

Family Newsletter



February 2026



After what has felt like months of non-stop rain (which is probably true), we are looking forward to stepping into the second half of the Spring Term with a little more optimism in the air!

As the weather improves, we will be making the most of our outdoor learning spaces and enjoying the fresh opportunities that only spring can bring.

NOTABLE DATES

Thursday 26 February - ETC Sonopera Interactive Workshop (students only)

Monday 2 March - New Menu meeting at HOLLOW LANE, 2 pm start

Tuesday 3 March - Futures & Transitions Fayre at WAYSIDE CRESCENT, open to Years 7-14, 10 am - 11.30 am

Wednesday 4 March - New Menu meeting at WAYSIDE CRESCENT, 2 pm start

Thursday 5 March - World Book Day

Friday 20 March - Red Nose Day (Comic Relief)

Wednesday 25 to Friday 27 March - Calvert Trust residential for Year 11's

Friday 27 March - Easter Raffle Draw at 12 noon

Saturday 28 March - PTFA Disco for all school and college students at HOLLOW LANE, 4 pm - 6 pm

Thursday 2 April - Easter Egg Hunt for all students in the playground, Easter Eggs courtesy of the PTFA

Thursday 2 April - Last day of term

Tuesday 21 April - Students return to school

Sonopera Interactive Workshop - Our students are taking part in an interactive workshop coming to the College this week! There will be a mix of performance and participation with songs, instrumental music, rounds and chants. To find out more about Elfyn, Kip and Patrick from Sonopera, visit their website www.sonopera.com



New Lunch Menus - Parents & Carers are invited to meet with Philippa from Norse Catering, our Kitchen Managers, plus students and staff, to decide which dishes to include on the next menu. Which meals would you like to see included?! Come along to either the school or college meeting and help us agree on the next nutritious, balanced menu which will run from April 2026 to October 2026 half term:

@ School - **Monday 2nd March**, 1.45 pm for a 2 pm start

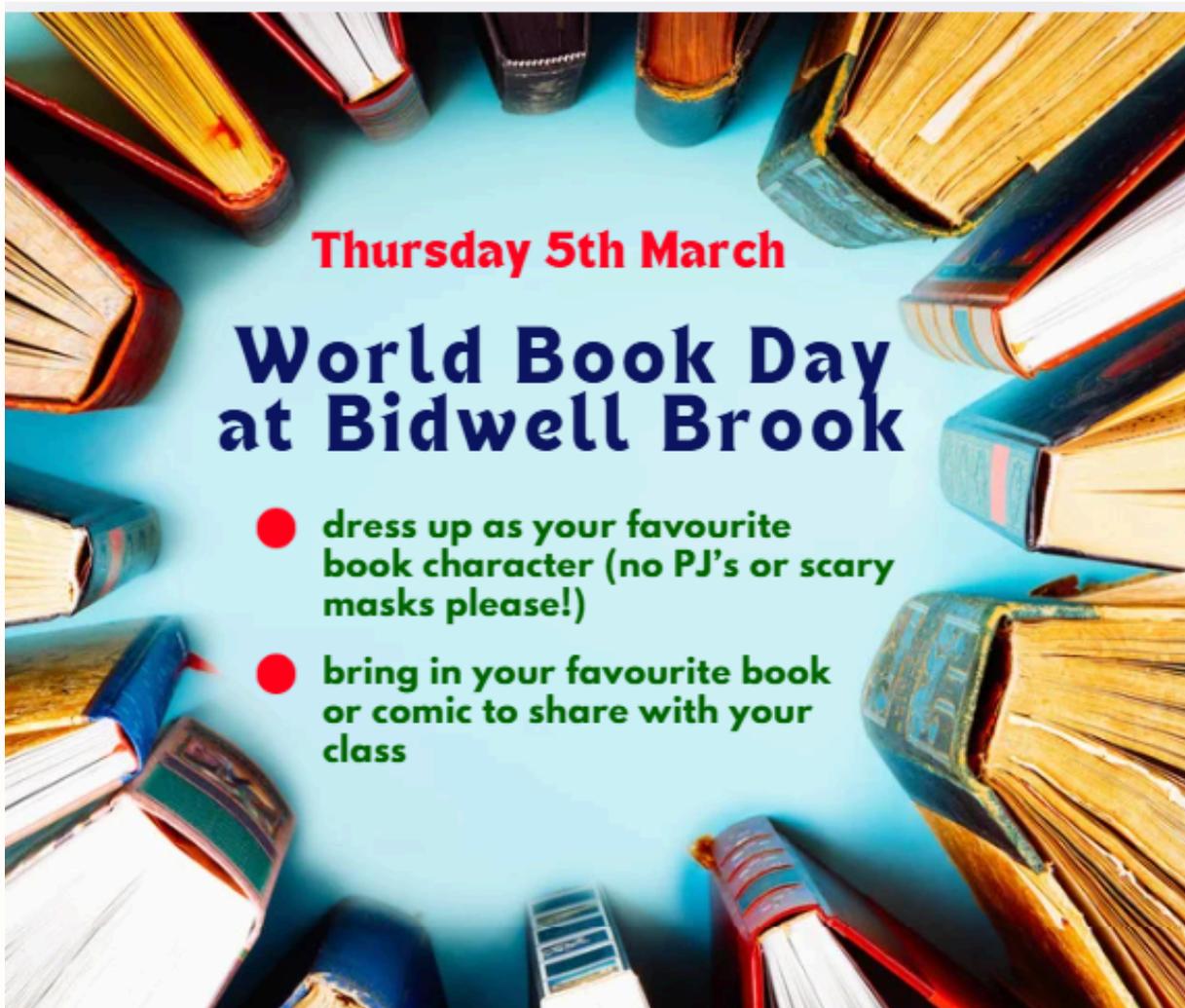
@ College - **Wednesday 4th March**, 1.45 pm for a 2 pm start



Futures & Transitions Fayre - We hope that all parents of students in Years 7 to 14 will be able to join us at our Fayre this year. There will be opportunities for you to start conversations with education and social care providers, as we are expecting the following to attend:

- Exeter College
- Garland Support
- In Focus
- Bicton College
- Pelican Project
- DWP
- Oakwood Court College
- Lifeworks College
- Learn to Live 19-25 Provision
- Foxes Aurora (Previously Foxes Academy)
- Sarah Baker (Post 16 Participation Team)
- Ellen Tinkham Sixth Form

The poster features a blue and yellow color scheme. At the top right is the logo for Ellen Tinkham College ETC, which consists of three stylized human figures in blue and red. The main title 'Futures & Transitions Fair' is written in large, bold letters, with 'Futures' in blue, '&' in yellow, 'Transitions' in blue, and 'Fair' in red. A yellow ribbon banner across the middle says 'TUESDAY 3 MARCH'. Below the banner, it states 'FREE TO ATTEND!' and 'Your chance to speak with representatives from education and social care providers from the local area'. At the bottom, it says 'THIS FAIR IS OF INTEREST TO FAMILIES OF STUDENTS IN YEARS 7-14' and provides the location and time: '@ WAYSIDE CRESCENT EX1 3LF 10 AM - 11.30 AM'.



Thursday 5th March

World Book Day at Bidwell Brook

- **dress up as your favourite book character (no PJ's or scary masks please!)**
- **bring in your favourite book or comic to share with your class**

World Book Day - Selected Libraries in Devon are running a new initiative for families to donate outgrown, unwanted children's costumes in good, wearable condition. At the same time, you can choose a new costume for free from the World Book Day clothing rail.

Libraries participating in this initiative are:

Barnstaple, Newton Abbot, Chudleigh, South Molton, Dawlish, Torquay, Pinhoe, Sidmouth, Torrington, Kingsbridge, Holsworthy, Tavistock, Exmouth, Paignton and Ivybridge.

At Ellen Tinkham, we will be running our annual "decorate your classroom door" competition with the lucky class at ETS and ETC winning a set of books! If you would like to make a donation towards the prize, this would be great. Thank you.



Red Nose Day / Comic Relief - The Student Council will be putting their thinking caps on and coming up with ideas for celebrating Red Nose Day at Ellen Tinkham later in March. Details to follow. but we guarantee it will be fun!

Easter Raffle - Tickets are being sent home and will also be available via School Gateway to purchase. We really hope you will be able to support us again this term. Perhaps you could persuade your extended family and friends to buy tickets too!

We would also be grateful for any sweet treat donations for our hamper!
Thank you.

The draw will take place at noon on Friday 27 March, and you could be one of our lucky, lucky winners!



HAPPY EASTER

We are looking for non perishable / unopened items for our raffle eg Easter Eggs, chocolates, biscuits, Florentines, cakes and sweets!

PLEASE BRING/SEND DONATIONS TO US BY WEDNESDAY 25TH MARCH

THANK YOU!

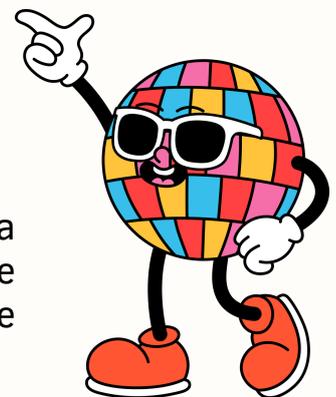
RAFFLE DRAW = FRIDAY 27TH MARCH

The poster features a white rabbit peeking over a yellow basket filled with colorful Easter eggs. Three more colorful Easter eggs are hanging from the top left.

Saturday 28 March, 4-6 pm, @ School - Hollow Lane

ALL SCHOOL AND COLLEGE STUDENTS WELCOME!

The PTFA is adding some extra fun to the weekend with a school disco! Get ready to bust some moves on the dance floor and have an amazing time with DJ Pedro! Tickets will be on sale soon via School Gateway.



A polite reminder that Ellen Tinkham is a "nut free" school and college.

Please check ingredients of snacks and food items before sending them in.

Thank you!



Devon Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)



Amending an EHCP (Education, Health & Care Plan)

As we continue with our EHCP annual reviews at Bidwell Brook, questions are coming up about the EHCP and the timings when plans can be amended.

If there are any amendments to an existing EHCP, we'll talk about them at the annual review meeting.

EHCPs will be amended by the SEND Operations Team (previously known as the 0-25 Team) when:

- there are significant changes identified;
- your child is moving onto their next phase of their education. For example, nursery into reception, Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2, Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3, Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4 and post-16;
- there is a change of address or school;
- there are changes in health and/or social care provision.

The Code of Practice says that it is not expected that the EHCP will be amended on a very frequent basis. When we hold the annual review, we look at the whole EHCP. The Class Teacher's report, the 'Listen to Me' booklet and parents' comments contribute to this. If an EHCP is amended, all information goes into the Plan and stays there until the EHCP is amended again. So if your child's EHCP is not amended frequently, the information will stay the same. This is why sometimes the information is quite out of date and can mention things that no longer apply.

As part of the annual review, we always want to know from you how things are going, so we'll talk about that in the review even if the EHCP isn't due to be changed. The comments you make go onto the EHCP Hub each time under the parents / carers views. The 'Listen to Me' booklet is also uploaded to the Hub.

If you need help getting onto the EHCP Hub, there is a Helpline number you can call - 01392 380434 option 2.

Annual Review Timeline

THE ANNUAL REVIEW WILL BE HELD

The school must hold the annual review meeting once invitations are sent and reports shared.

(SEND Regs 2014 Reg 20(1)/21(2); Code of Practice paras 9.176-9.177)

Attendees must review the child or young person's progress and whether the EHCP support is working effectively.



1

2-4 WEEKS BEFORE THE REVIEW

You will receive an invitation to attend the annual review meeting.

This is also the time when you can submit your parental advice and ensure your child's views, wishes, and feelings are included.

The school must collect advice and reports from all invited professionals and parents, and circulate these to everyone attending the review.

(SEND Regulations 2014, Reg 20(4) ; SEND Code of Practice 2015, paras 9.176)



2

WITHIN 2 WEEKS AFTER THE ANNUAL REVIEW

Within two weeks, the school must send a written report to all attendees summarising recommendations, any disagreements, and all advice gathered.

(SEND Regs 2014 Reg 20(7)-(9) 21(7)-(8); SEND Code of Practice para 9.176)



3

LOCAL AUTHORITY DECISION (WITHIN 4 WEEKS)

Within four weeks of the review meeting, the Local Authority must write to you confirming whether they will maintain, amend, or cease the EHCP. This letter is the decision notice and starts the amendment or appeal process. Missing this deadline is a breach of the law.

(Children and Families Act 2014 s44(1); SEND Regs 2014 Reg 20(10))



4

FOLLOWING THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES' DECISION

5

FINAL EHCP ISSUED

As soon as practicable, and within 8 weeks of sending the draft amendments, the Local Authority must issue the final EHCP or confirm they will not amend it after all.

(SEND Regs 2014 Reg 22(3)-(4); SEND Code of Practice paras 9.196-9.197)



6

IF LA KEEPS OR CEASES THE EHCP:

The decision letter must include your right to appeal, mediation information, and details of advice and disagreement services.

(SEND Regs 2014 Reg 20(11)/21(10); SEND Code of Practice paras 9.199-9.210)

IF THE LA DECIDES TO AMEND THE EHCP

The LA must send a draft amended plan with proposed changes, supporting evidence, and your right to comment and request a school.

(SEND Regs 2014 Reg 20(10), 22(1)-(2); SEND Code of Practice paras 9.176, 9.193-9.194)



Hydropool at ET - Our pupils benefit greatly from their sessions in the hydropool and our maintenance team ensure the pool is clean, hygienic and the water is at the correct temperature. A robust Risk Assessment is in place for all users of the pool.

All students using the hydropool must wear suitable, close fitting swimwear at each session.

Students who wear incontinence pads during the school day must wear specialist swimwear when in the pool to prevent any accidents occurring. If accidents do happen, the pool is closed for everyone until the maintenance team is able to carry out the necessary cleaning needed.

Below are links to companies which sell the appropriate and necessary swimwear:

<https://www.fledglings.org.uk/>

<https://www.incywincy.net/>

Thank you for your support.

FACE - Family Advice / Communication / Education - We have been sent information to pass on to families from FACE.

FACE is running free online parent training sessions. We do not endorse this company or recommend you attend these sessions, but if you are interested, you can find out more by clicking [here](#).



Online FREE talk by Jane Keyworth

Anxiety Based School Avoidance

March 26th 7-8pm



Book online

www.facefamilyadvice.co.uk
go to PARENTS - Live Talks page



All 16 parent talks **FREE** with our School Membership



New Federation Finance Manager - At the end of January, we officially said goodbye to Anne Davies, our Federation Finance Manager. Anne had worked for the Federation for over 15 years before deciding to retire. You may have seen Anne at our Fayres as she was always selling raffle tickets! We wish her well in her retirement.



We are delighted to announce that Warren Smart is our newly appointed Federation Finance Manager! Warren has previously worked in finance with both the Local Authority and at a Exeter-based Primary School, so joins us with lots of experience.

Welcome to the team Warren!

Free Car Seat Straps - Devon & Cornwall Police are offering drivers and passengers with additional needs, free seatbelt covers to help make communication easier after incidents including road traffic collisions.

The seatbelt cover can be personalised and wrapped around an adult seatbelt using Velcro. A card inside the seatbelt cover allows the user to add their name, age, address, medical conditions or other information about how they like to be communicated with. In the event of an emergency a first responder (someone from the blue light services) or a member of the public can look inside the seatbelt cover to get more information and understand how they can respond appropriately to a person's individual needs to help make them feel safe again.



The covers are attached to adult seatbelts and then easily removed if you want to use them in a different vehicle. The lightweight covers are also easy to pop into a bag and transport around.

Seat belt covers can be obtained from any Police Enquiry Office (PEO) across Devon and Cornwall. To check where your nearest PEO is and their opening hours, click here [Find a police station | Devon & Cornwall Police](#)

Free School Meals - Devon schools provide free school meal (FSM) holiday vouchers to low-income families, usually via email/letter with a unique code for supermarkets like Tesco, Asda, Sainsbury's during school breaks.

To get them, apply online through the [Devon Citizen's Portal](#) for FSM eligibility, or contact Devon County Council's free school meals team if you're already registered but haven't received them. These vouchers help cover food costs for children who would otherwise receive free school meals during holidays.

How to Get Vouchers

1. Check Eligibility/Apply: Apply for Free School Meals via the [Devon Citizen's Portal](#) for an instant decision.
2. Receive Voucher: If eligible, you'll get a letter or email with a voucher code for the school holidays.
3. Redeem: Use the code to exchange for an eGift card at participating supermarkets (Sainsbury's, Iceland, Tesco, Asda, etc.).

Key Contacts & Info

- freeschoolmeals@devon.gov.uk
- 0345 155 1019 (Education Helpline)
- <https://www.devon.gov.uk/children-families-education/education/school-meals/>

Codes do expire, so please redeem them before they become invalid.

Enjoy the rest of your week.



What Parents & Educators Need to Know about POKÉMON TCG POCKET



WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

Pokémon TCG Pocket is a mobile version of the hugely popular Pokémon Trading Card Game, downloaded over 100 million times on Android and iOS. Players collect cards, battle others online, and open packs of cards – known as booster packs – to expand their decks. While the core game can be fun and helps develop tactical and numeracy skills, its design encourages spending and can feed addictive behaviours – making it important for adults to understand the risks.

ADDICTIVE PACK OPENING



Booster packs rely on probability to provide rare or powerful cards. The excitement of opening them – and the dopamine rush when finding a sought-after card – can become addictive. Unlike purely cosmetic loot boxes, the cards here are integral to competitive gameplay, adding extra pressure for serious gamers to collect more.

ENDLESS PACK LOOPS



New themed sets of cards are released each month, ranging from around 85 to over 370 cards per expansion. This constant cycle encourages players to keep opening packs in an effort to complete collections or improve their battle decks, potentially promoting unhealthy spending habits. With the introduction of limited-time booster packs, some players may feel increased pressure to collect these cards while they're still available.

QUICK BUT ABSORBING



Card battles last around five to six minutes, making it easy to fit in "just one more game". This quick format, combined with the drive to win, can lead to prolonged play sessions and increased screen time without noticing. With limited-time Ranked Match seasons constantly being refreshed – an opportunity to accumulate points and earn profile emblems – players may find themselves drawn into this game mechanic repeatedly.

COST OF BOOSTER PACKS



Although free to play, with set rewards and two free booster packs given daily, players can exchange Pokémon Gold if they wish to open more, and a small amount of Pokémon Gold is rewarded for free as the player levels up. Pokémon Gold is also sold in bundles that are often just short of what players need to open extra packs, encouraging them to buy additional bundles.

PREMIUM PASS PRESSURE



A monthly subscription gives players access to exclusive missions, rewards, and an extra daily booster pack. Missions and rewards are replaced each month, providing an incentive to stay subscribed. While some premium rewards are exclusive, others are available through free play – making the pass more about faster progression and obtaining cosmetic items than true necessity.

COMPETITIVE ONLINE PLAY



Interactions in Pokémon TCG Pocket are relatively safe – there's no messaging between players, friend requests require player approval, no real names are used, and card trading is restricted to fair trades between friends. On the other hand, the competitive nature of online play can still cause frustration, over-investment, and isolation if children spend too much time focused on the game.

Advice for Parents & Educators

MONITOR SPENDING HABITS



Set clear boundaries around in-game purchases. Treat Poké Gold as an occasional rather than routine reward, helping children develop healthier attitudes towards digital spend.

PLAY TOGETHER



Card battles can help children learn tactics, problem-solving, and rule-following, as well as numeracy skills. Playing alongside them is a great way to share in their enjoyment, while also modelling balanced play and keeping an eye on how much they're investing in the game.

SET REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS



Talk about the unpredictable nature of booster packs and prepare children for disappointment when duplicates appear or rare cards don't surface. Understanding probability can help minimise disappointment – use the game's built-in offering rates guides to find out more about it.

TEACH FAIRNESS



Losing a battle can be discouraging, especially when money has been spent on collecting the cards to build a deck. Support children in recognising the importance of fairness, learning from both wins and losses, and making considered choices when trading cards.

Meet Our Expert

Dan Lipscombe is a videogame journalist and children's book author with over 15 years of experience. Specialising in technology and gaming, he has written extensively on how digital platforms affect young people and has been playing games for more than three decades.

