



Newsletter 7

23/01/2026

Dates for your diary!

SPRING TERM 2026

26th Jan - Maths Morning
 27th Jan - Holocaust Memorial Day
 30th Jan - FODs coffee & catch up
 2nd Feb - FS2 Vision Screening
 9th - 13th Feb - Arts Week
 16 - 20th Feb - HALF TERM
 23rd Feb - TEACHER TRAINING DAY
 5th Mar - World Book Day
 6th -13th Mar - British Science Week
 6th Mar - Science Fair
 27th Mar - Last day of term

SUMMER TERM 2026

13th Apr - Terms starts

Dear Parents and Guardians,

I hope you and your family well. It's been a cold and wet start to January and I can't quite believe that we are only 3 weeks away from half term – school life has returned to the usual busy and energetic rhythms.

Ofsted visit




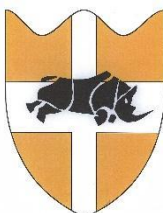
Our Ofsted visit last week was not a total surprise to us. I wrote to Ofsted in November to ask for an early inspection. Ofsted were asking for volunteers as they sought to test out their new framework and I wanted to show them the improvements we had made since our last inspection in June 2023.

There is a 30 day consultation period before the report is published so I will write to you again when this is the case. In the meantime, you can look at what to expect from the new Ofsted Report Cards [here](#).

Thank you to all those parents who completed the Ofsted surveys or allowed their children to complete a survey. All your feedback is valuable to us.

Attendance

A huge well done to Rhino House for a big improvement in its overall attendance.

			
95.9% ↑	95.1% ↓	95.7% ↑	96.2% ↑




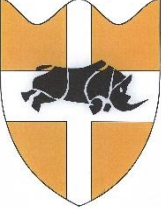
The NHS offer [guidance](#) about when it is ok to send your child to school. I hope to see our overall attendance improving towards our target of 97%, but it is important to note that attendance at our school is above the national average. Remember that you can really turn around school attendance over the course of the year as the table below shows:

Attendance after 10 weeks	Attendance at the end of the year if 100% attendance is maintained from this point
100%	100%
95%	99%
85%	96%
75%	94%
70%	92%

We are on hand to help if your child is displaying signs that they are worried about attending school. Please do talk to your child's class teacher or make contact with the office.

House points

Kiwi are maintaining their strong start in our House Point Competition.

			
75	83	100	76

Recent learning in Dandelions



Recent learning in Chestnuts



Cutting up the same fruit as in Handa's Story



Recent learning in KS1



Using Beebots



Recent learning in KS2

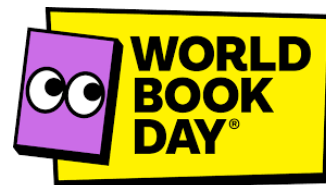


Patch and point balances



World Book Day – Save the date

We are excited to be celebrating World Book Day on Thursday 5th March at Downlands!



Children are encouraged to come to school dressed as their favourite book character, ready to enjoy a day dedicated to the wonderful world of books and reading. The day will begin with a special World Book Day assembly, followed by a range of fun and engaging activities celebrating books and stories.

All pupils will take part in a Big Book Share, where they will listen to some much-loved stories read by members of staff at Downlands. In addition, our Key Stage 2 children will enjoy a live World Book Day lesson delivered by the BBC Bitesize team.

To further celebrate the day, each child will receive a World Book Day book token, which can be exchanged for one of the special World Book Day books or used to get £1 off any book of their choice. These tokens are accepted in most bookshops and large supermarkets.

We are really looking forward to a fantastic day full of imagination, creativity and a shared love of reading!

Holocaust Memorial Day 2026

Tuesday 27th January is Holocaust Memorial Day, but we will be having special events all week. For example, on Monday and Tuesday, Y1 to Y6 will listen to an extended picture book during assembly which retells the iconic story of Anne Frank. All children will then help to make a colourful mural of a pop art portrait of Anne Frank.

On Thursday 29th January, Y5&6 pupils will be joined in assembly by an ex pupil who now attends The Blandford School Sixth Form. She will be talking to the children about her experience visiting Auschwitz. If any parents have any questions or concerns about these special events, please get in touch with the headteacher.

Our Annual Science Fair – Save the date

British Science Week is from the 6th to the 15th of March 2026. We will be launching this special week on **Friday 6th March** with our annual **Science Fair**.

Parents are invited to work on a 'science project' which they could 'exhibit' to the rest of the school. A parent will need to accompany their child from 1330hrs on this day and we will allocate exhibitor tables once we receive application forms (sent separately). This year's theme is, 'Curiosity: What's your question?'



As well as the science fair, children will be doing more science based learning than normal in their class groups and I will be doing some 'live' experiments in assembly.

Applications for SSAFA Short Breaks 2026 are now OPEN!

What Are SSAFA Short Breaks?

SSAFA Short Breaks are free, residential activity breaks for families currently serving in the Armed Forces who have a child (aged 5–18) with an additional need and/or disability. These breaks offer families a chance to spend quality time together, enjoy inclusive activities, and build confidence and resilience. Families will be responsible for their own travel costs; however, if this presents a challenge, the SSAFA team may be able to support.

Who Can Apply?

Families with children aged 5–18, where at least one child has an additional need and/or disability. Children must be dependents of a current serving person or reservist.

At least one parent must attend the break.

Families must not have attended a SSAFA Short Break in the last five years.

Two-Stage Application Process

This year, SSAFA is introducing a two-stage application process for Short Breaks applications. We will prioritise families where the need is greatest. This assessment helps us understand your situation and make sure support is offered fairly and where it can have the most impact. Every family deserves access to support that reflects their lived reality. For military families with children who have additional needs and disabilities, that support must be flexible, respectful, and emotionally safe. This assessment helps us understand what that looks like for you and your family

and helps us determine if SSAFA's Short Breaks can meet that need at this time, when considered in relation to other applications.

Stage 1 – Basic Eligibility

Families complete an online form to confirm they meet the core criteria. Only those who pass Stage 1 will be invited to Stage 2. [Apply for Stage 1 SSAFA Short Breaks 2026](#).

Stage 2 – Assessment of Family Need

Eligible families complete a self-assessment, which is supported by an assessment tool to prioritise applications based on need. This stage asks about:

Child's education, development, and behaviour

Family circumstances (financial status, caregiving, support systems, parental needs, statutory assistance, and military-specific challenges)

Break Dates and Locations

8-10 May – Calvert Lakes

20-24 July – Calvert Lakes

3-7 August – Calvert Devon

26-30 October – Calvert Devon

Applications close on Friday 30 January for Stage 1 and you can apply via this [webform](#).

School site access issues & Road Safety

Unfortunately, there has been further reports of children playing unsafely before and after school, on and near the roads. Children have been spoken to in school about the importance of road safety but please could all parents reinforce this message at home.

We ask that families please do not park near the 'safety gate' that leads to the staff car park by the tennis courts. It was partially obstructed recently, preventing staff from easily using the access road. Also, a polite reminder that all car parks on the school site are for staff, visitors and contractors only. Parents who hold blue badges are able to use the two disabled spaces within the staff car park as appropriate.

Please could parents of children in Dandelions queue outside the single gate access point in the morning. Key workers are often busy setting up the outside learning space prior to welcoming children and parents at 0850hrs.

Thank you for reading.

Mr Rielly
Headteacher

Supporting you and your child

The school is ready and able to support your family and help every child do well in school, build confidence, and have the skills they need for a bright and successful future. We understand that from time to time, families face challenges which might require the support of other agencies. The school has strong links with **Family Help** which is a new way that Dorset Council is offering support to families who need more intensive help and support. It brings together different types of help into one service, so families don't have to keep repeating their story to several workers. You can find out more [here](#).

All staff in school are trained on matters relating to safeguarding and child protection, but the following members of the team have more specialist training and are here to listen and help if needed:

Mrs C Goodall (Designated Safeguarding Lead - DSL)

Mr J Rielly, Mrs J Loveless, Mrs Y le May, Mrs A Robinson (Deputy DSLs)

Alternatively, you can contact the Family Support and Advice Line on 01305 228558. A friendly team member will listen to your concerns and help you decide what kind of support is right for you.

Lines are open:

- Monday to Friday: 8am to 10pm
- Saturday, Sunday and bank holidays: 9am to 10pm

Speak to a practitioner today if you have any worries or concerns about a child or young person.

Details on all of our policies, including attendance, complaints and uniform, can be found at <https://downlandsschool.org/policies/>