**SEPTEMBER NEWSLETTER**

September 2023

Dear Parents/Carers,

Welcome to our first newsletter of this academic year – apologies in advance – it is quite long!

The children have been telling me all about their wonderful, and much needed, summer holidays and appear to be enjoying being back in school with their new teachers and friends, even though it has been very hot! Everyone is looking very settled and learning has already begun at quite a pace. Even our first Foundation Stage children have been utterly amazing today!

These newsletters are sent out on a monthly basis to keep you informed about what is happening in school. If you ever want to contribute an ‘article’ or suggest information that should be on the newsletters, I would be delighted to hear about them.

*Please note events that are underlined and in italics are new or amended since the previous newsletter.*

**Tuesday 12th September –** Samba drumming workshops for Year 4 children

**Wednesday 13th September** – Half of new foundation stage children start school

**Thursday 14th September** – All foundation stage children in school, Year 2 trip to Whipsnade, *Open the Book assembly for KS2 children*

**Tuesday 19th September** – 2:30pm – Phonics workshop for Y1 and Y2 parents, **–** Samba drumming workshops for Year 4 children

**Wednesday 20th September** – Tri-*Golf sports festival for some Year 4 children,* 3pm – New parents volunteering sessions

**Thursday 21st September –** New Intake Meeting for Foundation Stage (2024), 9:30am**,** PTA meeting at 7:30pm

**Monday 25th September –** FS reading and writing workshop for Foundation Stage Parents with coffee ‘morning’ 9:15 – 10:30am, *Cycle to school week*

**Tuesday 26th September** – New Intake 2024 meeting, 9:30am, **–** Samba drumming workshops for Year 4 children

**Monday 2nd October –** Harvest Assembly TBC

**Tuesday 3rd October** - Year 2 visit to the Baptist Church TBC

***Wednesday 4th October –*** *Multi-skills festival for some children in Y2*

***Thursday 5th October –*** *Lunch meal census day – please encourage your child to have a hot meal today if at all possible – it affects our budget all year (please see below), Open the Book assembly for KS1*

**Monday 9th October** – Parents’ Evening 3:45pm to 7pm (more details to follow)

**Tuesday 10th October** – Parents’ Evening 3:45pm to 6:30pm (more details to follow), Samba drumming workshops for Year 4 children (am)

**Wednesday 11th October** – New Intake Meeting (FS 2024) at 9:30am

**Monday 16th October** – *Year 1 Toy Museum visit,* Finance and Resources Governors’ Meeting, 6:30pm

**Tuesday 17th October –** Samba drumming workshops for Year 4 children

**Thursday 19th October –** *Key Stage 2 Open the Book assembly,* PTA Halloween Discos (more details to follow)

**Friday 20th October –** Break up for half term

***Half term Monday 23rd October to Friday 27th October – Premier holiday camp at Russell***

***Monday 30th October – INSET DAY*** *at school – staff training – NO CHILDREN IN SCHOOL TODAY*

***Tuesday 31st October –*** *ALL CHILDREN BACK TO SCHOOL -, Y4 Samba drumming workshops*

***Wednesday 1st November –*** *History Workshop – Year 4 – Portals from the Past*

***Thursday 2nd November*** *– Rugby Union festival for some Y3 children, KS1 Open the Book assembly*

***Friday 3rd November –*** *Individual School Photographs*

**More detailed information on the above events will follow in due course**

**Staff Structure 2023/24:**

Please see the school website for this year’s staff structure <https://www.russell-lower.co.uk/website/whos_who/158>

**School is very full:**

We are absolutely delighted to be beginning the academic year with a very full school, but this does bring its own challenges. For example, we are now catering for almost ¼ of the school’s population at our Aviary After School Club (sometimes 100 children), and this has reached the capacity of the hall and staffing. We never expected to get to these sorts of numbers. For the first time we have a significant waiting list and would like to make an appeal on behalf of working parents: please only use Aviary Club if you need it to support child care while you work. It is **NOT appropriate to use it for ‘play dates’**, for example, as it results in parents who are working (and often not even working from home) in being unable to access a place. Please let’s all work together to ensure that the parents who really need it are able to access it. Thank you.

**Uniform Policy:**

From September 2022, the government made it statutory for schools to have uniform policies. Ours has not changed, but can be accessed here: <https://www.russell-lower.co.uk/website/school_uniform/6794> . Thank you for sending the children back to school looking so smart in all the correct uniform. It is really appreciated.

**RAAC – Reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete**

Although we have already been informed by CBC that **we do not have RAAC at Russell**, as a precaution they have also sent someone out to make a visual inspection - this happened last week and they have underlined the fact that **from what they have seen they can confirm we do not have RAAC at Russell.** In the near future, they will also send out a specialist to drill holes to check 'deep' within the building's fabric.  This will be a 'belt and braces' approach as **they do not believe there is anything at all to concern us here.** CBC is doing this in all of their schools to be absolutely certain, and they seem 'on it' and very efficient! I will, of course, update you when I hear more re the 'deep drilling'.

**Phonics Workshop with coffee – Year 1 and 2 Parents – 2:30 pm on Tuesday 19th September**

Ensuring children have good phonic skills is vital for reading, which unlocks the whole curriculum. Your child will have gained a great grounding in phonics in Foundation Stage and/or Year 1, and a partnership approach is the one we know works best for children. The government ‘screen’ all children’s phonic skills in KS1. This will take place in June. Please come, if you possibly can, to find out more about how to support your child with their phonics/reading at home and to support them with the ‘screening’, please join Mrs Jochacy (Phonics lead) for this quick, efficient and informative session. Coffee will be provided! **Please complete this very short form to save your place**: <https://forms.gle/igP3ETXQJLHYHdJ2A>

**Parent Volunteer Sessions – 3pm on Wednesday 20th September**

We really value parents' support in school with things such as reading with children, supporting with activities or testing spellings! Every adult helping regularly in school (not just for a one-off trip) must attend a short induction session and complete a DBS (safeguarding check). As a result, we request that anyone wishing to volunteer:

* Attends a short induction session to inform you about child protection and our Parent Volunteer Protocols
* Ideally, has had two Covid vaccinations
* Already has, or is prepared to have a DBS (disclosure and barring) with Russell Lower School’s name on it (ones from previous years are still fine)

Everyone MUST attend an induction session if they have not done one already and MUST have a DBS in place before working with the children. **If you would like to volunteer in school this term (and have not already attended a session), please complete the following Google form, to save your place on our first short induction of the year** [**https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSckQHthk5pMyJz\_o-VptLHrTwtKhyGwxjZuHlxX4nFpPJQ\_gA/viewform?usp=sf\_link**](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSckQHthk5pMyJz_o-VptLHrTwtKhyGwxjZuHlxX4nFpPJQ_gA/viewform?usp=sf_link) **There will be another opportunity in the spring and summer terms too.** Thank you.

**Foundation Stage reading and writing workshop with coffee – Monday 25th September, 9:15 – 10:30am**

This workshop is for our new Foundation Stage (Doves, Swifts and Swan Class) parents to find out more about how we teach reading and writing at Russell Lower School, along with how you can support us from home. ***Please do come*** and meet Mrs Brown in the main hall. Coffee will be provided! **Please complete this very short form to save your place**: <https://forms.gle/Ggd9AZL6nc9qhNEf8>

**Free School Meals ‘Census’ Day**

You will be aware that school budgets are getting increasingly ‘squeezed’ by the government, and one way we can maintain our budget is by making sure we are using what the government currently provide. Universal Infant Free School Meals are currently made available to children in FS, Y1 and Y2. From Y3, parents are asked to pay for school meals. In order to keep this free lunch facility, we have a ‘Census Day’ to check our use. This day is **Thursday 5th October.** If our percentage of meals eaten on that day is high it results in more money coming into the school budget. This is crucial in maintaining current standards. **Please support us by encouraging your child to have a school dinner on that Thursday** (we have changed the menu to make it as attractive as possible to as many as possible and Mrs Bremner will be sending you a separate letter to give you this information). With your support we can make sure Russell continues to receive the highest possible percentage of the available money so the children continue to benefit. Thank you.

**Free School Meals**

As you are aware, under the government ‘Universal Infant Free School Meals’ programme, all children up to the end of Year 2 are entitled to free school meals should they choose to take them. Once children are in Year 3 this stops and meals are only available as free school meals to children in receipt of the Pupil Premium. If you think you may be entitled to Pupil Premium and free school meals for your child, please do come and speak to one of us in the school office and we can advise you. Alternatively, **please call CBC on 0300 300 8306 to check your child’s eligibility**. There are many benefits to claiming Pupil Premium. If you think you may be eligible, please do come and let us know and we will give you more information about how to go about claiming it. Regrettably, we cannot do this for you and the request must come from you. Do come and see us.

**An update from the School Council 2022/23**

As a School Council/Eco- Committee we are delighted to announce that we have recently

been awarded the Eco – Schools Green Flag. This accreditation is the culmination of two

years of hard work, commitment and dedication from all of our wonderful School Council

representatives. As part of their work, our children identified environmental issues at Russell and within our local community and they have been committed to educating themselves and others,

creating positive change. Feedback from our assessor reflected this:

‘At Russell, you have an ambitious and assured committee that have no doubt inspired

others with their work.’ ‘It is clear that your Eco-Committee are constantly considering what actions they can take to improve their local community and benefit our planet.’

We are so very proud of all of our School Councilors for achieving the Eco-Schools Green

Flag accreditation. We are excited to see what is next and how we can continue to bring

positive environmental change to our school community and beyond.

**A plea:**

Please can you ask your children not to play on school equipment before and after school? We are not insured for injuries at this time as the playgrounds are not supervised and there have already been injuries in the first week. The most serious injury we have ever had at Russell happened after school one day. In addition, we do need to ask for the school site to be cleared quickly so that we can get on with after school clubs and the Aviary club promptly. Thank you for your support.

**Collection of children:**

The school day finishes at 3:30pm. Do not worry, if you have several children to collect, we will always keep them safely with us until you arrive. If your child is collected by anyone other than their parents, could you please ensure that your child’s new Class Teacher is made aware of this. ***Any changes to the normal collection arrangement of your child should also be notified to the school office please (not the class email address* as this cannot be checked regularly during the day).** As your child’s wellbeing and safety is paramount, no child will be released without prior parental consent of any changes or if anyone under the age of 16 comes to collect them. Should your child need to be collected during the course of the school day please can you ensure your

child is signed out at the school office? For all appointments such as doctors, dentists, hospitals etc. medical evidence will be required and requested. Thank you.

**Supporting learning at home:**

Thank you for your support with the numerous ways you enable your child’s learning at home. Your time and effort are invaluable and makes a HUGE difference.

Over the next few days (or already) we will be providing you with some information that we hope you will find useful:

* **Theme webs** for each year group to show you what children will be learning this term.
* **Home learning letters and Learning Logs** to explain what ‘homework’ children will be asked to complete in each class and other ways you can support learning from home. This will also detail when it is due in. Thank you for your support with this.

In addition, please don’t forget that each class teacher can be contacted via the class email in the format [XXXXXclass@russell-lower.co.uk](mailto:XXXXXclass@russell-lower.co.uk) . For example: [robinclass@russell-lower.co.uk](mailto:robinclass@russell-lower.co.uk) These are for general enquiries only **NOT reporting absence, discussing changes in collection arrangements** etc. as the email addresses ARE NOT ROUTINELY MONITORED DURING THE SCHOOL DAY AS TEACHERS ARE BUSY TEACHING CHILDREN. **Reminder: Pupil absence**: we have a **dedicated email address** for reporting pupil absence, this is: [pupilabsence@russell-lower.co.uk](mailto:pupilabsence@russell-lower.co.uk) Please use this to report pupil absence, if you can. Thank you for your support.

**School Safety:**

Please can we ask all parents who come and go through the main Queens Road entrance path gate during the school day to ensure they close **not only the latch on the gate, but also then CLOSE THE HOOK too**. In addition, **if you are collecting your child from Aviary Club**, can you please **ensure our new gate** (at the start of the school field, near the office and Head’s office) is also **closed behind you please**? This ensures all our children are as safe as possible.

**To parents of Greenfinch and Wren Class** – Please be aware that we do request that pushchairs are not brought inside school for Health and Safety reasons, as the corridors are too narrow.  I apologise for this not being made clear before the children started back last Monday.  Thank you for your support. Can you please also make sure that you are not walking siblings through the school to their classrooms, but come via the outside again please? Thank you.

**School admissions to Foundation Stage in September 2024 and Middle Schools**

It’s that time of year again! Even though the children have only just started in their new year group, you need to make your applications now:

**Children born between 01/09/19 and 31/08/20 are due to start school in September 2024.**

Parents/ carers need to make an application to CBC **by 15 January 2024**, even if their child attends a nursery/pre-school on the school site. All the information you will need regarding your Starting School 2024 application is available on the CBC website (see hyperlink below) and in the attached ‘Starting School Leaflet’.

Year 4 parents, please bear in mind that applications for **Middle School are also needed within the same timescales i.e. before 15th January 2024. Please note: this will not just happen automatically.**

For more information, please see attached and more information on the CBC website:

[School admissions | Central Bedfordshire Council](https://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/info/5/school_admissions)

**Russell Lower School Values:**

Each half term, we teach the children about a different value. We then have a weekly ‘values’ assembly where we celebrate the demonstration of this value. The values this term are:

**Autumn 1** : Respect

**Autumn 2** : Thoughtfulness

**PE and festivals news:**

We are very much looking forward to the year ahead and have lots of exciting opportunities planned such as festivals for years 2 to 4, new equipment to be purchased in order to support both children's physical education as well as physical activity outside of lessons, scoot sessions, bike sessions and additional swimming sessions to name but a few.

If your child is selected for an upcoming festival you will be contacted closer to the time. We understand that some allocations will not always be a child's first choice however in order for everyone to be able to attend we need to allocate the places rather than the children having a choice (we would never be able to please everyone!). If your child is showing some reluctance/worry around attending please reassure them and encourage them to attend, it is part of our curriculum offer. Many of the festivals are of a fun, inclusive nature not resulting in scoring and are all based around values - there is so much more to be learnt at these events than the sport/activity themselves - resilience, teamwork, respect to name but a few. Thank you for your support in advance.

**Community events:**

Utilita Ampthill fireworks Committee

SAVE THE DATE! Utilita Ampthill Fireworks will be returning on Friday 3rd November.

You will soon be able to find all the information on how to purchase tickets plus detailed information about the event including timings, refreshments, entertainment and parking on the Utilita Ampthill Fireworks Facebook page.

See you on Friday 3rd November!

** **

**And finally:**

Thank you for taking the time to read this (very long – sorry) first newsletter, and for making the first week back (for most children) run so smoothly. I look forward to another exciting, busy and productive year at Russell.

Many thanks and kind regards,

Nicki Walker

Headteacher