

Welcome Back to a New School Year

Dear Parents and Carers,

A very warm welcome to the new school year. I hope that you and your families have enjoyed the summer break and that the children are looking forward to the year ahead.

There is always something special about the beginning of a new school year: children returning with renewed energy, friendships being rekindled, new relationships being formed and our school once again becoming the busy, happy and purposeful place we strive hard to maintain.

We are enormously proud of our school community and remain ambitious for every child. As we begin this new year, our focus continues to be on providing an excellent education within a safe, nurturing, creative and inspiring environment in which children can flourish.

Thank you, as always, for the encouragement and support you give both your children and the school. The partnership between home and school makes an enormous difference.

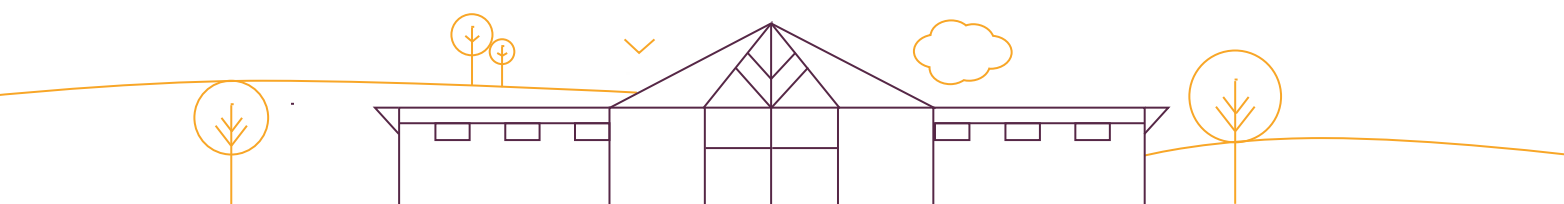
A Smartphone-Free School

From the beginning of this school year, Berrywood will operate as a smartphone-free school for pupils. This is an important step for our school community and reflects our commitment to protecting childhood, supporting children's wellbeing and ensuring that their attention, friendships and experiences are not unnecessarily shaped by smartphones and social media.

We recognise that technology has an important place in modern life. However, there is growing concern about the effect that unrestricted access to smartphones and social media can have on children's concentration, sleep, wellbeing and relationships. Our approach is therefore intended to be positive and preventative. We want children to have the space to talk, play, learn, explore, negotiate the normal ups and downs of friendship and, quite simply, enjoy being children.

Importantly, this isn't something we are asking of children alone. Our new policy establishes expectations for all of us. Pupils will not bring smartphones or internet-enabled personal devices onto the school site, while staff, parents, carers and visitors are asked to model responsible smartphone use around children. In particular, we ask parents and carers to make every reasonable effort to avoid using smartphones on the school site at drop-off and collection. There are also important expectations around photography, recording and children's privacy, all of which are explained in the attached policy.

Berrywood is proud to be a signatory and supporter of the Smartphone Free Childhood campaign – a grassroots movement bringing families together in support of healthier, happier childhoods. We are also fortunate to have a Berrywood parent, Mark Jacob, who is actively involved with the organisation and has already helped to bring its resources directly to our school community.



I strongly encourage every family to read the attached Smart Phone and Device Policy. The success of this approach will depend not simply upon having a policy, but upon children seeing the adults around them supporting its principles.

Our School & Parent Partnership

A strong relationship between school and home has always been central to children's success at Berrywood. This year, we are introducing our School & Parent Partnership document, which I would also encourage every parent and carer to read.

At its heart is a simple idea which we describe as Appropriate Partnership. For us, partnership means listening carefully, responding respectfully, explaining our reasoning clearly and working together in the best interests of children. It does not mean that we will always agree – and nor should it. What matters is that we have the trust, clarity and mutual respect to work constructively together when we do not.

The partnership also works both ways. Parents should be able to expect high-quality inclusive teaching, a safe and well-organised environment, clear communication, fair and consistent behaviour systems and strong safeguarding from the school.

In return, we ask families to support us with the things that make such a difference to children's education: good attendance and punctuality; positive behaviour and learning habits; reading and learning at home; respectful communication; and support for the policies and expectations which enable us to run a successful school for all children.

Schools are increasingly complex organisations and communication has become more immediate than ever. Against that backdrop, maintaining a strong relationship between school and families matters enormously. Our Partnership document therefore isn't intended to create distance between home and school. Quite the opposite. It is intended to provide greater clarity about how we can work well together and preserve something we value very highly at Berrywood: a strong, respectful and supportive school community.

Restoring Our 'School Within a Garden'

Many families will know how important our grounds are to the character and identity of Berrywood. We deliberately describe ourselves as a 'School Within a Garden'. Our outdoor environment is not simply there to make the school look attractive. It contributes to children's wellbeing, provides opportunities for outdoor learning and helps develop children's respect, responsibility and pride in the environment around them.

Unfortunately, this summer's prolonged dry weather and drought have taken a significant toll on our grounds. Areas that have been carefully developed and nurtured over many years now need our attention.

We are therefore beginning a 'School Within a Garden' Recovery Programme – not simply to replace what has been lost, but to restore, develop and, where possible, make our grounds even better for future generations of Berrywood children.

We would love this to become a genuine community effort.

There are three simple ways families may be able to help:

GIVE

Donate suitable plants, bulbs, seeds or gardening materials.

HELP

Offer some time to help with planting, gardening or particular projects as they develop.

CONNECT

If you have expertise yourself, or connections with garden centres, nurseries, horticultural businesses, landscapers or other organisations that might be willing to support the school, we would love to hear from you.

Our first appeal: autumn planting

We are about to begin bulb planting in readiness for next year and would be enormously grateful for donations of:

- Daffodils – miniature, multi-headed varieties
- Alliums – all varieties
- Crocuses – all varieties
- Ranunculus – all varieties
- Hyacinths – blue and yellow
- Muscari (grape hyacinths) – all varieties
- Snowdrops – all varieties
- Freesias – all varieties
- Crocosmia – all varieties

We would also welcome herb seeds, including:

Parsley, chives, rosemary, thyme, sage, mint, marjoram, oregano, tarragon and dill.

There is an extraordinary range of skills, knowledge, contacts and goodwill within our parent community. Nobody needs to make a huge contribution: if many families are able to do something small, collectively it could make a tremendous difference. Our ambition is to bring our gardens back to life and ensure that the children continue to experience a school environment every bit as special as the learning that takes place within it.

Preparing Our School for Hotter Summers

The impact of this summer's extreme heat has also extended beyond our gardens. We are very conscious of the challenges that periods of extreme temperature can create within the school building and of our responsibility to consider how Berrywood can become increasingly resilient to these conditions in the future.

We are currently working with Hampshire County Council and other parties to investigate the most appropriate way forward.

Unfortunately, there is no simple 'off-the-shelf' solution. Berrywood's non-standard building design presents some particular challenges and means that solutions such as air conditioning or mechanical ventilation cannot simply be considered in isolation.

We need to understand what will work effectively across the building, what is sustainable and, most importantly, what will provide the best long-term environment for our children. This work is already under way and will continue. Reassuringly, the greatest barriers to a sustainable solution are unlikely to be financial. As our understanding of the options develops, I will of course keep parents informed about our progress and the emerging strategy.

Looking Forward

There is much to look forward to this year. Alongside the learning, events, trips, performances, sporting opportunities and all the everyday moments that make primary school life so special, the initiatives outlined above share a common purpose. They are about protecting childhood, strengthening our community and taking care of the environment in which our children learn and grow. None of those things can be achieved by the school alone. They depend upon the partnership between children, staff, parents, governors and the wider community.

Thank you for being such an important part of Berrywood. Here's to another happy, successful and memorable year together.

With very best wishes,

Chris Reilly, Headteacher