloon encouraged me to take my GCSEs which I never thought I'd ever be able to take in my life.

CB

**LONDON
TRIP**

Thorpe Park

**WICKED
MUSICAL
TRIP**

2019



18 students at R.B-Reading have completed AQA Unit Awards certificates this academic year



Congratulations to all students who have worked towards and completed AQA Unit Award Scheme Certificates. Since September, eighteen students have been awarded at least one certificate. A total of 90 certificates have been awarded, which is an impressive amount. By recognising the effort students put into their work and rewarding their achievements the aim of the Unit Award Scheme is to motivate, encourage, engage, support

and raise the self-esteem of all students. Whatever a student's interests are we are likely to be able to find a unit which will interest them. Here are just a few of the units which have been awarded this year: Helping Endangered Species; Magnets and Magnetism; Designing Adverts; Studying a Shakespeare Play; Design and Create a Mask; Making Sweets: Fudge; Communication In French; Introduction to Frequency Tables and Bar Charts;

Designing and Making a Board Game; Boxing Skills; Emotional Wellbeing; Basic Watercolour Skills; Animal Care; Basic First Aid; ICT Infrastructure: Firewalls; and Fund-raising For a Charity.

We hope to continue doing more units next academic year. Please let us know if you have any interests or topics you would be interested in studying.

Student Takes on Shakespeare Challenge

During lockdown we have all taken on learning new things. One of our students, MJ, loves all things drama and theatre. During this time many theatre productions have been shared for free on various streaming services. So during her time at home, MJ decided to challenge herself to see how many Shakespeare plays she could watch. She managed six plays with Romeo and Juliet coming out on top as her favourite and Anthony and Cleopatra as her least favourite. Well done MJ for taking on the Bard during lockdown.



RB-Reading Partnership with Leighton Park

For the past year we have been building a partnership with Leighton Park, a secondary school in Reading. At the beginning of June we were asked by Natasha Coccia, Director of Co-Curricular and Outreach, if there was anything we needed which she might ask the Leighton Park community to donate. We gave them a list of quite a few items but expected there would only be a few items people would have in their homes and be willing to donate. To our delight we received a delivery of text and revision books, board games, various items to kit out our new Food Tech Kitchen and even a much needed sewing machine. We can not thank enough all those who donated items. We look forward to continuing working together with Leighton Park over the next year.

New sewing machine
donated by Leighton Park.

Student sewing a piece of fabric in Design Tech.



New Food Tech Kitchen utensils.



Know the Staff



Ohana Rowen
English Lead

What a strange time to be alive... I thought I would hate being cooped up in my house and not being able to adventure around the country and see my friends and family but I have found a new appreciation for the things on my doorstep! I've been exploring more of Reading and have been on walks to Clayfield Copse, Thames Canal, and the whole of the University of Reading campus. I've been having card tournaments every night (I always win, obviously), cooking up some yummy new dishes, and rounding the day off with a bit of yoga. I've also been able to see what Hank gets up to during the day and I was surprised to see him nibbling away on a monkey nut at 11am - weird hamster! It's also been a productive time as I have spent more time working on my craft projects and reading new books - and actually finishing them! So far I have completed an embroidery initial (see picture) for my cousin, finished two books, and I am currently half-way through knitting a blanket. I've spoken to my friends more than I normally would and we've been having 5 hour phone calls just playing pictionary! Even though we are all more physically isolated than usual, I feel a lot closer to everyone around me and for that I am extremely grateful.



Caroline O
Maths Lead

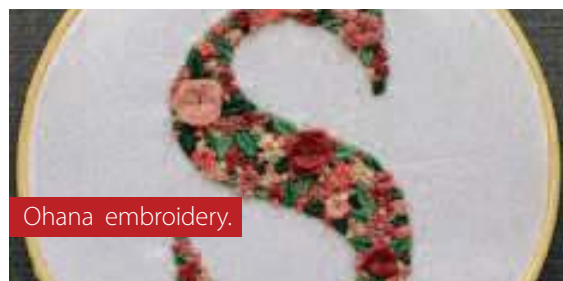
Such a strange time we have all been living in. These past weeks have often felt quite unreal and I have found small things have made me unbelievably excited. We are very bad as a family at finishing off one box of cereal before starting another so often have about 10 on the go. As a result of cutting down on trips to the shops, we have been working through all these part boxes and this morning saw major excitement (for me anyway!) as we now only have one open box!! I was also incredibly happy yesterday when the council resumed our collection of garden waste and was at the window excitedly watching as our two very full bins were emptied!

I am extremely grateful to all those individuals who have kept things running and provided us with essential services during this time. I have been enjoying going out for my daily exercise with my daughter, which involves a bit of a cycle, a walk through the woods and then if I'm up to it a run across the fields - I like to think of it as my mini triathlon! I have definitely found this a time for reflection and re-evaluating the important things in life and hope I can take this with me after we return to "normal". Missing everybody at Red Balloon but hopefully see you all soon.

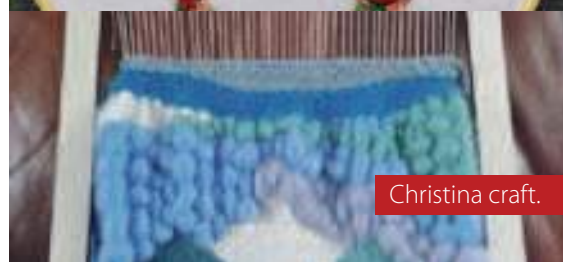


Christina Pepper
Deputy Head

My parents and sister bought me a loom for Christmas because I wanted to learn a new craft. I didn't expect I would open it before the summer holidays, but about a week into lockdown I unwrapped the wooden frame and my little boy and I put it together. Besides for assembly, it came with no instructions on actually how to weave. There were lots of false starts at the beginning and when I started the only thing for certain was the colour palette. I attempted new weaving knots, using varying sizes and textures of wool and incorporating various shapes. There was lots of trial and error; turning the mistakes into design features. For me that is what these past twelve weeks have been: trying new things, making mistakes (especially technical ones), and finding new ways of working, parenting and connecting.



Ohana embroidery.



Christina craft.



Pam Walters

Design/Food Tech Teacher

The pandemic and lock down has taught me not to put things off but to get on and try new things all the time because you never know when it might all shut down. I had plans for several gigs and events which have now been postponed or cancelled and I wish I had done them while I had the chance. So I have thrown myself into some new activities instead - I am learning how to play the ukulele. I am sewing scrubs hats for front-line workers in the NHS. I am crocheting rainbows to put in the windows. I am experimenting with new recipes in the kitchen with my children. I am growing plants for my garden from seed. I signed up to Davina McCall's online workouts and I am training for a 5K run. I am relaxing by doing jigsaw puzzles, going for walks (with my litter picker), meditating and reading a lot of books. I hope the sun keeps shining and we are all together again soon.



Laura Broughton

Music Therapist

The Lockdown. A strange time that I definitely never saw coming and a completely new pace of life for me. Yet, through all its uncertainties, confusion and upheaval it has created a bizarre space in my life that has allowed me to stop and catch up with projects and people. Having recently moved into a new house, we've found the time to paint the garden fence (a long laborious task!) that we'd been putting off, created flower beds and hung baskets of colour. I've turned a room full of towering boxes into a music room - to the delight of our neighbours! We've put up pictures, successfully assembled an assortment of flatpack furniture (who knows what those extra brackets and screws left over at the end were for...) and we are enjoying making a house our home. We've explored our new area on our daily walks and just when we think we know the roads inside out, we discover a new path to wander down. There's been time for reading in the garden, trying new things such as yoga and drawing but most importantly keeping in contact with my friends and family - I particularly enjoy guessing the camera angles that my parents will adopt when answering a video call, will I be greeted to a close up of a nose or a hand covering the camera? It really is anyone's guess! Yes, it is a slower pace of life and it can feel like life has been interrupted, plans have to go on hold and life has to be adapted. However, it has been a chance for me to step away from all of the hustle and bustle and enjoy what is immediately around me. The Lockdown. A strange time I never saw coming but a time I will never forget.



Taryn Cobb

Student Support

Lockdown has definitely given me time to reflect on the important things in life. I've learnt to slow down and not be quite so intent on getting everything done so quickly. I'm not an avid gardener usually, but the extra time has encouraged me to get out there and I've actually started to enjoy it. I've even jet washed the patio and painted the garden fences!!! I'm enjoying beautiful walks in my area and am, at long last, finding my way around locally!!! It's lovely to see clear blue skies (most days) and being able to hear the birds singing. The local farmer must be turning his fields over at the moment - I can smell it!!!! I've learnt how to use my computer more in the last few weeks than I have in a lifetime. So, there have been lots of positives come my way during this pandemic. However, I do look forward to getting back to some normality and being able to see my family.





Samba Virgo Science Teacher

My funniest lockdown experience happened yesterday. I have been having trouble with my car: when I don't drive it for a week the battery goes flat. So, when I went to my allotment I parked it on a hill as I was not confident it would start after only a fifteen minute drive. Sure, enough, after four hours of weeding and watering the car did not start. So, I let the handbrake off and rolled downhill. At the bottom of the hill was a main road at right angles to the side road I was on... I thought it was a long and steep enough hill to bump start the car, but I was wrong! I was then faced with a main road about 2 meters in front of me and a hill behind me.. I was just wondering what on earth I was going to do, and I did offer a brief prayer up..and then a police van came around the corner! I waved madly at them and they stopped.

The two policemen first tried pushing my car back up the hill, but to no avail (was I too heavy after lockdown comfort eating?) They then pushed the car downhill onto the main road (which they reckoned was safe!) but that still did not get up enough speed to bump start the engine. However, they were right that it was safe, amazing how well people drive when policemen are in view! So, they pushed me up a slight incline to a bus stop and brought the police van around to the bonnet of my car. Thankfully, I had jump leads and the engine roared into life! But, just as I was putting away the jump leads I idiotically pulled the key out of the ignition to open the boot! And then the engine wouldn't start again. So, we had to re-connect the jump leads and start it again! The policemen were very gracious, one even said that at least he had gotten some exercise through the whole palaver!



What we been up this term during online lessons

PSHEE

Since January students attending PSHEE lessons have engaged with a wide range of topics, all of which are essential to leading a healthy and positive life. The Spring term began with looking at relationships, from family and friends to defining our boundaries in both platonic and romantic relationships. We looked at marriage and civil partnerships, and discussed the legal status of each.

Mental health topics such as how to accept positive praise as well as understanding the role of positive criticism were also part of the curriculum during the Summer term. Students engaged particularly well with work around resilience, something which each and every one has displayed to some degree during this challenging time.

Well done to all the students for their input during these very important sessions.

In relation to physical health, we looked at the changing body, the importance of sleep, and addictions such as alcohol, smoking and vaping. In relation to society and the wider world, we covered information about the environment to celebrate World Environment Day and also engaged in some very important discussions relating to cultural diversity, such as different ethnic groups, the Windrush Generation and LGBTQ+.

In my first year as a PSHEE teacher at Red Balloon I must say that I am extremely proud and impressed with how engaged students have been,

particularly when discussing challenging yet extremely important topics this year. PSHEE is there to help students to manage their real lives, no matter what jobs, vocations, lives they go on to lead. Well done everyone!



Science

Between them, Samba and Cindy have covered a range of topics in recent months! In Biology many body systems have been investigated, including the digestive, cardiovascular, nervous and lymphatic systems. Also, we have looked at the anatomy of various parts of the human body, from bones and organs to joints and ligaments, including looking at the cause of hypermobility. A project on nutrition, looking at the macro and micro nutrients of food, was a great final project for a Year 11 student.

In Chemistry, there was learning about atoms, elements and compounds. In Physics, Earth & space and magnets & magnetism were a focus this term. 3D printing was also a feature thanks to Samba's fabulous pen! It has been great to see that despite no access to the Lab at the Centre (and slime making!) students have continued to embrace learning about their chosen topics.



Design/Food Tech

Although no tech lessons have taken place during lockdown it has been lovely to hear stories of students baking and making meals at home and using materials from the tech pack to have a go at their own creations. Pam has been preparing for the new term by practising different crafts at home with her own children, such as tie-dye.

She has also continued making face masks for key workers with a partner, delivering 1400 masks between the two of them. They have been so successful they have now started selling on Etsy. Next term the new kitchen will be better equipped following a fabulous donation from another school. Keep creating and see you in September.

Careers

Careers is often a daunting subject to consider and, I have to say, the way Red Balloon students tackled it head on was incredible to see. We started to build a Personal Development Portfolio which helped the students realise their strengths and areas they wish to improve. A mature and difficult step to make for anyone. From this, some students started to build their CV and even apply for jobs and college courses! Amazing! The student's enthusiasm and humour brought joy to such a daunting task.

I am so proud that the students had the confidence to ask questions to our visitors about different careers and openly speak about what they had learned during the talks. It's a shame that due to lockdown, we couldn't continue to gain knowledge through careers, but I am very proud of how far the students came in such a short time, especially with something so tricky. Well done everyone.

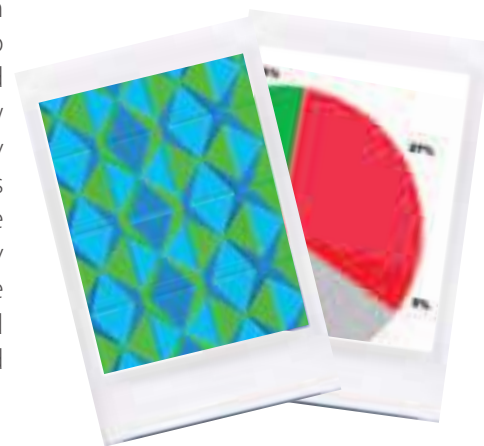


Maths

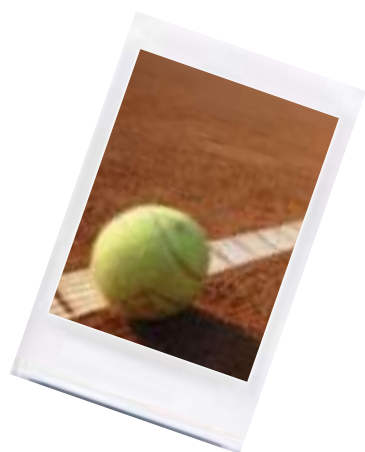
It has been a very different and interesting term. Students have risen to the challenge of learning online and in the process developed their IT skills and helped me develop mine! I have been really impressed by what we have managed to achieve online - some topics are certainly more tricky when we can't use our normal maths props or even pen and paper! Students have successfully managed to plot graphs, find properties

$$\frac{3}{\sqrt{x}} * 4x \quad 3'_x = (2x^4 + 2 + \frac{0}{2\sqrt{x^4-1}}) * 4x$$

of 3D shapes, draw pictograms, work on area and perimeter, measure angles to calculate bearings and work on maps and scales with the aid of our own jigsaw puzzles. Our capacity topic was pretty hands on with some good estimates being made as to the capacity of a range of different sized glasses from my cupboard. Students were also creative within our weight topic which involved many items from my grocery cupboard along with weigh-ins of guinea pigs!



Sports



The learners have enjoyed sport this year as I have too. Unfortunately, it had to come to an abrupt end due to lockdown. It started with kayaking before going on to basketball, fencing and archery. We also enjoyed playing various games in between such as badminton and dodgeball. It was nice to see our learners get active to help them improve their physical and mental wellbeing, even the ones who were a little docile at the Centre. In fact, some of these learners were the most active in the sports hall which I was pleasantly surprised to witness. Our learners also formed strong friendships with each other in the process. Our young people engaged well with the Instructors and everyone felt as part of the group displaying a streak of competitiveness from time to time in the team games. I look forward to next academic year for more fun and games.

English Language

It's definitely been an interesting term! Students have been completing a wide range of topics, ranging from guinea pig research to creative writing competitions. Some students have been brushing up on their knowledge of language techniques, including similes, metaphors and personification, and I have been so impressed with

how quickly they have managed to grasp such tricky terminology. As the term is coming to an end, we have been playing a lot of English related games including Boggle, Guess Who and Scattergories. I was very impressed with some students that managed to come up with 50 words from the letters in 'Eastenders'!



Word of the month

“Resilience

The capacity to recover quickly from difficulties; toughness.

"the often remarkable resilience of so many British institutions"



Project-based Learning Update

The students were making such great progress towards completing their boxes of curiosity to be photographed and exhibited. But our last three sessions had to be cancelled due to Covid-19.

Students have been collecting items for their cabinets of curiosity and Peter, our creative practitioner, will be photographing the cabinets over the summer ready to display in September.

COVID-19 COMMUNICATION TO PARENTS

Staying alert and safe (social distancing)

The most important thing we can all do in fighting coronavirus is to stay alert. We must control the spread of the virus, in order to protect the NHS and save lives.

To find out more, here are some useful websites:

NHS online advice about coronavirus (NHS 111):

- <https://111.nhs.uk/covid-19>

Coronavirus: How to protect your mental health (BBC):

- <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-51873799>

How to cope with anxiety about coronavirus (verywellmind):

- <https://www.verywellmind.com/managing-coronavirus-anxiety-4798909>

How to safely clean your smartphone (BBC)

- https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/video_and_audio/headlines/51863924/coronavirus-how-to-clean-your-smartphone-safely

Have a
restful break
and enjoy the
summer

...

Autumn Term 2020

Monday 7th September - Friday 11th December
(13 weeks)

Half Term:

Monday 26th October – Friday 30th October

Staff Inset Days

Tuesday 1st September to Friday 4th September

Wednesday 30th September

Wednesday 18th November

Information

We will continue to keep you updated over the summer term regarding the full opening of the Centre in September.

As always if you have any questions or concerns please feel free to contact us.

Follow us on our Facebook and Instagram page and get the latest school info.



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