



THE COMPANION

Mr D. O'Brien, Editor

Message from the Headmaster

The Easter Term is always a busy one: we celebrated World Book Day, the ski trip to Italy took place over half term, students have been attending science masterclasses, holding chess competitions, competing with other schools in a mootings competitions (arguing legal cases) and there were plenty of other activities as well. None of these events would happen if it were not for the commitment and dedication of Maria Fidelis staff and I am grateful for everything they do to make this such a great school.

Without doubt, the highlight of the term was the Talent Show. The 6th Form Leadership Team planned, organised and ran the event and it was by far the most impressive talent show I have been to. There was a wonderful breadth of talent that showed the school at its best: Orlando, Zackaria, Ahmad and Clementine in Years 7 and 8 wrote and performed their own play; there also performances and acts from Leah, Kelysha, Rayan and Anisa in Year 7 Ryan and Elisabet in Year 11, Falak in Year 10, Elliot in Year 9, and Nedra in Year 12. The marimba band are going from strength to strength and they always bring joy to any event, and the 'unofficial' school band - Woman of Tomorrow - shone in their performances of Radiohead's *Just* and *Dreams* by Fleetwood Mac - hopefully we'll see more of them! Wilson impressed everyone with his blindfold piano-playing. The event ended with a rousing performance of *Uptown Funk* performed by Debby, Teddy and Jorim in Year 7. However, the audience were taken to another level by the evening's winner - Luca in Year 11 singing *Sway* by Michael Bublé. I hope that we have many more events like this.

It is with great sadness that we say goodbye to Ms Barrett, who will be leaving us to become Head of Maths at a school in South London. Ms Barrett joined Maria Fidelis in 2013 and played a major role in supporting and developing the maths department. She will be greatly missed by staff, students and parents. We also say goodbye to Mr Abidogun and Ms Hillier, both of whom have been dedicated in their service to the school. We wish them all the very best in their new ventures.

I wish you all a very happy and relaxing Easter break and I look forward to starting again on Monday 13th April.

Mr M. Anthony, Headmaster

Important Dates:

April 2026

Mon 13th First Day of Term
Thurs 30th Year 7 Parents' Eve

May 2026

Mon 25th Half Term begins
Fri 29th Half Term ends

June 2026

Fri 19th Sports Day
Thurs 25th Year 11 Prom

July 2026

Thurs 2nd Year 7 Transition Day
Thurs 9th Prizegiving Evening
Fri 17th Last Day of Term



Maria Fidelis Talent Show 2026

FOCUS ON: STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

We recently had the privilege of hosting Joanne McCartney, Deputy Mayor of London for Children & Families. Her visit was to explore the mental health challenges affecting young people today, with a particular focus on the impact of social media and the pressures it brings.

During her visit, the Deputy Mayor met with a Sixth Form student panel, students, mentors and staff who work in our outstanding pastoral team. These meetings gave a wholistic picture which we hope will inform policy and investment going forward to ensure all young people are given the resources, education and support to cope with teenage life in the 21st century.

Joanne McCartney was incredibly impressed by the articulate way in which our students discussed mental health, and the mature manner in which they openly discussed views regarding a potential social media ban for anyone under the age of 16. Representatives from Camden Council were also present, and commented how lovely it was to visit Maria Fidelis and tackle this incredibly important issue with those who are directly affected by it.

Any student who is struggling can speak to any member of staff, who will be able to find them suitable support.



Looking towards the future

For many Year 8 parents, it only felt like yesterday that they were shopping for their son/daughter to start here in Year 7. Now the time has come for our Year 8s to choose the GCSE subject options that they will study for the next three years. Choosing GCSEs is an incredibly important step in a young person's educational journey. It starts to streamline the sort of further study and careers that are open to them. It also increases the level of independence young people have, as they have to limit their subject choices to just three options (plus a fourth backup).

To help students decide, Thursday 26 February was a taster day for the subjects students had not yet studied as they are predominantly only offered from GCSE: Business, Sociology, Drama and Classics. That evening, we also invited parents to find out about all subjects available on offer, with the opportunity for parents and students to ask subject experts about the benefits of choosing their subject.

All students are required to take the following GCSEs: at Maria Fidelis: English Language, English Literature, Mathematics, Science (Double Award or Triple) and Religious Education. Students will continue to have PE lessons as part of their weekly timetable.

Catholic Life

FCJ Days

We were once again delighted to welcome Sr Lynne, Sr MaryAnne and Sr Anouska to Maria Fidelis in early February for the annual FCJ days. Each year, a number of classes are taken out of lessons to learn about the FCJ history, charism and missions today.

On Monday morning, Sixth Formers gathered to hear about the wonderful work FCJ sisters are doing all over the world. This includes running a refugee centre in Toronto, Canada, as well as leading courses in the UK on leadership amongst young people. The students also asked very thought provoking questions to the FCJs, ranging from their own vocational journey to how they balance their faith in an all-loving God with all the many negative news headlines we see daily.

The mid-morning session was split so that all Year 8 students could attend. The students were able to show off their knowledge of the FCJ order, as well as the values inherent to FCJ schools. The sisters commented on the outstanding behaviour and genuine interest shown by the students.

Tuesday saw small group sessions, with the sisters visiting a number of GCSE RE classes. 10W had the privilege of a Q&A session with Sr MaryAnne on the theme of vocation, with a huge range of questions covering her Maltese background to what it is like to live in a convent.

We look forward to welcoming them back again sometime in the near future.



FCJ Values

It has been wonderful to see a significant increase in the number of students with FCJ badges proudly pinned to their blazer lapels. These are given when staff observe our students live out these values. Many badges have been given in recognition of the positive impact students have on the day to day life of the community. Even little acts of kindness are rewarded.

A number of students, we are delighted to share, have completed the set, with all six badges on display!



Solemnity of the Epiphany

The first day of the new school term saw Key Stage 3 attend Mass at St Aloysius' to observe Epiphany, a holy day of obligation. The feast day celebrates the arrival of the wise men to the Holy Family and them offering their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh to the baby Jesus. Fr Jeremy preached about making every day of our lives a personal 'Epiphany' by offering our own gifts and talents as a way of bringing joy to the world.

Interactive Learning

During the first week of the term, Year 10 RE lessons were taken out the classroom and into Church. Their latest GCSE unit requires them to know the features of a Catholic Church and why they are important. Being able to see and explore the whole Church up close has been a regular feature of the course over the last few years, and has become a very effective way of teaching this lesson. Students enjoyed the experience too.

Archbishop of Westminster

Saturday 14 February saw members of the Maria Fidelis community attend Westminster Cathedral for the Installation of the new Archbishop, Richard Moth.

Archbishop Richard Moth has previously been Bishop of the Forces and, until recently Bishop of Arundel & Brighton. The Mass was a wonderful and prayerful celebration of this new chapter in the life of the Diocese. We hope to invite the new Archbishop to visit Maria Fidelis sometime in the near future.

Sacrament of Reconciliation

During the season of Lent, we once again welcomed Canon Jeremy Trood to offer the Sacrament of Reconciliation to students and staff. Repentance is an integral aspect of this penitential season, as we unite ourselves to Jesus' suffering and temptation in the wilderness. Most importantly, we show our gratitude for His ultimate sacrifice on the Cross that frees us from sin.

Lenten Prayer Group

During the 40 days of Lent, Catholics are encouraged to focus on prayer, fasting and almsgiving. To help our students engage more in prayer during this time, a prayer group has been run every Friday lunchtime in our Chapel. This has given space for students to be still and reflect, as well as pray for perseverance in whatever it is they have committed to give up this year. Students found the time very powerful, helping them to reflect on their own relationship with God and how they can unite themselves to Jesus being tempted in the wilderness.



A Prayer for Easter Sunday

O God, who on this day, through your Only Begotten Son, have conquered death and unlocked for us the path to eternity, grant, we pray, that we who keep the solemnity of the Lord's Resurrection may, through the renewal brought by your Spirit, rise up in the light of life. Through the same Christ our Lord, Amen.

Royal Institute of Science Masterclass Certificate

A group of 18 Year 9 & Year 10 students took part in a five-week programme at the London AI Campus delivered by world leading Google DeepMind engineers to complete a Royal Institute of Science Master Class certificate. The students demonstrated such commitment and tenacity, making their own way to the Academy each week recognising the unique opportunity they were taking part in. They took on an intensive yet exciting workflow from 4 pm until 5.30 pm with lots of positive energy and curiosity. Miss Hammond said, "This wonderful group of students really earned their Master Class certification from one of the most prestigious scientific institutions in the world! A big well done to each of them!"

The programme of study included:

- Game Development
- Theoretical Computing
- Reinforcement Learning
- Scientific Thinking
- Introduction to Graph Neural Nets
- Coding Illusions
- Developing Scientific Thinking Skills



Keep Calm and Code On

On Friday 23 January, three brave Olympians from Maria Fidelis took part in the notoriously difficult British Informatics Olympiad. Two Students from Year 10, and one student from Year 11 took on the challenge. The total task time was three hours, which was broken by snack breaks and breathers every hour.

In the three hours, they had three questions to answer, all requiring an execution time of less than a second, and each resulting in its own unique programming challenge. The paper first took the Olympians through a battle with a recursive 5×5 grid, where each grid co-ordinate has its own unique string; you might think of it as What3Words without the map. This would be followed by sub-questions on the written section, where they must apply their logic and computational thinking to solve two related problems.

The next task involved a unique encryption method using playing cards and an alpha or beta stack, which would result in a different encryption depending on the stack size and value. This was before the final question which involves a defined mathematical object called a "raindrop" which is an integer which contains exactly one digit smaller than the digit to its left (like 123, but not 321).

Overall, the Olympians put on a valiant performance, with a mixture of strategies which they used to showcase their skills in Computer Science, such as one student starting at the end of the assessment, another focusing on the written portions, whilst the third familiarised themselves with Python documentation prior to attempting the questions. All three of these brilliant students showcase the prowess of Maria Fidelis, and may even go on to prove themselves at the national competition held at Cambridge university, the 2026 International Olympiad in Informatics held in Uzbekistan, or maybe even Germany in 2027.

Mooting Competition

On 29 January, 12 students competed in a Mooting Competition hosted by South Hampstead High School. The scale of the event was impressive, with around 180 students in attendance from a wide range of schools, many of which were independent schools with established debating and mooting traditions. The competition was exceptionally challenging. Students were given just 15 minutes to prepare legal arguments on a case they had not seen before. They were not told in advance whether they would be arguing for the appellant or the respondent, meaning they had to think on their feet, adapt quickly, and demonstrate sharp analytical skills under significant time pressure. This format tested not only their legal reasoning, but also their resilience, teamwork and composure.

Despite the intensity of the competition and the high calibre of opposition, our students were outstanding. Their determination and drive were evident throughout the evening. They approached each round with focus and maturity, showing real confidence in constructing and delivering complex arguments.

A particular highlight was the Year 7 boys' team, who won one of their moots. The presiding judge praised them as "the best group I've seen all night," a remarkable commendation given the size and strength of the field. Overall, the event was demanding but hugely rewarding. Competing at this level against such strong schools speaks volumes about our students' capability and character. We are incredibly proud of their performance and the resilience they demonstrated throughout the evening.

God knows what we need and is always near and watching over us. Let us do our best and He will turn everything to our greater good

~ Marie-Madeleine D'Houet



Inter-House Chess Competition

February saw the inter-House Chess Competition held with enthusiastic participation from students across different year groups. The event aimed to promote strategic thinking, concentration, and sportsmanship.

Participants competed in a series of matches following standard chess rules. The atmosphere was both competitive and respectful, with students demonstrating strong problem-solving skills and patience throughout the games. Several closely contested matches kept players and spectators engaged. The event helped students build confidence, learn from challenges, and develop a deeper interest in chess.



Overall, the competition was an enjoyable and educational experience that encouraged healthy competition and intellectual growth among students from all year groups.

A huge congratulations to winner, Zikora in 7C, who beat off stiff competition to be crowned champion.



Ski Trip 2026

February half term saw 30 students set off on a 25 hour coach journey to northern Italy for the annual Maria Fidelis Ski Trip, supervised by Ms Palankai, Mr Lissowski, Mr Barnwell and Mr O'Brien. The trip included five days of skiing along with other activities and entertainment.

Upon arrival at the resort, students received their skis and ski boots and met the instructors, who would be supervising and teaching them throughout the week. The group was split into two, as a number of students already had skiing experience.

For those who had never skied before, day one was particularly challenging, as they had to learn the basics of how to start, stop and turn. We were delighted with the impressive show of resilience that our students demonstrated, with no one giving up even when disheartened. As the week progressed, there was a clear improvement in the ability of all students, with some learning tricks to show off as well!

Each evening, there was an activity for everyone to enjoy. On Monday, Mr O'Brien hosted a quiz night. Tuesday's entertainment was an authentic pizza night at a local restaurant followed by a surprise visit to watch an ice hockey game at the local ice rink. The next day, the students and staff took to the ice themselves to have a go at ice skating. It is safe to say that the students were much better than the staff! After our final day skiing, the students tried out tobogganing.

Overall, the trip was incredibly successful, with no major injuries and everyone finished the week as competent and safe skiers. The hotel staff also commended our students for their manners. We are very proud of the way in which the students represented Maria Fidelis.



Ski Trip 2026



Planning and organisation of the 2027 Ski Trip is already well underway. Students who wish to be shortlisted for a place on next year's trip should first speak to their parent/carer and then keep an eye out for information that will be shared regarding the initial deposit and payment instalments which will be shared in due course.

Student Council

Since its founding last year, the School Council have continued to meet regularly with Mr McLoughlin. This is an incredibly important aspect of school life, as it is imperative that all decisions that affect the students are made with the input of student voice. Each form class from Year 7 to Year 10 are represented by a student that they voted for, bringing to life the fundamental British value of democracy. This student is responsible for collecting views from their peers and feeding back to members of SLT and occasionally, the Governors.

Gold Medal at Maria Fidelis

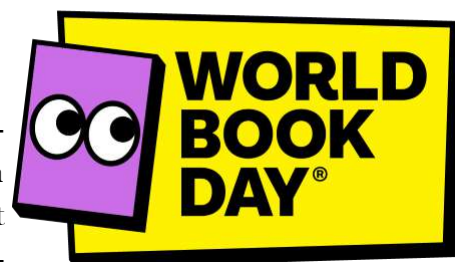
Whilst we may not have had anyone representing Maria Fidelis at the recent Winter Olympics in Italy, that does not mean that we are without silverware this year. In fact, during the February half-term, Mr Fa'alogo, our Acting Head of PE, won gold in a Jiu-Jitsu competition!

This is an enormous moment of pride for us as a school, since he also oversees the weekly Jiu-Jitsu Club at school. It is safe to say that our students truly are learning from a master of the sport!

World Book Day 2026

Each year, Maria Fidelis are proud to celebrate World Book Day, an annual day that reminds us all of the importance of reading, and of the joy it can bring. It was great to see so many teachers (led by the English Department of course!) dressing up in a great array of costumes to represent many different characters across many different books and genres. Some teachers even stayed 'in character' all day, which truly brought the text to life for those students in their classes!

To encourage reading for pleasure, each student received a voucher to be used at any bookstore, where presenting the voucher means a book of their choice will cost just £1. The charity, named after the day itself, believe that by championing reading for fun, young people will be happier and more successful in adult life.



All students at Maria Fidelis should come to school equipped with a reading book of their choice. There is time each week for students to read for pleasure.

All students are able to make use of our fantastic library. Books can be borrowed for two weeks, and renewed if needed. Please see Ms Belter for recommendations and help with using the library.

The Girls' Network



We were once again delighted to welcome back volunteers from the Girls' Network, a charity that puts our female students in touch with professional women from a range of industries in order to promote resilience, independence and aspiration through a series of 1:1 mentoring sessions over a period of time.

Having been selected, students were paired up with women from Triland Metal. The mentoring sessions give our girls an insight into the world of work, which helps them consider and plan ahead towards a certain goal or career. This is particularly useful, since Year 10 are encouraged to already be considering post-16 options, such as A-Levels, T-Levels, Apprenticeships and BTECs.

With these 1:1 sessions, students are able to take ownership of their futures, recognising their strengths and creating a pathway to a successful future.

CAFOD Lenten Fast Day

Friday 27 February was allocated as this year's Lenten Fast Day, a time when Catholics are called to fast and reflect on how they can support those most in need around the world.

At Maria Fidelis, we hosted a soup lunch, with homemade tomato, pepper and chilli soup made by none other than Mr Anthony himself!

Every cup of soup poured was a £1 donation towards the work of CAFOD. Corey in Year 9 commented that "it is the best £1 you'll ever spend," with another student saying Mr Anthony could be "the next Gordon Ramsey." Over £100 was raised which will go directly towards helping CAFOD projects overseas.



Geography Fieldtrip

Thursday 26 February saw the Year 11 GCSE Geography class step out of the classroom and explore the local areas of King's Cross and Somers Town. Students are expected to participate in practical fieldwork in order to get their qualification, as first-hand geographical research is a core element of the subject.

For this fieldtrip, students focussed on the concept of sustainability. Students took the day to consider if our local area is truly sustainable, and what improvements can be made to improve the quality of life for local residents.



My Life in Versailles

After Easter, 20 Year 8 students will visit the Institut Français for a showing of the film My Life in Versailles. The students were picked by their MFL teacher as they showed a particular aptitude for French. The trip is designed to enable students to experience French cinema whilst also develop their understanding of French film. The students are incredibly excited to go, as the original trip was postponed due to our recent OFSTED inspection.

Mingalaba UK Languages Assembly

On Monday 9 March, all Y8 students were treated to a fascinating talk by Steve Eadon from Mingalaba about the opportunities studying Modern Foreign Languages can provide. Steve studied French and German at university and then went on to work for Arsenal FC and has conducted numerous interviews with Arsenal players such as Thierry Henry in their native language.

Steve spoke of the benefits of studying languages and how this can lead to careers in a variety of sectors such as sport, journalism and the media. Steve spoke inspiringly of how studying languages at GCSE and beyond can boost career prospects as well as our students' understanding of the world around them.

We are very grateful to Steve for speaking with the Y8 students and hope to have him back as soon as possible.



University of Cambridge Visit

On Monday 23 February, our Year 10 students had the fantastic opportunity to visit Girton College at the University of Cambridge as part of the Pathways programme. During their visit, students also had the chance to see the College bees, offering a unique insight into the College's sustainability initiatives and environment.

The day began with an introduction to Oxbridge admissions and the Foundation Year, giving students a valuable insight into routes into one of the world's most prestigious universities. This was followed by a STEM/Arts Taster Session, allowing students to get a flavour of university-level study. After lunch (enjoyed in the College's historic Hall) students took guided tours of the beautiful College grounds, before rounding off the afternoon with a Cambridge Quiz and a Student Q&A panel, where they had the chance to put their burning questions to current students.

The visit wrapped up at 3pm, with the option for students to continue into the City Centre for a self-guided tour of Cambridge. It was a brilliant and inspiring day out, and we hope it has sparked some exciting aspirations for our Year 10s!

Floating Garden, King's Cross

Some of our students recently went to a group activity at the Floating Garden in Kings Cross, led by Mr Langley. They made sauerkraut and why it is important to be able to preserve different types of food. The Year 7 students chosen really enjoyed working with the team and being on board a real boat! We were lucky to have the sun shining that day as well!



Genetic Engineering Workshop

As part of our ongoing working relationship with the Francis Crick Institute down the road, our VI Form students were invited to attend a workshop that focussed on genetic engineering. This is a wonderful opportunity to bring classroom learning into employment based scenarios and apply skills that will help students to grasp topics as professionals. We are incredibly grateful for to the staff at the Institute for providing this great experience!



Talent Show

Following two weeks of auditions, our judges whittled down just 15 competitors who took part in our Talent Show on Tuesday 24 March. It was a great turn out of staff, students, parents and the local community which made the backstage nerves all the more real!

Everyone who attended was treated to a wonderful evening of music, song, dance and acting, displaying the wonderful array of talent here at Maria Fidelis. There was also a nice selection of drinks and snacks for sale, with proceeds going to good causes. Photos of the night can be seen on the next page.



AI Hackathons

Florind Chili in Year 11 attended the 'Hack the Senses from Vision & Sound to AI' run by UCL and ElevenLabs on Saturday 14th and 21st March. His work on building his own speaker and audio circuit and own video-streaming circuit puts him place to win a range of prizes of professional-grade AI tools to help you keep building even after the hackathon. Well done Florind!

National Museum of Computer Science

A group of 20 Year 10 computer scientists made their way to TNMOC in Bletchley which houses the world's largest collection of functional historic computers and World War II machines, including Enigma, Lorenz, the working Turing-Welchman Bombe, the rebuilt Colossus (the world's first electronic computer), and the WITCH (the world's oldest working digital computer).

Students took part in interactive educational workshops to develop a deeper understanding of computing and how it has evolved over time to the present day, as well as considering the ethical implications of AI systems and the moral dilemma posed by relying on AI decision making in driverless cars. The day ended with a self directed tour of the amazing collection of retro gaming consoles before we headed back London.



TALENT SHOW



A massive thank you to all those who participated in planning and preparing the Talent Show. It could not have run smoothly without the incredible effort of many VI form students who worked behind the scenes both in preparation and on the night itself.

A huge congratulations to Luca Martinez Reid (photo on the right) who after a tough competition, was crowned the winner. The audience were captivated by his incredible voice!



Year 6 Offer Evening

It was an absolute delight to welcome the families of Year 6 boys and girls who have received an offer to study at Maria Fidelis from September 2026. Whilst the parents met with our fantastic Student Council, the future Maria Fidelis students got to attend some taster lessons in Maths, Art, Music and Food Tech. This hugely successful event saw us host over 100 guests who we look forward to working with in the future!



Technology in Education



One of the wonders of teaching in 2026 is the vast array of technology that helps bring learning to life in the classroom. In their most recent unit in RE, Year 7 students have been exploring the many different ways Jesus is made present in the Mass.

It was very useful for 7A that their double lesson on this topic coincided with many parishes around the UK livestreaming their morning weekday Mass. This allowed Mr O'Brien to explain what was happening in real time without disturbing the prayerfulness of the celebration of Mass.

Year 10 English: Macbeth

Year 10 students in Ms Gill's English class got creative with their GCSE studies of Shakespeare's Macbeth this half term. The entire play was recreated as dioramas with 6 scenes all depicting Macbeth's tragic tale.

This active learning style really helped our students engage with, and remember, the plot of the story, which they need to know for their exams.





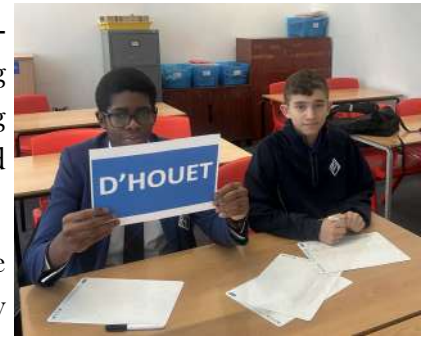
Inter-House MFL Spelling Bee

In the final week of term, the MFL Department hosted an inter-house Spelling Bee designed to put to the test everything our students have learnt in French and Spanish so far this year.

In order to put any nerves at ease, the teachers helpfully offered Wednesday lunchtime as a practice run so that potential competitors knew what they would be facing the next day.

Students worked collaboratively in their house teams to spell a range of words and full sentences in both French and Spanish,

demonstrating their growing vocabulary and language skills. The event was filled with enthusiasm, teamwork, and a strong competitive spirit throughout. After a close competition, D'Houet House emerged as the overall winners - merci beaucoup/muchas gracias and well done to all students who took part!



Young Citizens Legal Workshop

During March, 30 Year 10 students were invited to participate in The Big Legal Lesson, a workshop delivered by Young Citizens and facilitated by a wonderful group of volunteers from the legal firm Pillsbury Winthrop.

Students worked in small groups to discuss big legal matters surrounding artificial intelligence. This was incredibly important, given the implications that AI is having on our daily lives. The facilitators worked to encourage and guide our students to explore the challenges AI can have on the legal sector in particular.

At the end of the session, our students debated on the advantages and challenges of using AI. The volunteer lawyers were very impressed with the work ethic and knowledge that our students showed. We hope to invite them back again soon!

Bank of England

Year 12 Economics students made an important visit to the Bank of England on 23 March. It reinforced classroom learning while inspiring a deeper appreciation of the complexity and importance of the Bank's decision making on interest rates, inflation, and quantitative easing.

Students also gained hands on insights into currency production and security, sparking curiosity and critical thinking. The interactive activities were a highlight, students cracked a safe, identified security features on banknotes, and even lifted a real gold bar, winning prizes along the way!



Overall, the trip brought economic concepts to life, showing students first-hand how the Bank of England shapes the UK economy. It was both educational and exciting, leaving students motivated and inspired.

PHOTO GALLERY



January: Music Rehearsals



February: GCSE Geography Fieldtrip



February: CAFOD Soup Lunch



February: Ski Trip 2026



February: Year 8 Options Evening



February: Sr Gloria FCJ's visit as Link Governor

PHOTO GALLERY



March: Exploring Retro Games Consoles



March: The Girls' Network



March: Deputy Mayor of London's Visit



March: Mingalaba UK Languages Assembly



March: Year 7 Reading Champions



March: Bank of England Visit

What Parents & Carers Need to Know about

TIKTOK

AGE RESTRICTION
13+

TikTok is a video-sharing social media app which lets people create, view and download looping 15-second clips. Typically, these are videos of users lip-syncing and dancing to popular songs or soundbites (often for comic purposes), enhanced with filters, effects and text. Designed with young people in mind, TikTok skyrocketed in popularity in 2019 and has featured near the top of download charts ever since. It now has around a billion users worldwide.

AGE-INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

Most videos appearing on a child's feed are light-hearted and amusing. However, some clips have been reported for featuring drug and alcohol abuse, themes of suicide and self-harm, or young teens acting in a sexually suggestive way. The sheer volume of uploads is impossible to moderate entirely – and since TikTok Jump's introduction in mid-2021, users can view third-party content outside the app.

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CENSORED

EXPLICIT SONGS

TikTok primarily revolves around videos of users lip-syncing and dancing to music. Inevitably, some featured songs will contain explicit or suggestive lyrics. Given the app's young user-base, there is a risk that children may view older users' videos and then be inclined to imitate any explicit language or suggestive actions.

W&A*!

TIKTOK FAME

The app has created its own celebrities: Charli D'Amelio and Lil Nas X, for example, were catapulted to fame by exposure on TikTok – leading to many more teens attempting to go viral and become 'TikTok famous'. While most aspiring stars hoping to be 'the next big thing' will find it difficult, setbacks may in turn prompt them to go to even more drastic lengths to get noticed.



HAZARDOUS VISIBILITY

Connecting with others is simple on TikTok – including commenting on and reacting to users' videos, following their profile and downloading their content. The majority of these interactions are harmless, but – because of its abundance of teen users – TikTok has experienced problems with predators contacting young people.

ADDICTIVE NATURE

Like all social media, TikTok is designed to be addictive. It can be hugely entertaining – but that also makes it hard to put down. As well as the punchy nature of the short video format, the app's ability to keep users intrigued about what's coming next mean it's easy for a 5-minute visit to turn into a 45-minute stay.

IN-APP SPENDING

There's an in-app option to purchase 'TikTok coins', which are then converted into digital rewards for sending to content creators that a user likes. Prices range from 99p to an eye-watering £99 bundle. TikTok is also connected with Shopify, which allows users to buy products through the app.

Advice for Parents & Carers

TALK ABOUT ONLINE CONTENT

Assuming your child is above TikTok's age limit, talk to them about what they've viewed on the app. Ask their opinion on what's appropriate and what isn't. Explain why they shouldn't give out personal details or upload videos which reveal information like their school or home address. In the long run, teaching them to think critically about what they see on TikTok could help them to become social-media savvy.

MAINTAIN PRIVACY SETTINGS

The default setting for all under 16s' accounts to 'private'. Keeping it that way is the safest solution: it means only users who your child approves can watch their videos. The 'Stitch' (which lets users splice clips from other people's videos into their own) and 'Duet' (where you build on another user's content by recording your own video alongside their original) features are now only available to over 16s. This might clash with your child's ambitions of social media stardom, but it will fortify their account against predators.

LEARN ABOUT REPORTING AND BLOCKING

With the correct privacy settings applied, TikTok is a relatively safe space. However, in case something does slip through, make sure your child knows how to recognise and report inappropriate content and get them to come to you about anything upsetting that they've seen. TikTok allows users to report anyone breaching its guidelines, while you can also block individual users through their profile.

ENABLE FAMILY PAIRING

'Family Pairing' lets parents and carers link their own TikTok account to their child's. Through your mobile, you can control your child's safety settings remotely – including limiting screen time, managing their ability to exchange messages (and with whom) and blocking a lot of age-inappropriate content. TikTok's Safety Centre also provides resources for parents and carers to support online safety among families. These resources can be found on their website.

USE RESTRICTED MODE

In the app's 'Digital Wellbeing' section, you can filter out inappropriate content (specific content creators or hashtags, for instance) using 'Restricted Mode'. This can then be locked with a PIN. You should note, though, that the algorithm moderating content isn't totally dependable – so it's wise to stay aware of what your child is watching.

MODERATE SCREEN TIME

As entertaining as TikTok is, you can help your child to manage their time on it in the 'Digital Wellbeing' section. Under 'Screen Time Management', you can limit the daily permitted time on the app (in increments ranging from 40 minutes to two hours). This preference can also be locked behind a PIN. That way, your child can get their regular dose of TikTok without wasting the whole day.

Meet Our Expert

Parveen Kaur is a social media expert and digital media consultant who is passionate about improving digital literacy for parents and children. She has extensive experience in the social media arena and is the founder of Kids N Clicks: a web resource that helps parents and children thrive in a digital world.



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