



I've really enjoyed dropping into some of the children's virtual Form Times to read a story to them and have a chat about their responses to it. The technology that makes this possible is extraordinary: I can see each child waving back at me when the Microsoft Teams session first starts, talk to them individually and collectively, and share my screen with them so they can read along with me. But it's all rather different to interacting with them in person, face-to-face. For a start, I don't get that feedback that's there in a classroom or the assembly hall when I read a story, especially a funny one, and the children react to it and laugh out loud. At times, online, I feel I need to check they haven't all switched off-metaphorically or literally- and the silence can be unnerving! Is the story not as funny as I thought it was? Am I reading it all wrong? Ah, I remember, I've 'muted' my audience! At the end, it's been a big relief to hear they have enjoyed it and have some great insights into what it all might mean. The author I've been sharing with the children recently is called Robert Munsch, an American-Canadian writer whose most famous book *Love You Forever* is a tear-jerker which featured in an episode of the sitcom *Friends* no less. But it's his wacky, exuberant, humorous stories that the children seem to like the best and that I love reading to them. Storytelling builds connection and even though we are all in different places currently it brings us magically together. So thank you Microsoft for facilitating that, but I still can't wait till I can read to the children again- in real life.

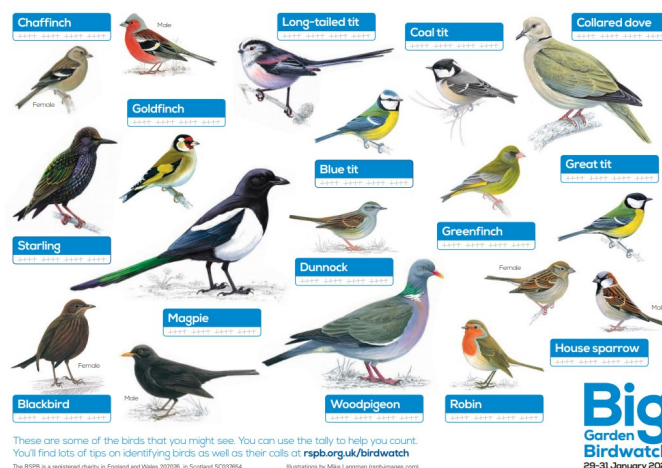
*Joe Layburn*

## BIG GARDEN BIRDWATCH

The Big Garden Bird Watch, organised by the RSPB, came to our homes from the 29<sup>th</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> January. It is the world's largest bird survey and participants are asked to count bird visitors to their garden over the course of an hour and submit their results to the RSPB online. The results of the survey give the RSPB vital information about the numbers and distribution of garden birds across the country. Mr Layburn's assembly this half-term increased our understanding of the challenges faced by wildlife in our gardens. Garden birds, like the Thrush, have declined in our gardens by 68% over the last 30 years and statistics like these help us spot problems that we can take steps towards solving. There are various ways in which you can encourage birds to your garden. One of the them is to make your own bird feeder and keep a regular supply of food available. I have prepared some resources with simple instructions to follow and these can be found on Mr Layburn's Birdwatching blog on the VLE here: <https://prep.bancrofts.org/bird-watching>

These feeders will encourage birds to your garden and help in the challenge to be kind to our wildlife community. You can still get involved with birdwatching by clicking on this link: <https://www.rspb.org.uk/get-involved/activities/birdwatch/everything-you-need-to-know-about-big-garden-birdwatch/>

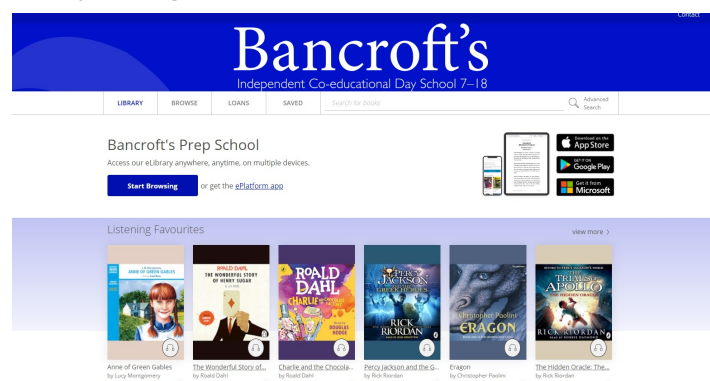
You will be able to print a copy of this wonderful poster and, even though the challenge is over, why not see how many birds you can spot in your garden? If you make a feeder, I would love to see a photograph of it in use! Chris Hall



## LIBRARY NEWS

We now have our own online library! Pupils are able to borrow eBooks and audiobooks from the exciting new eBook and audiobook library. The library catalogue is full of bestselling, popular fiction titles which gives you 24/7 access to a digital library in addition to the print library in school. Students can have two books out on loan at any one time. The eBooks can be read on a computer, laptop, or through the free App on your tablets or smartphones. They can browse the collection or search for a specific book title, author or publisher and loan the book they choose. Happy reading!

Kathryn Houghton



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## AMAZING ALPHAS

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Back in September we were fortunate to be able to welcome our brand new Alphas and begin the Autumn Term in a somewhat normal way. As the weeks went by, I held my breath, never quite believing we had made it so far without our Alpha bubble bursting! But, as we neared the Christmas holidays, with national and local infection rates rising, we hastily inducted our classes in to the realms of school email, the VLE and Teams. When the government announcement inevitably came, we were saddened not to be returning to school, but we felt ready and we felt confident in our pupils' ability to rise to the challenges ahead - and rise they have! We have been wowed by their resilience, their enthusiasm and their amazing ability to adapt as well as hugely grateful to our army of good-humoured and supportive parents who are undoubtedly playing an enormous, yet gruelling, part in the success of online learning. You have to appreciate the positives where you can and, strangely, although we are apart, I feel like I have got to know my class even better! Their personalities still shine through online and, indeed, I have glimpsed the impressive strength of character many have. One of the highlights of my day is Form Time, where we have had everything from stories, musical performances, songs, dances, 'Show and Tell' and quizzes, but as I sit here writing this, snow is falling outside and the Alpha corridor is eerily quiet. Whilst Mrs Bhangal, Mrs Kanolik and I are filled with pride at what our pupils, the youngest members of our school, are achieving, we cannot wait to hear the thunder of Alpha feet once again and see them burst through the classroom doors, ready to pick up where we left off. We miss them terribly!

Laura Dalton

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## BRILLIANT BETAS

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Despite the distance, it almost feels like business as usual in the Betas! I am bowled over by these amazing children and their ability to adapt to these challenging circumstances. So much has changed from their last lockdown experience where they were complete 'newbies'; they are now so settled with the technology and routine, that very little fazes them. As a result, we've been able to go on exciting learning journeys, from our own homes. The children have enjoyed some cross-curricular learning, creating some fantastic artwork in Excel (who would've thought it possible?) and producing sweet, albeit slightly piercing, sounds through a wine glass science experiment! We've found our inner poets and played around with words and phrases to describe both the fantastical and the mundane; the Betas are an expressive bunch! And finally, as a treat at the end of a gruelling six weeks, the maths team have set them a 'food and drink' challenge to demonstrate their measuring skills. We are so proud of our children; they have worked hard but all the while kept their unique sense of fun. I think they could all do with one of their mocktails come half-term!

Bino Rathod

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## PREP 1 NEWS

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John Wooden once said 'Things turn out best for the people who make the best of the way things turn out' and that is the attitude we have taken to our online learning this term in Prep 1. Perseverance, resilience and kindness have been key values in making this half-term a success. I have been so impressed by the children's work ethic and enthusiasm for all the topics we are covering and we have certainly seen them all as the best versions of themselves. We now have extended Form Times in the morning and afternoon and this gives us the opportunity for social interaction and to take part in fun activities. One highlight for me was the 1SS Bake Off, where everyone showed off their culinary skills and we voted for the top three chefs in the class. Xiaoyu was the winner so well done to him. Across Prep 1 Form Times we have had musical interludes, show and tell, word of the day, poem of the day, dress up challenges and 'Tell Us a Joke' mornings which have provided lots of laughter. 1KY taught each other new skills like skipping and origami. We are also currently reading 'Far From Home' to our Prep 1s in form sessions and the children look forward to their daily chapter. It is great to see all the children's personalities shining through and, I am safe in saying, they appear happy, confident and full of energy! It is lovely to see the value of kindness still being shown, not only amongst themselves, but also towards the local community. I must give a special mention to Bethan in 1SS who, up until Christmas, was taking food to an elderly 92 year old neighbour until she was admitted to a hospice. Bethan helped tidy her flat when she left and made her Get Well cards. The lady sadly passed away but I am proud that Bethan brought her so much happiness in her final months. It is this Bancroftian spirit that can always be relied upon to see us through, even in the toughest of times.

Sarah Strong

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## PREP 2 NEWS

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The Prep 2 children have been nothing short of outstanding over the last four weeks of returning to online learning. Their skills and patience with the technology, joining the daily live lessons and impressive work ethic never falters. These challenging times present us all with the need to upskill our technological abilities as well as adapt, quickly, to a very different way of teaching and learning. So many children have told me that being able to see their friends and teachers, even if it is via a screen, has kept them motivated and helped them feel less isolated. Keep going Prep 2s; we are so proud of you all! Hopefully, it won't be too long before we are back in the classroom enjoying some normality and sunshine!

Alex Adams





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## THE GOOD LIFE

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One of the many things Bancroft's School is renowned for is how aesthetically pleasing its grounds are. As you approach the tower along the drive, lined with trees and shrubs, or approach the Prep through verdant hedges, you must wonder who maintains these plants and keeps the school looking so beautiful. Well, let me introduce you to Yvonne and Martin Brewster, a husband and wife team who have been green fingered enthusiasts for over 25 years! Having been on the Bancroft's staff for over ten years, Yvonne and Martin have told me their job has also had to adapt in the last year to deal with the pandemic. Generally, their jobs involve sweeping the front of both schools, then weeding borders, cutting hedges, pruning shrubs, planting bulbs and watering everything thoroughly. Now of course, they have to do all these tasks whilst socially distancing and wearing masks, and they commented how quiet it is with so few children in school now. Gardening clearly runs in the family. The couple have seven grandchildren who they enjoy being outside with, planting their own fruit and vegetables. Yvonne said, 'Like us, they just love being at one with nature!' This love of being outdoors in the open, extends to their other passions: flying stunt kites, walking and cycling. It is clear how much Yvonne and Martin love their job and our school. They also really enjoy working together and when asked what makes them such a good team, Yvonne told us, 'It's because Martin does as he is told!' We think they are the 'cream of the crop' – thank you both for always making our school look 'as fresh as a daisy.'

Sarah Strong



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## DRESS TO EXPRESS

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Last week was Children's Mental Health week. Given the challenging times we find ourselves in, it is really important that we acknowledge this subject with our classes as often as possible, but this week, even more so. One of this year's themes was to 'Express Yourself' and our twelve classes all took part by arriving at Friday's Form Time dressed or accessorised to express their moods, their aspirations or as a way of reminding themselves of something they may be missing. Many of our children talked about how they are feeling at the moment and how they try and make themselves feel better if they are feeling down or bored. All of the teachers were so impressed with their efforts!

Alex Adams



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## MEANWHILE IN SCHOOL

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We were proud to be part of the team during the first lockdown, back in March 2020, supporting the children of key workers at school. Little did we know, that almost a year on, we would be doing the same for the second time! Along with everyone else, we hope we will all be together soon. Our Keyworker children have approached their day at school with much enthusiasm and maturity. They have forged new friendships and developed their independence. Their positive attitudes, displays of resilience and collaboration have been uplifting and impressive. Asked how they have found their new way of working at school, Arianna said: "I love to play with all my friends – you also get to make friends with other year groups." Along with everyone working out there, we hope we will all be together soon.

Jane Hayman and Teresa Jones



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## MUSIC

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How I miss the live music in the school! The energy of young people making music simply cannot be beaten. Even in our bubbles during the Autumn Term, we were able to sustain a lot of musical activity. Every class sang and every ensemble, in an adapted way, still happened. Thanks to Miss Akroyd, Miss Ellery and Mrs Rathod our groups flourished, through to putting on a lovely Christmas Concert with every child taking part. Individual music lessons took place behind masks, screens and visors, but it worked. This term, our school world has been turned upside down once again, but the great news is that most lessons with our visiting teachers have taken place remotely. One of the great supporters of Prep School music is Ms Tarrant and she says, "I enjoy seeing my pupils and keeping in touch, so online lessons are definitely better than no lessons. The breaks in sound and picture are sometimes annoying, but we do our best and remain cheery and patient. I do 4-5 lessons a day and try to avoid back to back ones, but home teaching is fun and concentration can even be better in the pupils." This is the way it is for now, but I yearn again for concerts, choirs, assembly and music making. It is the very lifeblood of Bancroft's Prep.

Adam Baum

# HOUSE NEWS

Even though we are not in school at the moment, House competitions continue to be rolled out to the enthusiastic and creative Prep children. The 'Tower Build' card competition has tested many people's patience and perseverance. A variety of tactics were used to see which was the most successful technique, with Alex (ASB) creating a giant 56cm tower! Overall results were:

Manor 484.4cm

Hereford 363.1cm

Monkhams 269.6cm

Knighton 225.5cm



More photos can be found on the VLE House section.

Just before Christmas, we launched a creative writing competition and saw in excess of 75 entries that had the heading of 'The Year - 2030'. The adventures were great to read and I would like to say that they were all happy stories with rainbows and unicorns, however, the influence of zombies, killer robots and deadly ooze left me with some disturbing and sleepless nights. The literary talent was evident to see from everyone and the year group winners were: Sophia - Manor, Evie - Monkhams, Iqra - Monkhams and Tara - Hereford. Finally, the House Captains have been set a task to create a 'chain' music video and are developing great leadership skills to try to complete the task to the best of their ability. Good Luck!

David Archer

## SHE PLAYS TO WIN

'She Plays to Win' is a girl only chess group run by Mr D'Costa. Mr D'Costa teaches us how to play chess and the best moves to make in certain situations. There are regular tournaments too! 'She Plays to Win' is focused on girls who like to play chess. Did you know that until recently, women were underestimated and were not allowed to compete in chess championships? One of the famous women who proved the men wrong was Vera Menchik. I joined the beginners class as well as the intermediate class, where people who had played chess before come to improve their skills. Mr D'Costa teaches you lots of great moves and shows you ways to outsmart your opponent. After the lesson I also joined in with the

tournament - my first ever tournament! In the tournament I played four games. Unfortunately, the first time I played the game didn't last very long as I was playing the person who ended up coming second! I lost in a few moves, but, as I played on, I started to get better and my games started to get longer. In one of my games, I achieved a stale mate (which means we drew). I had a great time and I think it was a good way to be introduced to chess. Before I went to this class, I would play a bit of chess with my Dad, but he would always beat me. Now (even after one lesson) I know a lot more moves and I'm sure I can beat him! I lost most of my games, but that didn't bother me because I knew that even though I'd lost I had learnt something from each game. If you don't know much about chess but are inspired to learn more, I would highly recommend Mr D'Costa's chess class.

Nell DeSyllas 1KY

## VIRTUAL GAMES

Team PE have been impressed by the efforts of our outstanding pupils this term, and although we may not be together pushing one another on, words of encouragement and praise via Teams posts have been wonderful to read. They have really embraced all areas of the timetable including our live Get Active lesson every Friday morning with an exciting theme each week, mirrored Teams workouts with their friends, Yoga with Mr Yelverton, Street Dance, live PE with Joe Wicks alongside thousands of other pupils across the country and many more. Team PE wanted to create a varied timetable to give our pupils the opportunity to try out new activities. We would like to take this opportunity to say a big well done to everyone and to keep up this amazing attitude to online sport in the coming weeks.

Kelly McNelis

