

Principal's Newsletter

December 2023

Dear Parents / Carers,

It is hard to believe that December has arrived. This year has certainly flown, and I'm delighted to report that Acorn is full of festive cheer! Trees are being decorated, carols are being sung, plays are being rehearsed and the children are having lots of fun! Christmas is one of my most favourite times of year and while it is most certainly a busy month, I hope lots of lovely memories will be made.

As you can see below, the next few weeks are action packed with a range of Christmas activities taking place in school. I am looking forward to seeing you at these events. It is lovely to celebrate the festive season together. This month we are delighted to welcome back Mrs Judith Trussell. Mrs Trussell has been greatly missed by all the staff and children at Acorn. On her first day back, Mrs Trussell got straight to work and took a Key Stage Two choir practice. She was delighted to hear everyone singing beautifully! (We have been practising with the help of Mrs McIlmail and Miss Cosgrove!)

In Acorn we are not fond of goodbyes, on the 6th of December Miss Cosgrove willing be leaving us but thankfully we know we will see her again soon. Miss Cosgrove has done an outstanding job teaching our Primary 6 children. Thank you, Miss Cosgrove, for all your hard work. Your dedication and commitment have been second to none!

Thank you to everyone who supported our fundraising events last month. I am delighted to report that the Halloween Disco and Acorn's Pumpkin Patch raised £950. This money will be used to develop our P1 and P2 Outdoor Classroom area. We also raised £220 for Children in Need. Our Parents' Council will be presenting a cheque to Pudsey very shortly.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to wish you all very happy and peaceful Christmas. As always, if you have any questions or queries as always, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Kind Regards,

Jennifer Fuller (Principal)

Dates for your Diary

Key Events in December

05.12.23	Santa Hat Stroll and Run
06.12.23	Choir singing at Downshire Church
08.12.23	Nursery and Playgroup Christmas performances
12.12.23	P1-P4 and KS2 Christmas Nativity/performance
13.12.23	P1-P4 and KS2 Christmas Nativity/performance
14.12.23	P1-P4 and KS2 Christmas Nativity
15.12.23	Supper with Santa- 6pm-8pm
18.12.23	Christmas Dinner Day
21.12.23	School closes at 12 noon for Christmas

SENIOR LEADERSHIP TEAM

Principal

Mrs. J. Fuller

Vice Principal, Head of Key Stage 2 and Assessment Co-ordinator

Mrs C. Hamilton

Head of Foundation & Key Stage 1 and Deputy Designated Teacher

Mrs S. McIlmail

I'M WORRIED ABOUT A CHILD IN SCHOOL.



If you are concerned about the welfare of a pupil in school, please speak with Mrs Rolloos (Designated Teacher for Child Protection and Pastoral Lead).

Buddy Update

This month we would like to give special recognition to Lucy Branagh who is our buddy of the month. Lucy has been an amazing help to our younger children and support staff. She is not only extremely organised but exceptionally kind to everyone! Thank you, Lucy!



All Thing Eco!

On Friday 24th November, Noel Lyons from ARC recycling visited Acorn. Noel called in on every class and the children had the opportunity to make something useful from a recycled product. Acorn was a hive of creativity. Children made paper plant pots, Eco badges, cardboard pencil cases and tetra wallets!



This month Mrs McIlmail and her Eco team have also been working hard in our Green House village. The planters have been filled with compost in preparation for planting and rumour has it we are building our Green Houses in the new year!



Sustrans

We were delighted to hear this week that the Sustrans charity will be working with pupils and staff in Acorn and helping us become healthier by walking, wheeling, and cycling. Our first event will be the Santa Hat Stroll and Run. This event will take place on **Tuesday 5th December**. We would like to encourage all pupils to walk, cycle or scoot to school wearing a Santa hat or festive gear. Later that day, each class will also run or walk a mile! We might even sing the odd Christmas song as we run to keep us motivated, merry and bright!



Christmas Dinner Day

Christmas Dinner will be provided in school on **Monday 18th**

December. The children will be served turkey, ham and all the trimmings! (Vegetarian and gluten free options will also be available) Christmas dinner is free to all children in Acorn. Mr. Houston from Ulidia has very kindly supplied everyone with a meal. Please complete the Google Form that has been sent to you before the 11th of December so as we know the numbers that will be attending. **(Please wear your Christmas jumper!)**

Supper With Santa

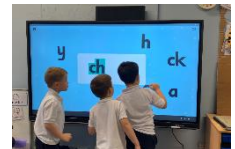
By popular demand, our infamous Supper with Santa is back again this year on **Friday 15th December from 6pm -8pm.**



This fantastic family event will definitely get you into the festive mood! Tickets can be purchased through our School Money App. Children's tickets cost £5 and adult's tickets cost £2. Children will have the opportunity to meet Santa and take part in lots of Christmas activities. A brass band will also be playing and there will be a small selection of stalls. Please book early to avoid disappointment! One of the items on sale will be your child's very own Christmas decoration! This is an exclusive buy that can only be purchased here in Acorn!

Technology Update

In ICT this year, our whole school is learning to make animations and digital stories. The great news is, every class now has a state-of-the-art touchscreen interactive whiteboard to show their animations on. We are delighted to be the first school in NI to have this model of whiteboard. Our teachers have been working with Stuart Montgomery from Promethean World to learn how best to use these boards to deliver interactive lessons to our children. Learning has never been so much fun!



30 years plus and counting

Did you know that Acorn celebrated a big birthday towards the end of last year? In January our school will be entering its 31st year and to celebrate this important milestone, we are planning a special event around 15th May 2024. In the meantime, a beautiful display board of memories is on show in our school entrance hall. These pictures tell the story of Acorn and have been carefully collated over the years by Mrs McIlmail. Thank you, Mrs Humphries, and Mrs McCulloch, for putting this display together. It really is terrific! Please come and have a look at this display when you are in school over the Christmas period. It really tells a beautiful story!





Shout outs!

Christmas Performances!

Friday 8 December

9.30am – Nursery
1.30pm – Playgroup



Tuesday 12 December

9.30am – P1 - P4
11.00am – KS2



Wednesday 13 December

9.30am – P1 - P4
11.00am – KS2

Thursday 14 December

9.30am – P1 - P4

*** Please book your free tickets for P1 - P4 & KS2 performances using the Google Form link that has been sent with this Newsletter!**

Thank you, Mrs Davis!

Our recent 'Big Bedtime Read' was a huge success, enjoyed by all who attended.

Many thanks also to Mrs Hill and Mrs Rolloos who were our highly entertaining readers.



Watch this space for a similar event planned for KS2 in the new year!



Has your child tried **Stay and Play** yet? It's proving very popular each day. Look at all those excited little faces in the photo!

Remember it's cheaper to book your days in advance - bookings for the following week are £4 if they're made by 12 noon on Friday.

£5 if you're booking later than 12 or during the same week your child is staying.



Reminders:

- Please use our **"Park and Stride,"** facility at Downshire Church. This system helps reduce the amount of traffic around school at drop off and pick up times
- The next Parent Council meeting is on **Monday 4th December at 6:30pm**. We look forward to welcoming our new members
- Apart from Assistance Dogs, our school site is a dog free area

Gaming Top Tips!

Gaming continues to be one of many children's (and parents!) favourite pastimes! However, many parents have concerns over how to keep their child safe while gaming. Here are 5 ways to keep children safe whilst gaming.

5 Ways to Keep Children Safe Whilst Gaming

Gaming continues to be one of many children's - and parents! - favourite pastimes. However, many parents have concerns over how to keep their child safe while gaming. Here at Ineqe Safeguarding Group, we've been busy testing consoles and games to identify areas of risk to promote a safer gaming experience for children.

Video games are fun and remain popular among young and old users alike.



Research by Ofcom showed that approximately

62% of adults in the UK

were reported to have played video games in 2020, propelled by the COVID-19 pandemic and the stay-at-home restrictions.



With all this fun, it's important to remember that playing video games comes with risks.

Our online safety experts have compiled the following top tips to promote a safer gaming experience for children.



Some have **in-game purchasing** while others contain **age-inappropriate** content. These risks can significantly increase when a child is playing and interacting with other gamers online.



1 Choose the right child-friendly game

Choosing the right game for the child in your care can be difficult. Some parents and carers feel pressured to buy a game which might not be age-appropriate.

12 To help you make the choice, we have explored the PEGI age rating system and highlight the designated ratings of the most popular games around.

You can use the **PEGI (Pan European Game Information)** labels found on **all major games** to help inform your decision. PEGI is the video game content classification system used for evaluating games based on their themes. It is broken down into the following levels:

3	Suitable for all ages.
7	Includes content with scenes and sounds which might frighten younger children.
12	Slightly graphic violence which is non-realistic/fantasy.
16	Violence included which is similar to real life, bad language, and the use of drugs tobacco, and alcohol.
18	Includes motiveless and gross violence, the glamorisation of drugs, and explicit sexual activity.

The PEGI rating system also includes content descriptors which are symbols that quickly tell you the themes included in a game. Categories include:



For help with teaching children about PEGI ratings, use our free lesson plan on [oursaferschools.co.uk](https://www.oursaferschools.co.uk).

PEGI Ratings for some of the most Popular Games around:

- Minecraft – **PEGI 7**
- Among Us – **PEGI 7**
- FIFA 22 – **PEGI 3**
- Call of Duty Black Ops: Vanguard – **PEGI 18**
- Spiderman: Miles Morales – **PEGI 14**
- Fortnite: Battle Royale – **PEGI 12**
- Mario Kart Live: Home Circuit – **PEGI 3**
- Call of Duty: Warzone – **PEGI 18**
- Minecraft – **PEGI 7**

Always remember, PEGI ratings focus on in-game content and not communication between players in online games. Children and young people in your care may be exposed to offensive or inappropriate language from other players via their headset and live chat functions in many games.

Using PEGI ratings and online safety advice can help promote safer gaming for children and young people in your care.

4 Know when to take a break from gaming



Many of the top games this Christmas such as Fortnite are created to engage their players. One of our online safety experts refers to this as the **Pringle Effect - Le once you pop you just can't stop.**

Many of the most popular games are designed to form strong gaming habits. Game designers use persuasive design tools that work to encourage gaming sessions that can last hours on end.

Encourage the gamers in your care to take a break or use our resources to set a time limit on gameplay.

2 Begin the conversation about gaming safety settings and in-game purchases

Whether the children and young people in your care are new to gaming or are experienced gamers, it's important to have conversations regarding the risks and benefits of gaming. This is also the perfect time to talk to them about safety and privacy settings.

You might be met with **opposition** but talking about why privacy and safety settings are important can help keep the gamers in your care online. You might want to talk about what might happen if these aren't enabled. Feel free to use the top tips in this article to help guide your conversations.

The gaming world and its risks evolve all the time, and naturally so will your conversations about keeping safe while gaming.

It's important not to feel like this is a thankless task or pointless conversation when explaining the importance of safety and privacy while gaming. Enabling these settings is something you and the gamer in your care can do together.

Explaining why safety and privacy are important will help support a child or young person's understanding and respect for these decisions.

It can help to focus on how restrictions on games will change as they grow older. This will give you a perfect opportunity to encourage the gamers in your care to continue talking to you about safety and privacy online.

Check out our Console guides on [ineqe.com](https://www.ineqe.com)



Loot Boxes have been compared to gambling. This is because gamers pay for items with real-life currency and in-game currency without a full understanding of the risk and reward of these purchases.

Games now provide warnings on their labels if they include in-game purchases.

Games that have in-game purchases include:

- Fortnite
- Grand Theft Auto 5 (GTA5)
- Mario's Spider-Man: Miles Morales
- Call of Duty Black Ops: Cold War
- Call of Duty: Warzone
- FIFA 21
- Roblox
- Among Us

3 Usernames: Keep it random to keep kids safe online

When using consoles and games, users are required to create a username, which is sometimes called a 'Gamer Handle'.

This is the name you are identified by on your online gaming accounts (PlayStation Network or Xbox Live).

Whether they're playing Fortnite Chapter 3 or Call of Duty: Vanguard this Christmas, children and young people in your care will need a username.

Xbox and PlayStation assign random usernames and we advise that you keep them.

When the children in your care use a random username, they are less likely to be identifiable online. If the game(s) in your care wants to personalise their username, make sure they add using any personal information, such as first or second names, football teams, or school names.

5 Make sure the child in your care knows where to go for help with gaming

Gaming is fun and can have real benefits for children and young people. But it's not without risks, as highlighted above.

Gamers may interact with strangers via online games, where they might be exposed to age-inappropriate content, or experience bullying and harassment.



Make sure the gamer(s) in your care knows where to go for help if they need it. This can be you or any other trusted adult. It's important that they have someone to talk to if they have any interaction which makes them feel uncomfortable while playing games.

To help the children and young people in your care have a safe and fun gaming experience, visit [ineqe.com](https://www.ineqe.com) to find more resources and useful information. By doing this together, you can be part of their gaming journey, positioning yourself as someone who they can go to for help.