

Friday Focus

Friday 23rd January 2026



Dartmoor
Multi Academy
Trust

...everyone in our Trust.



This Monday coming I am looking forward to attending our SEND conference with our neuro-diverse group. We will be looking at how we can, together, improve our school. I know that the group have been working exceptionally hard on their presentations and it will be great to hear from them.

This week I spent some time with our student leadership group where we discussed 'moments'. I know from my own schooling that it is not necessarily the worksheets or exam practice sessions we look back on about our time at school, but the 'moments' of fun and excitement. From this discussion I learnt how much students value having ice-cream, watching sports' days and taking part in the interhouse competitions. I want to try and make more of these moments as they make such an important part of our time at school.

Devon and Cornwall Police Partnership



As part of our partnership work with Devon and Cornwall Police we were joined yesterday by PC Waters and Skye, a passive drugs dog. This was a first visit of what will be a regular presence as part of a drive to raise awareness on substance misuse and the harm they can cause. Part of this work will be undertaking searches in Skye's role as a passive drugs dog and speaking to student groups.

Lunch Vouchers

We introduced a voucher system recently to ensure students are able to have a lunch even if their account is not in credit. It is important to note that this is not a 'free lunch'. If a voucher has been used the student's account will still be debited allowing their balance to become negative. If you are struggling financially and would like some support with school lunches, please get in touch with your child's house leader.

Year 9 Curriculum Choices

Thank you to everyone in Year 9 who returned their curriculum choices forms for today's deadline. Dr Kelly is now working through them and we will be in touch if any issues arise. Once finalised we will inform both students and parents of their final option choices.

Year 11

We are holding an information evening on Wednesday 28th January 2026 showcasing possible sixth form

options for our students. Please sign up using [this link](#) if you would like to attend. Launceston College, Tavistock College, Queen Elizabeth School, Exeter College and Duchy College will be in attendance to show what they have to offer to our Year 11 students for their next steps. The evening starts at 5pm on Wednesday 28th January and will finish by 6.30pm.

Principal's Breakfast:

Congratulations to the students listed below. To celebrate they are invited to have breakfast with the Principal next Friday.

Ash: Maisy Woodhouse - For fantastic effort and commitment to learning. Lots of positive feedback from teaching staff.

Beech: Merryn Philips - for her dedication to her learning and exceptional standards. Well done!

Oak: Jamie Todd - For making an excellent start to his new work experience.

Elm: Nina Adimuik - for having a great start to the new term and for consistently meeting expectations around college.

APPRENTICESHIP

exeter college

EXPO 2026

NATIONAL APPRENTICESHIP WEEK 2026

WHO IS THE EXPO FOR?

- Students wanting to explore apprenticeships.
- Individuals looking for a career change.
- Adults looking for a career with training.
- Parents/NOK wanting to learn more.

MEET EMPLOYERS

OFFERING 100+ VACANCIES

CONSTRUCTION HEALTH & CARE HOSPITALITY
SPORT
EDUCATION BUSINESS HAIRDRESSING
ENGINEERING DIGITAL & DATA

DISCOVER CAREER OPPORTUNITIES WITH BUSINESSES ACROSS THE SOUTH WEST!

EXETER COLLEGE SPORTS HALL
THURSDAY 12TH FEBRUARY
Victoria Yard, Off Queen Street,
Exeter, Devon, EX4 3SR
1 PM - 5 PM

FREE ENTRY
FREE ENTRY
FREE ENTRY

For more information, contact us:
01392 400800
apprentices@exe-coll.ac.uk

apprenticeships at
exeter college

Why Understanding VPNs Matters for Online Safety

With VPN use rapidly increasing among children and young people, it's becoming more important than ever for parents and educators to understand what these tools do—and the risks they may pose. While VPNs can legitimately protect privacy on public or unsecured Wi-Fi, they can also enable children to bypass safety filters, hide their online activity, and potentially access harmful or inappropriate content unnoticed.

This guide explores how VPNs work, the dangers linked to unregulated “free” VPN apps, and why they can undermine essential safeguarding tools used both at home and in school. By staying informed and having open conversations, we can help ensure that young people stay safe, responsible, and supported in the digital world.

At The National College, our WakeUpWednesday guides empower and equip parents, carers and educators with the confidence and practical skills to be able to have informed and age-appropriate conversations with children about online safety, mental health and wellbeing, and climate change. Formerly delivered by National Online Safety, these guides now address wider topics and themes. For further guides, hints and tips, please visit nationalcollege.com.

What Parents & Educators Need to Know about VPNs



WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

VPN use among UK teens is on the rise – with a noticeable uptick following the introduction of the Online Safety Act's age-verification rules. A VPN – or virtual private network – can boost online privacy by hiding internet activity and masking the user's location. But while this technology has legitimate uses, it can also allow children to bypass safety filters and access inappropriate content. This guide covers what parents and educators need to know about VPNs and how to keep young people safe.

BYPASSING RESTRICTIONS

VPNs are commonly used by young people to get around blocks on school networks or parental controls. This could include accessing social media, gaming sites or adult content that would otherwise be blocked out.

ACCESSING INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

When a VPN is active, content filters can no longer see which sites a child is visiting. This means they could access inappropriate content without detection. This also makes it harder to intervene when a child is engaging in risky behaviour, as it may be difficult to detect if it's happening.

REDUCED TRANSPARENCY

VPNs may make parental monitoring software ineffective, stopping parents from monitoring their child's activities, including their ability to identify potentially harmful or inappropriate content or online contact. This in turn may prevent parents from protecting their children from attempted sextortion or other online threats.

FALSE SENSE OF ANONYMITY

Children believing that VPNs make them 'invisible' online may seek to explore unsuitable (harmful) content, including content which might otherwise be blocked. This may result in them seeking and accessing increasingly inappropriate – or even harmful – content.

INCREASED EXPOSURE TO MALWARE

Many free VPN apps are poorly regulated and may carry hidden malware. Young people installing unvetted software could unknowingly open up their device (and home network) to spying, data theft, computer viruses, or even remote access by criminals.

RISK OF MALICIOUS VPN PROVIDERS

Although VPNs may increase privacy from network or service provider filtering and monitoring, this results in providing user and usage data to VPN providers. Some VPN providers may track user activity and sell that data to advertisers – or worse, malicious third parties. Not all VPNs are trustworthy.

EXPLAIN THE POSSIBLE BENEFITS OF VPNs

Explain how VPNs can help protect user data and therefore may be appropriate when using public or other unsecured Wi-Fi, or while dealing with sensitive corporate or personal data.

EXPLAIN THE RISKS OF VPNs

Discuss online risks, including harmful, disturbing, and unsuitable content, inform children about criminal contact, such as sextortion, and how VPNs may restrict adults from monitoring children's internet use and helping them avoid these risks.

FREE ISN'T FREE

Discuss the risk of 'free' VPNs and how they may add or use people's data which adds privacy risks. Additionally, discuss the potential for added malware in VPN downloads, and how these compromise devices and apps, leading to potential fraud or theft.

CHECK DEVICES FOR VPNs

VPNs can be installed as both apps and browser extensions, so regularly check these on the devices used by the young people in your care. If they have been using VPNs, discuss it, listen to their reasoning, and inform them of the associated risks. In some cases, it may be appropriate to block VPN use via parental controls and other settings.

DISCUSS ONLINE BOUNDARIES

Reinforce the importance of keeping safe online and how filtering and monitoring helps keep young people safe – explain this to them rather than just 'being strict' – encourage an open conversation around what they're accessing and why.

Meet Our Expert

This guide has been created in collaboration with Gary Henderson, director of IT at a large independent school in the UK, an ambassador for the Association of Network Managers in Education and the Vice Chair of the Independent Schools Council Digital Advisory Group.

WakeUpWednesday

The National College

✕ @wake_up_weds f /www.thenationalcollege @wake.up.wednesday @wake.up.weds

Users of this guide do so at their own discretion. No liability is entered into. Current as of the date of release: 20.08.2025

Please zoom in to view images in full

Year 11 English

Our Year 11 English students are working hard on their revision for the GCSEs which start in May. Independent revision is a core part of their preparation, and an excellent way to be productive at home is to search up past papers and practice them. English teachers are more than happy to mark work or give one to one advice, and don't forget the after school revision sessions which are currently on offer. The next couple of weeks include:

- Tuesday 27th January - Power and Conflict Poetry - War Poems with Miss Bray
- Tuesday 3rd February - Language Paper 1 Question 5 with Mrs Edwards
- Tuesday 10th February - Language Paper 2 Question 4 with Mrs Sizmur

As you can see from the beautiful description below, written in response to a Language Paper 1 Question 5, when talent and hard work combine, the outcome is exceptional. Well done to Inas Arafa for having written this as part of her revision, and to all of our Year 11 students working so hard at the moment.

A plethora of bucolic trees stood in calm defiance. The air hung low among ancient roots, heavy with a learned stillness that bred a stagnant atmosphere. Flushed, the mistlocked the forest floor, settling like a soft veil over the barren ground. Through the canopy, light filtered down into the understorey, dappling the layered trunks and reinforcing the forest's timeless presence. The forest felt watchful, shrouded in quiet layers of life, like a seed waiting beneath its soil.

Each tree was a spine in the forest's back - rigid and unyielding - holding the woodland upright beneath the weight of its own history. Every twisted branch and wavering leaf contributed to this silent structure. The bark became a manuscript of years, its surface etched with memory, quietly preserving what had passed beneath its shade. Like the pillars of a forgotten cathedral, the trees stood firm against the surrounding meadow, enforcing a divide between the cultivated countryside and the secluded woodland.

Light filtered, like glass through stained windows, onto demure leaves, washing the forest floor in a muted green glow. The dark, weary trunks and tangible, skeletal branches of the barren boscage lay in stark contrast to the ethereal rays of golden light; their sombre forms softened by the gentle illumination, dewing the atmosphere with tranquillity and leaving the forest floor serenely undisturbed. A delicate haze clung to the air, veiling the undergrowth in a soft glow, while fleeting glimmers danced on dewdrops, as if the forest itself breathed with quiet tranquillity. Darkness lingered at the edges, pressing gently against the light, its presence accentuating the indescent serenity that lay at the heart of the woodland.

Roots clutched the fern-laced earth like buried hands, snaring the tangled growth of stray weeds and tender shoots. Silence settled like a held breath, enhancing the humid decay of vegetation, leaving the moss-laden ground expired of life. Tiny tendrils of bracken quivered under a whisper of wind, and minute insects skittered through the organic debris, stirring the delicate scent of moist, ancient timber. Every step pressed into the soft, spongy undergrowth, releasing the faint, acidic tang of decomposition, a reminder of life endlessly recycling beneath the towering canopy.

Lingering, the forest watched through thousands of unmoving eyes, leaning in to listen rather than speak. Unspoken secrets overflowed like sap seeping from the bark, leaving the air thick with quiet curiosity. Undisputed among the landscape, the stillness of the woodland was deliberate, almost conscious, as if every leaf and shadow held its breath.

#THRIVEhive

Visit our THRIVEhive
A signposting hub
for advice
& support



www.okehamptoncollege.devon.sch.uk/Thrivehive/



CLICK
HERE

KEY DATES

- 23rd January 2026 - Year 9 Curriculum Choices Deadline
- 28th January 2026 - Year 11 Post-16 Support Evening
- 5th February 2026 - Year 10 Parents' Evening
- 16th February - 20th February 2026 - Half Term Holiday
- 23rd February 2026 - Year 11 Mock Exams start
- 25th February 2026 - Macbeth Performance Year 10 & 11
- 5th March 2026 - World Book Day
- 5th March 2026 - Year 7 Parents' Evening
- 19th March 2026 - Year 8 Parents' Evening

Please do get in touch if you have any questions.

Telephone: (01837) 650910

Email: ash@okehamptoncollege.devon.sch.uk

beech@okehamptoncollege.devon.sch.uk

elm@okehamptoncollege.devon.sch.uk

oak@okehamptoncollege.devon.sch.uk



CLICK
HERE

**Whisper Report**
Anonymous Reporting Form



PROBLEM? Whisper it!

If you have a problem or concern in school or at home, you can report it to a member of staff anonymously.

To: 07860 021 323
OKE123 [+ your message]

When To Report...

- You or a friend are being bullied
- You are concerned for a student's welfare
- A student, member of staff, or parent has behaved inappropriately
- You need to talk to someone about a problem
- Suggestion for changes or improvements in school

Report via SMS or visit:
<https://swgfl.org.uk/whisper/oke123/>

 Powered by Whisper



 **SWGfL**
Safe. Secure. Online.



CLICK
HERE

**Blue Sky**
FOSTERING

20 Years of Outstanding Care, Building Brighter Futures.

Changing lives through fostering

Do you have a spare bedroom and are able to provide a loving and stable home environment that will change the lives of children and young people in the area.

We need short term, long term and parent & child foster carers

Could you foster in Okehampton?

Call us on
0800 035 6499

www.blueskyfostering.co.uk



 **Ofsted**
Outstanding Provider

USEFUL LINKS

Term Dates



Letters Home



Enrichment Programme



Okehampton College