



Headmaster's Weekly Bulletin

23 FEBRUARY 2024

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Introduction

Dear students, colleagues, parents and carers,

I have been greatly privileged to hear Luca Z (Year 13) address chapel this week, and ask each year group to explore questions about expectations, perceptions and illusions. Studying English, Philosophy and History, Luca shared stories of his disappointment regarding film adaptations of his favourite books. He invited all of us to reflect on our own expectations. Quoting the Great Gatsby, he described “the colossal vitality of our illusions.”

I found Luca’s words challenging! I know that we can place unreasonable expectations upon ourselves, creating burdens of guilt and disappointment. We also sometimes have unreasonable expectations of others. Some students will imagine that their parents can fix every problem, and some parents may expect their children to ‘ace’ every test. Sometimes a student may imagine their teachers should have all the answers, and sometimes a teacher may expect more mature engagement than is possible for a thirteen-year-old! As a community, perhaps we might benefit from continuing to think about the expectations we have of one another?

For example, as I congratulate the U14 and u16 badminton teams for their success, I think it is my job to place upon them the expectation that they play their best in the regional finals, that they support one another and that they demonstrate true sportsmanship. Expecting victory may be unreasonable, but expecting this group of whom we are so proud to give the best of themselves seems fair. Certainly, knowing the work Mr Pedlow puts into coaching and supporting them, and knowing how far ‘above and beyond’ he goes, it feels fair to ask that these teams represent the school to the best of their ability.

As I urge our Year 13 students towards their A Levels, it would be unreasonable to expect them to get every answer right, but I believe it is the job of our teachers, form tutors and attendance team to expect the highest possible level of attendance in lessons. I’m disappointed, therefore, that our senior students have only managed 84% attendance since half-term. There were 5 days of unauthorised absences in Year 7 this week, but 65 days of unauthorised absence in Year 13. That level of participation and commitment falls well below the standards we expect. I think we must be clear about reasonable expectations for attendance, and hope all parents will join me in supporting high standards. We cannot guarantee examination outcomes, but we are each accountable for the way we spend ourselves.

Checking our expectations, aiming high yet extending grace to one another must be our goal. We mustn’t be like Homer Simpson who had no expectations, and said, “Kids – you tried your best and you failed miserably. The lesson is – never try.” Equally, we must heed Douglas Adams’ warning, “A life that is burdened with expectations is a heavy life. Its fruit is sorrow and disappointment.”

As I thank Luca for his provocation, I wish you all light burdens, realistic expectations and unlimited hope.

Chris Evans
Headmaster



Key information

All years

Data collection – checking personal details on MCAS

In order for us to comply with GDPR regulations, we ask that all parents use the MCAS ([MyChildAtSchool](#)) App (which can be used as a web-based app as well as a smartphone app for Apple and Android devices) to check contact details, dietary requirements, and medical information. It is particularly important for the school to have the correct information ahead of your son attending any school trips.

As a helpful reminder, here are the features of the MyChildAtSchool parent portal:

- Provides you with a secure platform to view personal information about you and your son.
- It allows you to make online changes of address, contact details, and dietary and medical information via the Data Collection Form button.
- It allows you to send absence notification messages to the school which are retrieved by the attendance officer, allowing them to update attendance marks accordingly.
- Provides secure access for you to view your son's school attendance and behaviour.
- Provides instant electronic online reports and online timetables.
- Provides the option to purchase items and top up dinner money.

Years 8 and 9 only

Belonging Week 2024

Please find links to information about the Belonging Week Residential Programs offered to students in Year 8 and 9. We thank Year 8 and Year 9 parents for taking the time to read, complete and return the forms found below by Monday 4 March.

[Year 8 Belonging Week Parent Letter](#)

[Year 9 Belonging Week Parent Letter](#)

Year 10 only

Belonging Week 2024

The link for Year 10 students to sign up for their preferred Future Stories program during Belonging Week will be sent directly to students on Monday 26 January. They will be asked to choose from the following programs: Football, Cricket, Rugby, Science and Me, Music, Canoeing, Team Building & Leadership Coaching and Cooking. Students may also choose to develop their own programs which will operate in tandem with the planned activities.

Students should indicate their preferences and discuss this with their parents/carers as some of the programs may require a financial contribution based on the cost of trips taking place as a part of the program. All programs will involve a range of activities led by our students in local primary schools across Reading, at our Boat House and at Reading School.

Year 7 only

Belonging Week 2024

Details of the itinerary for Year 7s will be shared next week and no selection will be required as all students will take part in the same activity programme.

Current Vacancies

Do you know a talented individual who would like to join and be part of an exciting and leading educational institution? Below is a selection of teaching and associate staff roles currently available:

Teacher Vacancies

Teacher of English - deadline for applications 9am, Monday 11 March 2024 - [click here](#) for further details.

Teacher of Geography - deadline for applications 9am, Monday 26 February 2024 - [click here](#) for further details.

All applicants must complete a Teacher Application Form which can be downloaded by [clicking here](#).

Associate Staff Vacancies

Student Support Assistant - deadline for applications: 9am, Friday 1 March 2024 - [click here](#) for further details.

Cover Supervisor - deadline for applications: 9am, Monday 4 March 2024 - [click here](#) for further details.

All applicants must complete an Associate Staff Application Form which can be downloaded by [clicking here](#).

School Community News

Behind the Scenes Spotlight



Last week, we shared that those who contribute to your child's education at Reading School, including the Associate Staff Team and others, would be featured in order to shine a spotlight on their work. This week, we spoke with Revd James Stephenson, a former elite athlete, GB rower and World Triathlon Champion who is supporting Reading School's ambitious and growing rowing programme.

Rev. James Stephenson is a former elite athlete, GB rower and rowing coach from grassroots to Olympic level and World Triathlon Champion. He was educated as a sports scholar at Harrow School and Durham University, going onto read Theology at Oxford University.

James currently supports schools and organisations with effective, uplifting, meaningful and powerful social impact programmes. He is a strong advocate for caring and compassionate communication and ethical leadership.

He has recently been working with Reading School in order to grow our work being done with partner primary schools and children seeking refuge through an exciting transformational rowing programme being led by Reading School students.

Q: Please share a little of your background with the Reading School community

A: As a young student, I used to compete in the 800 metres for England as a junior and when deciding on universities, it was mainly a sports-based one I wanted to go to, so I went to the University of Durham to complete an undergraduate degree in psychology. Durham is near Gateshead, which is traditionally a base for middle distance running in England. While at university, I had a few goes on the rowing machines where one or two rowing professionals noticed that I was fairly quick. They suggested swapping from running to rowing, which I did, however I experienced a back injury which stalled my development. I had completed my degree by the time I'd recovered and really felt in my heart that I could achieve something in the rowing world, so I used a friend's single boat, and I rowed on my own for about three to four hours every single day for 18 months, including Christmas Day, trying to master the technique.

Q: It sounds like you faced some adversity in achieving your goals, what did rowing offer you?

A: I found rowing alone every day a very spiritual time for me and a time of great contemplation, you know, on a river for that amount of time, predominantly on your own. People started wanting to coach me as I got better, and I eventually went to the GB trials, did very, very well, and suddenly I was catapulted into the GB Rowing Team.

Q: What was it like rowing for Great Britain?

A: It was a really positive experience and time for me. I loved being part of a team. We were really privileged to get paid to wake up in the morning and go rowing. Some athletes talk about sacrifice, but for me, it felt like we were the luckiest people in the world. Getting paid to go out in the sunshine and row up and down a river. How nice, however, it didn't end brilliantly. Just before the 2008 Olympics in Beijing, I injured my back really badly again so I missed out on that Olympics, and that was really the year perhaps when I was possibly peaking as a rower. My teammates went onto win the gold medal for Britain and that's fine – I was happy for them. It was hard for me

because I didn't get to self-actualise. I didn't reach my potential at that moment. There's no doubt it's influenced the rest of my life because I have such a passion for great coaching – I think I could have been looked after better by some rowing coaches. And I have a passion to help children and young people self-actualise and feel fulfilled in what they're doing.

Q: How did you bounce back?

A: There was lots of surgery required for my injury, and it took three years of rehabilitation. But three years later, I went back and competed for Great Britain in the Triathlon, and I won the gold medal in the short course triathlon in 2011 in Beijing. It felt like a cathartic moment of recovery, to come back to a high-end athletic performance.

Q: What came after rowing?

After my rowing career came to an end, I felt a calling to ordination in the Anglican Church, but never to run a church but to be a school chaplain or youth worker. My academic background and interest was in psychology and the love of human nature. Once ordained, my family and I left the country in 2013 to live on the Zambian Congolese border for many years, where we ran a church, set up a school and then started to work in the area of social impact by using the resources of corporates to help local people. We left to go to New Zealand, where we did the same sort of work, especially with the indigenous population of New Zealand, the Maori population, where I learned a lot about culture and belonging. We then returned to Zambia to carry on more of the same work armed with new knowledge.

Q: What brought you back to the UK?

A: Mainly for our children, who are now 14 and 15 as they saw the UK as home. We actually went via Australia, where we lived for about nine months, thinking that it would be a good middle ground between the life that we led in Africa and life in the UK. We found that wasn't the case and that living in Australia was like a hyper Western lifestyle. The culture felt much more like America and extraordinarily competitive in all ways, and that really threw our children. So we thought, let's come home. They've always felt England to be their home and it's worked out well.

Q: To return to the idea of self-actualising (feeling as though you have achieved your potential in a certain area) - it is very much in line with Reading School's character education programme. In your view how do the two align?

A: We need to cut to character development, values and principles so that young people can use their skills, (and there are some very talented kids at this school), to use them to feel fulfilled in their Maths, English, Science, Mandarin... whatever they're learning. The school has understood that the building of a principle-based identity is key. Ultimately, no one cares how fast I could row a boat, but what we do care about is about building people of character, who we are as people, that's what counts. You've got some great leaders at this school who have understood that building character is as equally as important as academic achievement. It's the character building that will contribute to being a better husband, a better father, a better citizen, a better friend, a better work colleague. They are the things that matter. And if we can build a principle-based identity in order to get to that point, young people will self-actualise, because they will be as good as they can be at whatever they are, in whatever they do.

Q: What has your experience been working alongside colleagues at Reading School?

A: I've found a lack of ego-centricity and more of a student-centric approach. In education, if the focus is student-centric, and not egocentric, then it's a great school and I've seen a lot of schools around the world. Reading School masters that better than any other I've visited. The people here are masters at remaining student-centric. A lot of leaders can become egocentric in that they feel

that it is about them. If that can be replaced with a people-centric culture, then you've got great leadership which gives students (and people if it's a business) the ability to maximise whatever they do.

Q: In closing, what does rowing offer children and young people?

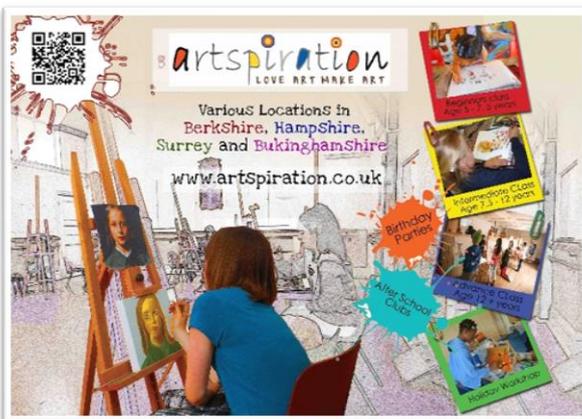
I set up a programme on the Zambia/Congolese border where people said 'you cannot pull that off and you won't find anyone that's going to be a great athlete'. We found a boy who really took to rowing and loved it. He ended up on a full scholarship at a renowned school in England and is now on a full scholarship at a university in America. Rowing can not only provide opportunity, it can provide an opportunity for people to excel, to just enjoy exercise and the outdoors.



The rowing programme at Reading School is a values-based programme. How far someone moves the boat is a secondary consideration. The foundation is getting as many people in to enjoy themselves. Rowing also produces grit or motivation, which is a big factor for success in anything that we do in life. Lots of psychologists will tell us that grit entails sticking with your goals over the long term, despite setbacks and obstacles, but few point how to instil grit. A rowing programme can develop passion and perseverance in a person because it can be hard.

You can get blisters on your hands very easily. You can get out of breath. But lots of people learn to love that and therefore build an element of grit and resilience. They also build a growth mindset because they learn if I put some effort in here, I get better. Great. Let's take that characteristic and put it into the maths classroom.

Art classes



Artspiration hosts structured art classes for children and young people (5yrs – 17yrs) on Sundays at Reading School. The classes are open to the whole community and are delivered by professional artists who support children to achieve specific objectives individually and collectively provide a holistic approach to drawing and painting.

Hemmed into their curriculum is: Art History, Contemporary Art, Understanding of the Elements of Art, Exploration of various Visual Art forms, Styles, Techniques and Methods and the know how to use a

range of art materials effectively. Problem-solving, critical thinking, decision-making, all form an integral part of this sessions.

Reading based teacher, Mrs Areej Abdi is a contemporary, multidisciplinary visual artist and educator. Her journey into teaching started 25 years ago when she gained a Bachelor of Arts in English and Fine Art from Surrey University and subsequently a Postgraduate Certificate in Education to teach secondary children. Her passion to seek out different skills to enhance her practise has led her to residencies in Spain and Japan.

To sign up, please visit www.artspiration.co.uk

RSPA

Donations to School Uniform Shop

Preloved uniforms can be donated to School Uniform Shop and we would welcome your donations. Parents, carers and students can simply come to the Uniform Shop when open (within the walled carpark) or drop to School Reception in a bag clearly marked 'Uniform Shop'. We thank you in advance for removing any names, labels, named buttons etc.

The Uniform Shop will be open on:

Friday 23 February from 3:30 – 5:00pm

Saturday 24 February from 10:30am - 12.30pm

Friday 22 March 3:30 – 5:00pm

Saturday 24 March 10:30am – 12:30pm

Please email shop@readingschoolparents.co.uk with any queries.

School Lottery



Win the ultimate family entertainment experience when you support a good cause this February!

Unlock a world of excitement with our Mega Nintendo Switch Bundle: From intense fitness workouts to Mario Kart races and Zelda adventures, all on a dazzling 50" UltraHD Smart TV.

It's your all-in-one entertainment thrill. [Get your tickets before Saturday 24th February to be in with a chance to win!](#)

Thank you and have a lovely weekend.

The RSPA Team

Lent Term – Week 7

To keep up to date with student life at Reading School, click the icons below to follow, be part of and stay connected with the Reading School community.



Congratulations to the Reading School Badminton Team for reaching the VICTOR/School Sport Magazine National Schools U14 & U16 Badminton Cup Competition 2024/25 this week after competing against Wilson's School.



Coach Pedlow shared after the event, “In the U14 match, Akhil G led the way, winning the 1st seed game fairly comfortably, and although Aditya V lost he gave a gutsy performance, as did Arhant Y and Kalyan M...”



“...the doubles was also tough; our opponents worked with great synergy and played with aggression; this is something we will want to emulate in the Regional final of the Badminton England competition...”



“...and the U16 team, having been tested in the previous match, looked sharp, finishing the singles 2-2 but with a large points advantage. James S and Nived N sealed the win with a 21-6 win against Wilson's first pair, then Neerav S and Sahil C avenged singles defeats with a doubles win against the Wilson's second pair.”





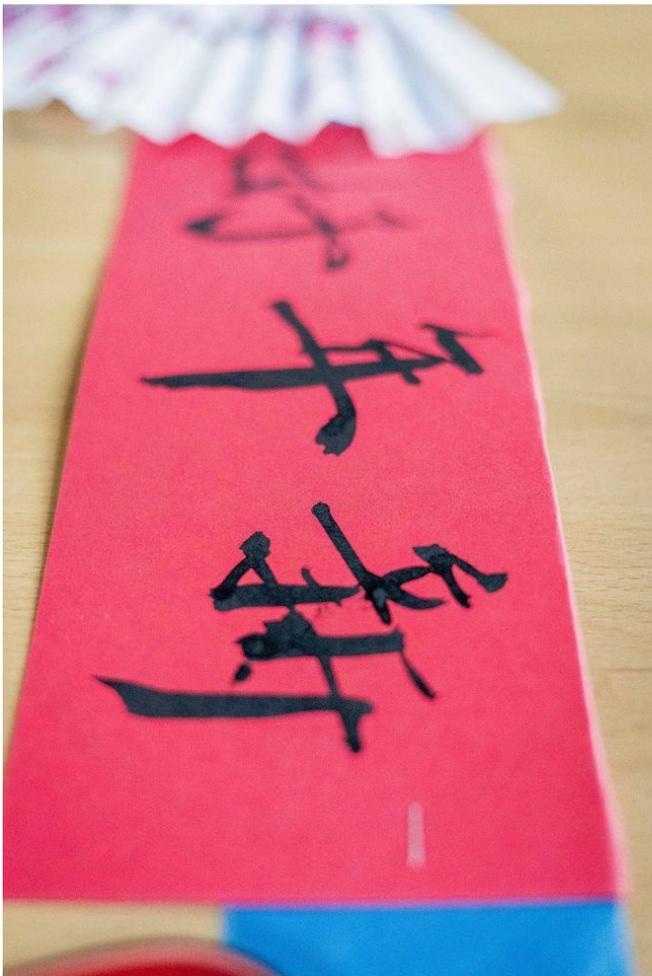


This week has seen Teacher of Mandarin, Mr Wu and his team lead on our Lunar New Year Celebrations with a full day of cultural and enrichment activities. Year 8 Mandarin students had the opportunity to participate in a range of workshops from calligraphy to paper cutting, learning more about and trying on traditional Chinese clothing to taking part in a lion dance.









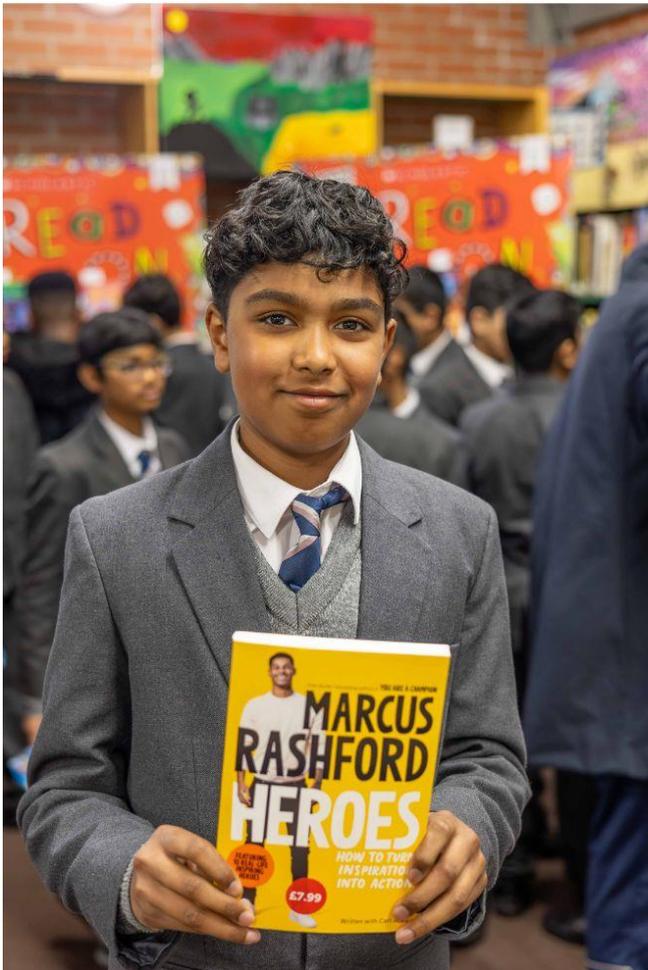
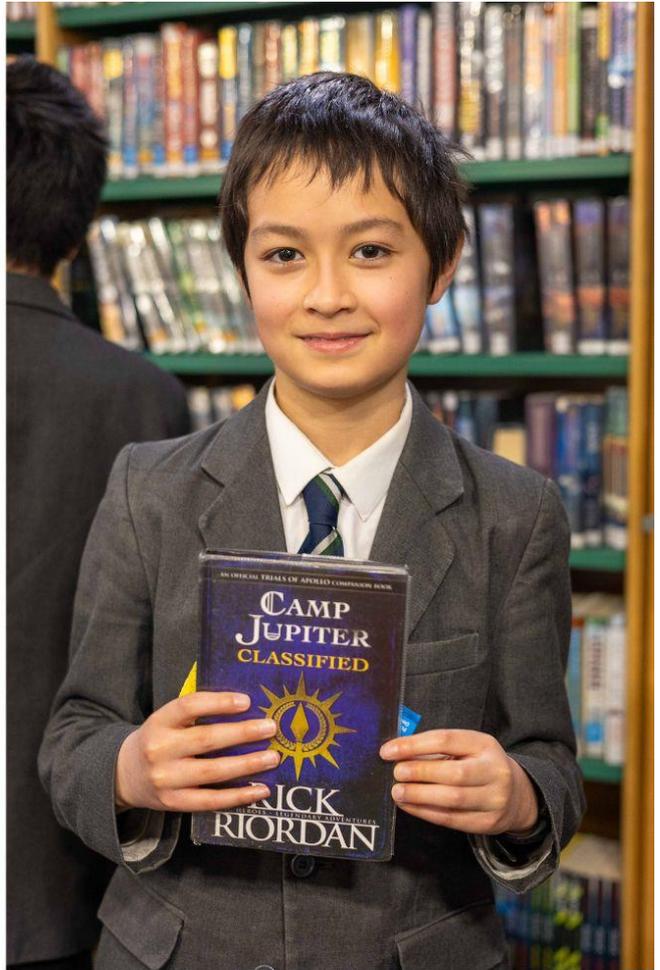
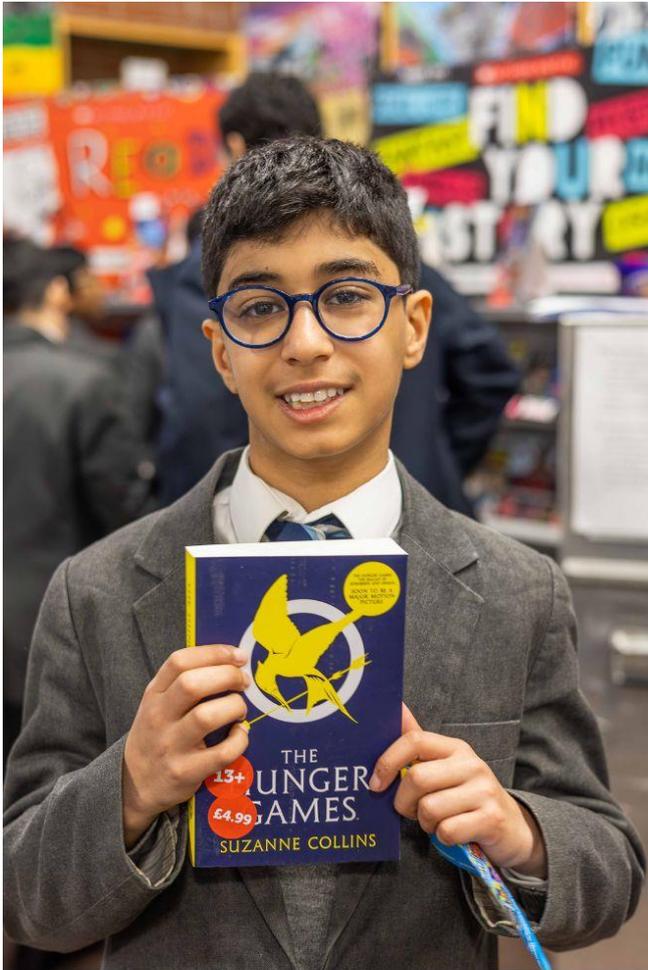
Guest student photographer Yicheng L (10S) shares his images of Lunar New Year celebrations hosted by Reading Chinese School on Sunday 11 February in Reading Town Centre.





Scholastic Book Fair 2024











Feedback is important to us and if you have any positive news, comments or suggestions, please contact the Community Relations Office by emailing communityrelations@reading-school.co.uk