

Holmes Chapel Comprehensive School & 6th Form College

Issue: 196

Date: 5th December 2025













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Dear Parents and Guardians

A call for your support in reaffirming our commitment to a phone-free school day for all of our children

Our phone-free policy has been in place for over two years and the commitment to banning mobile phones for all students during the school day has yielded great benefits for our children's learning, behavior and wellbeing: We have seen a huge reduction in online bullying, inappropriate use of social media in school, a dramatic reduction in mobile phone associated safeguarding issues and very few behavioural incidents related to the misuse of mobile phones.



Without their phones, our children socialise more. They chatter and talk, laugh and play. I hear it and see it every time I am out on duty, at breaks and in lesson transitions. In short, your children have enjoyed a safer, better, less stress ridden day at school and been given the freedom to be children.

I was recently invited to a conference of schools committed to delivering a ban on mobile phones and had the privilege to listen to real experts on the impact of phones on our children's lives. In the words of a psychiatrist I spoke to

"... given the intentionally addictive nature, by design, of mobile technology and social media platforms, it is irresponsible for any adult to expect children to be able to manage access to and use of their phone and associated apps. Children do not have the maturity or capacity to do this for themselves and so we, adults, need to manage their mobile phone access for them until they are old enough to do so themselves and at least until they have left school"

This really emphasised to me the importance of what we are trying to achieve. I want to share with you the latest research and talk to you about our next steps.

The Moral Imperative: Learning from Brianna Ghey's Story



The early adoption of a total phone ban at our school is underpinned by powerful testimony from those who have faced the very worst outcomes. At the conference, Esther Ghey shared how her daughter, Brianna, struggled with severe phone addiction and was able to access extreme online material freely. This contributed to a range of profound behavioural issues, poor mental health and self harm. This might sound like a very extreme case but every internet enabled device is a source of very harmful and damaging material that our children can access. It is an open door for our children to be influenced, manipulated and coerced. The campaign <u>for Phone Free Education</u> (and similar organisations) is calling for statutory change because they recognise that school must be a sanctuary. By banning phones, we are directly contributing to the layers of protection that every child deserves.

The Learning Imperative

Education and learning require focused and sustained concentration. There is a huge volume of research consistently showing that the mere presence of a mobile phone, even when switched off and placed in a pocket or a bag, is a severe drain on anyone's 'cognitive load' – the capacity and ability to think, learn and interact. The drain on cognitive load as a result of having free access to a mobile is especially high for children. Their brains are constantly expending energy either thinking about the last thing we saw on our phone or resisting the urge to check their socials. For children, this means they are not fully present. When a phone is simply out of sight, so in a bag or a pocket, it is definitely not out of mind. The constant and invasive distraction severely impacts attention span, processing speed, and memory recall, effectively placing an unnecessary barrier between the child and their education. We invested heavily in secure, safe phone lockers to remove the presence of the phone and therefore the inevitable distraction it brings.



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Phones and anxiety

It is understandable that, when our students are dealing with times of stress and anxiety, having a phone close to hand can be perceived as a source of comfort. Up to this point in time, there have been situations where we have permitted this, believing it is in a child's best interest. However, the latest research shows that having a phone all day is in fact one of the key stressors for a child experiencing heightened anxiety and having unrestricted access to a phone is more likely to spike anxiety levels for children rather than reduce them, due to the constant need to check messages, social media and missed calls. Whilst some parents and carers might not fully agree, free access to a phone as an anxiety reducing tool for children is not the best way of dealing with their mental health and wellbeing. In fact, so we are told, it does the opposite and fuels phone and social media addiction and an overreliance on a phone rather than real people here in school to help when times are challenging during the school day.

The emerging challenges in the way of delivering a mobile free day?

The addictive nature of the platforms our children use is so powerful that they often feel compelled to find a way around the ban to maintain access. We are now seeing clear signs that standards are slipping. Levels of compliance regarding locking phones away are dipping, especially as the children get a little older. Specifically, we have seen an increase in students bringing an 'old' second phone to school, locking them away and keeping their 'real' phone in their bag. This isn't ok. This behaviour undermines the entire point and purpose of a ban which is to create a safer, more social, connected and more focused learning environment without the invasive distraction of a mobile phone and social media. Very recently, there has been a very small number of behaviour incidents in school that have a root in phone misuse during the day. Whilst these have not been particularly serious, the reemergence of problems in school,linked to phones shows the danger of slipping back into habits that we are trying so hard to reverse. Remember the ban is about our children having a safe day where they can learn, thrive and be physically free of their phone.

What needs to happen now?

We need to stand together to reinforce and insist on a consistent, bell-to-bell ban so that your child reaps the benefits of a screen-free day and total respite from social media, the need to constantly check their messages and addictive algorithms that feed anxiety and fuel negative influences. We have done so much together to provide a safe, phone free day for all children but I fear that unless we act as one now, there is a real risk that the good work we have achieved is undone. Please read the following points that highlight our areas of focus going forward.



1. Practice and policy

All children must lock away their phone(s) at tutor time. They must not collect them until the end of period 5 and phones must not be accessed during the day. Some children claim that the lockers are unsafe and are easy to break into. This is not the case unless a child shares their own personal lock combination. We will update parents and students with any future changes to this policy

2. The two phones issue

Please ensure that your child knows that however many phones they bring to school they must all be locked away in their own lockers at tutor time - this will be checked closely by form tutors

3. My child needs a phone all day because they are anxious

If you are worried about your child's wellbeing during the day, then you must contact their year team. If there is a serious, urgent and important need to check in on your child during the day, this should be via a phone call to school, not directly to the child. If there are issues which you need to know about, we will call you.

4. My child needs their phone to manage a serious medical condition

There are a very few number of students who have a medical condition, such as diabetes, that can only be monitored using an app on their phone. These students already manage this very effectively with an appropriate exemption and we fully support them in this.





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5. My child needs (or has) an exemption from the phone ban
Over the coming weeks and months, existing exemptions to the phone ban will be reviewed with the intent that all children will follow the same practice as their peers each morning and afternoon.

6. Increased vigilance

In the coming weeks, your child will begin to notice an increased emphasis on securing full compliance from all children with regard to the phone ban. This will be led by the tutor team each morning and reinforced though the year group teams. We are exploring the most appropriate ways of encouraging and securing full compliance from all children which will include appropriate sanctions if necessary.

Thank you for working with us to ensure your child continues to have the best chance to focus, connect, and grow.



Nigel Bielby
Executive Headteacher

Nut allergy – Don't bring nuts to school...

As the festive season gets underway, I need to reiterate an important health and safety message. Nuts, or any foods containing nuts or nut products must not be brought into school under any circumstances.

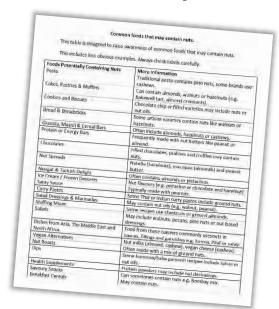
A number of people at our school have a very severe and potentially life threatening nut allergy. For these people, exposure to even a small amount of nuts or nut products, even carried in the air can trigger a life-threatening allergic reaction, known as anaphylaxis. This can cause swelling of the airways, a drop in blood pressure, and in some cases, death. By not bringing nuts or any food containing nuts or nut products to school, the risk of exposure is significantly reduced, creating a safer and more inclusive environment for everyone.

Often, at this time of year, children bring in chocolates to share or give as gifts. Many of these contain nuts. The same goes for savoury snacks as well as things like biscuits, cakes and cereal bars. The potential risk to those with this severe allergy is exceptionally high so please very carefully check the labels and ingredients of any and all foods that your child brings to school to ensure they don't contain nuts. If in doubt, don't bring it in.

Thanks for helping to keep everyone safe at our school

NUT ALLERGY AWARENESS. Let's keep everyone safe. How can I help? 1. Check food labels before bringing food to school. If the label

- Check food labels before bringing food to school. If the label says 'contains nuts' or 'may contain nuts' please don't bring it into school.
- Avoid nutty snacks e.g. peanut butter, chocolate with nuts, sandwiches or pasta with pesto and cereal bars with nuts.
- Let a teacher know if you see someone with food that contains nuts in school. It is not to get anyone into trouble, it is to keep everyone safe!



Common foods that contain nuts - Click the images to expand



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Medication Reminder

Students are not allowed to carry medication in their bags. Any medication needs to be stored in Reception with the relevant form.



Alternative Learning Week - July 2026

We are delighted to present to you our 2026 Alternative Learning Week international and residential trip package. In a new, revamped format, we are releasing different tiers of trips at various points to ensure improved organisation and efficiency to ensure ALW is a successful, productive and culturally-enriching experience for all students.

- Tier 1 International/residential trips presented (this stage)
- Tier 2 National, large-scale day trips
- Tier 3 In-school activities and local trips

This package gives you all of the international and residential trips that will be on offer in July 2026 in a centralised location. This will ensure you have all the information you need before deciding which trip you would like to send your child on. It also means that once you have paid for your trip, you will not be able to transfer to another trip.

Please click on the link attached <u>here</u> to view our ALW international/residential trip package so that you can access the trip information.

All trips in this package must be paid in full by 13th February 2026. Please note that some trips have already had some places allocated.

If you have questions regarding a specific trip, please contact the trip leader attached to the letter. If you have any questions regarding ALW as a whole, please contact me at liam.beard@hccs.info.

Kind regards,

Liam Beard Head of Cultural Capital and Enrichment

MiniMunch

On Wednesday 19th November Miss Baker and Miss Lawrence escorted 12 of our students to our first Mini-MUNCH (Model United Nations at Cheadle Hulme). The students from across year 7 - 11, for some of whom this was their first time - impressed the committee leaders so much that they won a Special Mention on the evening. A number of our students, including Caydee Darlington (our only year 7 delegate) also won Best Delegate in her committee too. Students debated moral issues



such as Child Refugees and Nuclear Power. All students who attended this evening spoke with mindful enthusiasm about the issues we face as a global population and we were so proud of their achievements and many awards won on the night!

We have lots more MUN events to attend throughout the year, across Cheshire and further. If anyone is interested in attending please speak to Miss Baker or Mr Bell.



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Year 8 News

Year 8: Half Term Update

As we reach the midpoint of the term, I am delighted to report that many of our Year 8 students have displayed a positive attitude towards learning and respectful behaviour in class, creating a productive and supportive environment.

To celebrate the students' achievements, we are excited to be running a Christmas trip next week on Thursday 11th December to the Trafford Centre . This trip is a fantastic opportunity for our Year 8 students to come together, socialise, and build stronger relationships with their peers and teachers. Through a range of fun activities, students will have the chance to develop their teamwork skills, challenge themselves, and create lasting memories.

The trip is a well-deserved recognition of the students' hard work and we are confident that it will be a wonderful experience for all involved.





A Reminder of the Trip Details:

Time: The trip will take place after school, departing at 2:45 PM and returning by approximately 8:30 PM TBC

Destinations:

- Students from 8SA, 8FO, 8DT, 8RM will go bowling, followed by the Trafford Centre.
- Students from 8SP, 8SF, 8AL, 8TG will go to the Play Factore followed by the Trafford Centre.
- Trafford Centre: Students will have the opportunity to explore the shopping and entertainment complex.

What to Bring: Students should bring comfortable clothing for walking around the Trafford Centre, as well as suitable clothes for the activity.

Food: Students may bring snacks or purchase food at the Trafford Centre.

Money: To purchase any food/gifts

Year 8 Key Dates

Term 1		Term 2		Term 3	
Parents Info Evening	Interim 1	Showcase Evening	Interim 2	Interim 3	Celebration Evening
Y8 4 th Sept	24 Oct	Y7 5 th March Y8 12 th March	12 th Feb	3 rd July	11 th June



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Year 8 News...continued

"Congratulations to all the students who took part in the inter-tutor football competition! What a great turnout! Well done to everyone on your joint success - keep an eye out for your rewards breakfast coming soon!"





Well done to our Year 8 Netball team who came joint second in the South Cheshire Netball Tournament. Well done to 8SF who achieved a rewards breakfast for achieving the best punctuality award in half term 1. A huge Congratulations to Carter Taylforth who has signed for Manchester City Academy. This is an outstanding achievement for Carter and we are delighted for him and his family.



Rewards breakfast 8SF



Inspiring Future Medics: Dr. Ollie Dray Visits our Sixth Form

We were thrilled to host Ollie Dray, a former Sixth Form student and a dedicated doctor for an inspiring and highly informative conference session. The event was primarily aimed at our Year 12 and 13 students on our STEM pathway, but we were delighted to welcome students with aspirations for medicine from Years 10, 11, and even one student in Year 8.

Ollie delivered a practical and motivational talk, offering invaluable insights into the challenging yet rewarding world of medicine and the application process. The session focused on the following:

Getting Your Application Right

Grades are important: Ollie emphasised the importance of academic success: "part of the entry requirements is that you need to get your GCSE and A level grades banked." He candidly admitted that the A-level period was arguably the hardest time of his life, reinforcing the need for a focus on academic success. Personal Statement: Students were urged to start thinking ahead and ensure they have something to say beyond their academic performance in their personal statement.

Work Experience: Ollie focused on the value of experiences beyond the classroom focusing on travel, work experience, shadowing, volunteering, and extra-curricular activities, noting that the exposure gained is invaluable.





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Attitude and Persistence

Believe in Yourself: Ollie shared powerful advice on mindset and longevity in a high-pressure career; "Anything is possible" and "I needed to back myself" were his key messages despite his evident humility. Ollie promoted the view that with the right work ethic, you can achieve any goal.

Longer Term: Students were encouraged to think longer term about their career path and understand that the difficult work now will pay off "keep going, you will never regret it."

Making the Decision: Ollie emphasised that becoming a doctor is a massive decision. He advised students to think early and be prepared to navigate making difficult career and academic decisions, in order to find out where they belong. He also addressed the fear of rejection, encouraging students to persist despite setbacks.

Looking Ahead to Life as a Doctor

Ollie provided a realistic glimpse into medical life, particularly focusing on the crucial balance needed:

Work-Life Balance: He highlighted the importance of establishing a healthy work-life balance right from the start of the career and during your GCSE's and A levels.

Commitment: Ollie shared some of his practical experiences as a doctor and encouraged students to fully commit to the path and career they may.

A huge thank you to Dr. Ollie Dray for taking the time to inspire our students and for offering such candid, practical, and highly motivating advice. The session was a phenomenal resource for our aspiring STEM professionals!





Christmas Themed Lunch

Christmas Lunch in the Restaurant at HCCS - Tuesday 9th December

On Tuesday 9th December we will be serving Christmas themed food in the restaurant through our Christmas market stall.

£5.00 per ticket (paid for on the day at the till)

Turkey or Pork Bap with stuffing, cranberry or apple sauce Roast Quorn bap (V)

Pigs in blankets

Roast Potatoes

Hot Chocolate brownie with Chocolate Sauce.





Reminder that School closes for Christmas on 19th December at 12.30pm



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Year 7 Residential Camping Trip - ALW

The Year 7 Team are planning a residential camping trip to Barnswood Scout Camp for Year 7 students in Alternative Learning Week. Like other Year 7 Residentials, this plans to be a superbly enjoyable event and we would like to invite your son/daughter to attend from Tuesday 30th June - Thursday 2nd July 2026. Places will be given on a first come, first served basis. The deposit secures your child's place.



Please click here for the full letter



In November our amazing cast, crew and musicians brought the Little Shop of Horrors to the bright lights of the HCCS stage. The spectacular show drew in audiences from throughout the local community alongside HCCS friends and families. Students worked tirelessly since September to create this fantastic spectacle which received rave reviews and was thoroughly enjoyed by all. With over 100 students involved from Year 7-13, a massive congratulations to all!

Also a huge thank you to all of the staff that made this memorable opportunity possible. We hope to see many of you with us again next year for the next whole school production and thank you to all families for their support this year!













Year 11 GCSE Drama Theatre Trip

Our Year 11 GCSE Drama class were fortunate to visit The Lowry Theatre in Salford last month to watch the high profile and hugely well renowned Physical Theatre Company Frantic Assembly with their sensational performance of 'Lost Atoms'. The students were engrossed throughout and will analyse this production in their GCSE Drama written paper where in lessons post the trip the students have been delving into some insightful exploration of the innovative production









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House Leaders Update

In the coming weeks, the House Team has lots of exciting events planned, all linked with our value of BELONGING.

- 1. First of all, we would like to congratulate the newly appointed House Council. Thank you to all those students who expressed interest; there will be lots more student leadership opportunities for you to get involved in. It is fantastic to see our students so engaged with their school community and eager to contribute and have their voices heard.
- 2. Thursday 4th December marks the start of our first ever "12 Days of Christmas" Winter Event with a Christmas competition. Guess the number of chocolates for the chance to win the whole jar! Guesses will be 20p, with all proceeds going to the Middlewich and District Food Bank. On Friday 5th December, we will have Christmas jumper day, with donations of £1 payable on Scopay. Each event will be announced in the student bulletin or on social media, and we are really looking forward to seeing as many students as possible get involved, showing our school's wonderful sense of community and earning as many house points as possible. The other upcoming events are as follows:

Thursday 4th December	Guess the number of chocolates	20p per guess	
Friday 5th December	Christmas Jumper Day	£1 payable on Scopay	
Monday 8th December	Design A School Elf		
Tuesday 9th December	Hot Chocolate Break	30p per hot chocolate, 40p with cream and marshmallows	
Wednesday 10th December	Christmas Card Making		
Thursday 11th December	Thank You Cards		
Friday12th December	Surprise!		
Monday 15th December	Christmas Card Deliveries		
Tuesday 16th December	Masked Singer		
Wednesday 17th December	Christmas Quiz		
Thursday 18th December	Reindeer Run		
Friday 19th December	Assembly		

In addition to raising money for the Food Bank through these events, in reception there are four boxes for food donations, one for each house. We greatly appreciate any donations for this fantastic cause, and each donation will earn house points. If you are able, please leave any donations in the relevant house box in reception before 15th December. All non-perishable goods are welcome, but these are the most requested items at the food bank:

Tinned fish, coffee, tea bags, long life milk, tinned potatoes, instant mash, pasta sauce, rice pudding, tinned fruit, angel delight, custard and fruit juice.

Thank you as always for your support of the house system, and we look forward to seeing our students engage with the wider community in supporting the Food Bank.

Best wishes.

Miss Lawrence, Miss Gudgion, Miss Brown and Mr Gamble



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Biology Field Trip



On Friday 14th November, the year 13 A-level Biologists braved Storm Claudia and took part in a field trip to Cable Bay and Abberfraw in Anglesey.

At Cable Bay, we looked at the seashore ecology, building on what we had learnt during the Millport, Scotland field trip earlier in the year, to study the diverse ecosystems in the Upper, Middle and Lower shore zones, to be able to complete the Required Practical part of the Biology course. We looked at how plants and organisms change as we moved from the edge of the sea (lower shore) to the top of the shore (Upper shore). These zones are characterized by the challenges of daily and seasonal changes in tides, temperature, and salinity, forcing inhabitants like algae, barnacles, mussels, crabs, and snails to develop specific adaptations for survival. Life is organized into zones (splash, high intertidal, and low intertidal) based on exposure to air and water, with different species dominating each zone, creating distinct bands of life.





At Aberffraw, we explored the sand dunes to see succession. This succession happens as the physical environment changes: pioneer plants like marram grass stabilize the sand, their dead plant material adds humus, which improves water retention and nutrient content, allowing more diverse and specialized species to colonize. This creates a zoned system with distinct vegetation communities, or "zones," moving inland from the beach

Science - DNA

Students in Year 8 have been learning about DNA and how genes are inherited, which creates variation in the population. One task was to extract DNA from an organism. Luckily, no one was harmed, as strawberries were used to extract the DNA from.

Students were amazed to see what DNA looks like, and how much there is in one little fruit!











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Learning Resource Centre News

Accelerated Reader Celebrations - Class Competition

This term has been a fantastic one for Accelerated Reader, with our KS3 students showing incredible dedication and enthusiasm for reading.

It's been wonderful to see so many striving for the top and challenging themselves to achieve more. Each term, LRC classes compete in the Class Competition, battling it out to see who will come out on top. A huge congratulations to this term's winners:

Year 7 – Miss Brown's 7x/En3 with an incredible 6,458,500 words read!

Year 8 – Mrs Martin's 8y/En2 with 3,848,341 words read!

Year 9 – Mr Fox's 9x/En1 with 3,738,864 words read!

They will be celebrating their success with a special Christmas Film and Treat lesson at the end of term - a well deserved reward for their hard work and commitment.

Accelerated Reader Celebrations - Individual Competition

Our KS3 students are set targets on Accelerated Reader based on their STAR Test results, giving them a personal goal to work towards throughout the year.

This term, the students listed have truly blown us away by reaching their targets in the very first term! We are so impressed by their dedication and enthusiasm for reading.

Students who pass their targets are entered into a prize draw to receive some bookish goodies and treats.

Congratulations to this term's lucky winners:

Year 7 - Charlotte C

Year 8 - Anna W

Year 9 - Beth F



Well done to all our KS3 readers - keep up the amazing work and keep reaching for those targets!

Accelerated Reader Celebrations - Millionaire Readers

These remarkable students have truly taken their reading to the next level this term. In just 11 weeks, they have managed to read and quiz on over 1 million words through the Accelerated Reader programme - an incredible achievement! We are so proud of their dedication and enthusiasm.



Bookbuzz

Our Year 8 students have received their Bookbuzz selections this term! Bookbuzz, a fantastic initiative by Booktrust, allows students to choose from a carefully curated list of 16 titles to take home and keep. The aim is to promote reading for pleasure - and it's certainly created a buzz among our Year 8 readers.

Happy reading, everyone! We can't wait to hear what you think of your chosen books.





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Learning Resource Centre News....continued

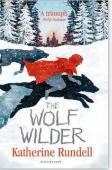
Festive Recommendations

The holiday season is here, and so is the perfect time to curl up with a good book!

This month, we're sharing some of our favourite festive reads.











Book Recommendations from our School Community

The holiday season is here, and so is the perfect time to curl up with a good book!

This month, we're sharing some of our favourite festive reads.





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Learning Resource Centre News....continued

This Advent, we're excited to share a daily book recommendation on our Instagram account - each one selected by a different member of our school community.

Follow us on Instagram to join the fun, and keep an eye out for our special bumper video featuring all of this year's recommendations!



HCCS_LRC

Sparx Reader Celebrations









Gus Competed for Cheshire!

Just thought you like to know that Gus competed for Cheshire in the school's inter-counties xc at Himley Hall in Dudley on Saturday. He was in the Junior Boys (years 8 and 9) and finished 12th overall and 1st year 8.









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Girls Football Results

12/11: Under 12s and 14s vs Shavington Academy.

Our first fixture back for our Under 12 and 14s teams was an exciting fixture to say the least! All the girls were very excited for this game, despite the awful rain. But this didn't discourage the neither the U12s or U14s, as both teams went onto the pitch with lots of determination and passion to win these games. Some excellent play from the 12s and 14s, scoring consecutive goals in both games within just a couple of minutes!! The end results were fantastic, with our 12s winning 6-3 and 14s winning 8-0!!!

Congratulations girls - fab start to the term!





19/11: Yr 7 & 8Cheshire Competition:

Today our girls were up against Eaton Bank in the Cheshire Football competition. The teams was a little different, as it was a year 7 & 8 mixed girls team. The girls were excited for this game, even if the temperature was 2*c!!. The girls had a strong start in the first half, with the score ending 1-1 at half time thanks to a fantastic goal from Poppie Shaw from the half way line! A couple of changes in the second half were made to get some fresh legs on, even though the girls were close many times to taking the lead the score ended 1-1. This meant the game went to penalties... neither Holmes Chapel nor Eaton Bank could score until the the 5th and finally penalty where Eaton Bank scored.

Even though the girls lost this game, they played extremely well today. POM = Everleigh Brandon for her speed on the pitch and creation of goal opportunities!!





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Girls Netball Results

Monday saw our 7a and 7b team take on our local rivals Leftwich! The girls were very excited to play this game, competing against their friends whom they compete with at club level. Both teams were extremely competitive, and saw some great contesting for the ball! Our slick and sharp shooters were on target and for both As and Bs, and our defenders turned over lots of ball. Our A team.... Our B team had a convincing win, scoring a flurry of goals towards the end of the second half.

On Tuesday we hosted the the annual year 7 South Cheshire Netball Tournament. This saw Alsager, Congleton, Brine Leas and Sandbach travel to HCCS for some brilliant netball games. Our A team competed in this tournament, and had some tightly contested games! Our As came 3rd in

this Tournament both winning and losing some games. The girls were incredibly proud of their achievement and have gained some knowledge going into training next Monday on what they need to work on!

Well done girls - a busy week for you all!!



