

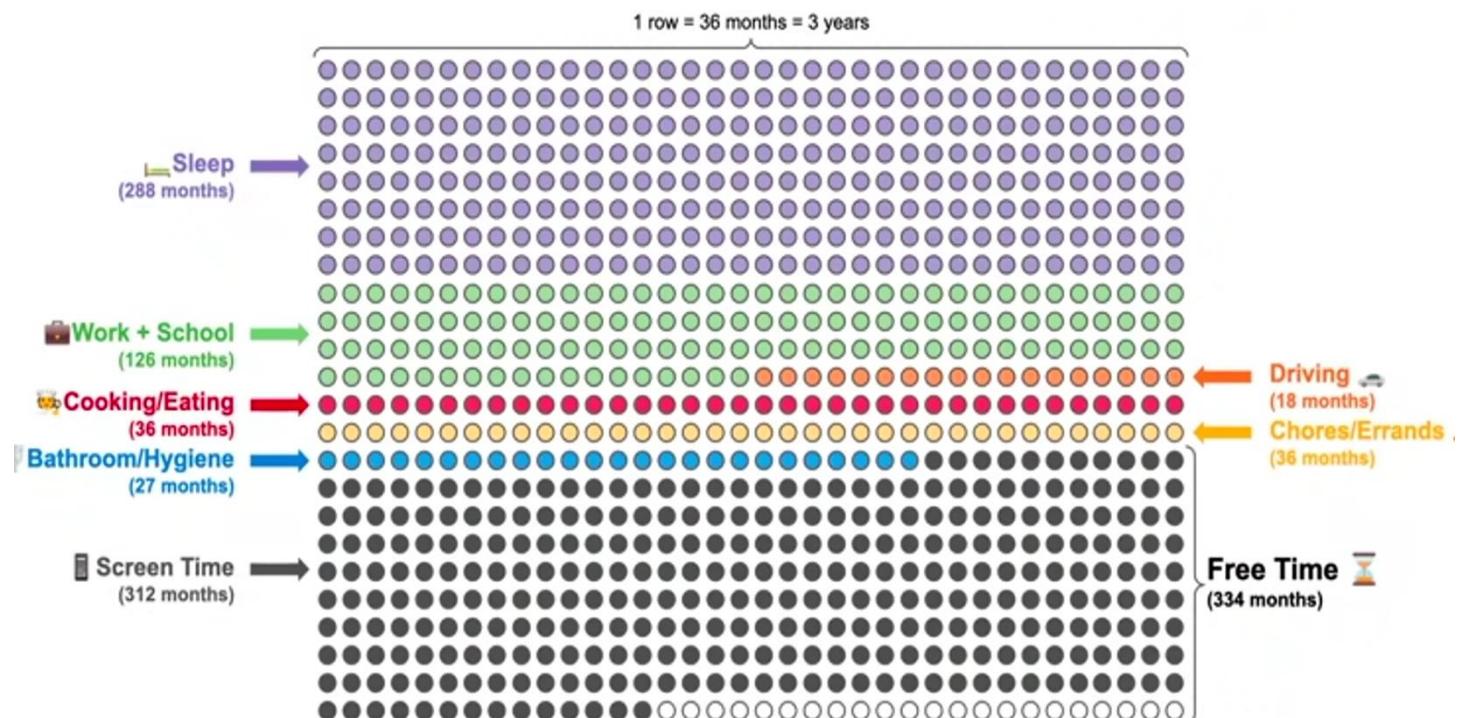


Dear Parents and Carers,

Happy new Year and welcome to the Spring Term! There's a Geography flavour to our learning this half term and children are already feeling proud of knowing counties, countries and capitals!

The first week back was a very productive one – our Bench of Glory on Monday morning was a celebration of January determination and positivity. Over the past term, I have had the pleasure of showing many prospective parents around the school and, without fail, every single one comments on how calm and focused the children are. We welcomed four new children this week and they have all settled brilliantly! It's all down to what we sometimes call the 'Willow Brook magic'!

During our very first assembly of the year, it seemed like the right time to talk about the gift of time. It's a precious commodity, even when you're very young! We looked at a visual map where each dot represented a month of life. The example below starts at school age and hopes you are blessed with a long life. We looked at the 'after school, work and the general necessities of life', and the fact that there'd be the equivalent of 334 months' worth of free time. These hours are for making your mark on the world, learning through play, and shaping who you want to be. As you get older, there's ambitions and bucket list adventures to work towards. However, based on current surveys of how children and young people use their free time, a stark 93% is, on average, destined to be spent attached to a screen. We wondered whether we'd look back on life with regret if that was the path we'd followed...



Willow Brook continues to be a phone free school, and for good reason. We continue to prioritise and promote real-world interaction, creative play, and removing digital distractions during the school day. We made New Year resolutions to 'seize the day' and be mindful that there's less scrolling and more ambitions and bucket list dreams.

There is no doubt that the internet provides a mine of information and an instant source of entertainment. The effects it can also have on aspects of safety, mental health, anxiety and brain development should always be considered with care. If your child has unrestricted access to the online world, we would also urge you to check out guidance and advice on sites such as www.internetmatters.org or www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/ both of which have excellent resources and guidance. At school this half term, our Computing lessons in every year group are focused on internet safety, leading up to Safer Internet Day on February 10th. There's plenty of positive advice and lots to learn.

In other news...



Back in October, Willow Brook promoted the BBC's 500 Words competition. Children wrote short stories and we awarded prizes in three age categories. Orla in Year 3 was a standout winner at Willow Brook, and together with Eleanor and Harriet from the same class, her entry was submitted to the BBC and made it through the first round. With an incredible 40,000 entries, that was quite an achievement! It is with huge pride that I can now share the news that Orla's story has been selected for the grand final!

This means that Orla gets to visit Windsor Castle to meet the Queen as one of 25 children in her age group. What an achievement! We will be keeping our fingers crossed that Orla's story makes it all the way to those prize-winning places – that would be the icing on a very special cake!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Mrs Ballard'.

DATES IN THE DIARY FOR THE TERM AHEAD

Date	Event	Details
22 nd January @ 4pm	Choir performance to parents	
26 th January	Young Voices Arena concert	
5 th February @ 6.15pm	Meeting for Parents and Carers of children attending the residential	
11 th – 12 th February	Mount Cook Residential experience for Years 3 and 4	
13 th February	Break up for half term.	
5 th March	World Book Day	
18 th & 19 th March	Parents Evening appointments	

Advice for parents of older primary aged children:

- **Enable access to devices with limited features** - Device usage at this age is best kept to devices with limited capability. This could include tablets without data and non-smart phones that only allow calls and texts.
- **Keep tech use visible in the home** - Try to keep tech use in shared family spaces or used with bedroom doors open. This will allow you to support your child and be more aware of what they are doing online.
- **Follow age ratings** – Apps, sites and games come with age ratings which are important to follow. Many popular Apps, sites and games are 13+ for good reason.
- **Use safety settings** – Explore the in-app and device safety settings with your child and check them regularly to make sure they are still in place.
- **Revisit parental controls** – As children grow up and need the internet more for schoolwork you may want to adjust your [parental controls](#). Keep checking these regularly to make sure they are in place.
- **Have regular safety conversations** – At this age online safety conversations should be happening regularly. Visit our [advice on talking to your child about online safety](#).
- **Build healthy habits** - Acknowledge the positives it brings as part of your safety conversations and agree rules and boundaries together as a family. This could be agreeing to charge devices away from beds to support sleep and not using devices during mealtimes to help take breaks.
- **Share youth facing help and support** - Make sure your child knows about services that can help like Childline. You could start by sharing the [online safety advice content](#) and the [Report Remove tool](#) created by the IWF and Childline.

Advice for parents of children with SEND:

- **Parents are best placed to know their child** – This is particularly true for children with SEND. We recommend parents consider the right age and stage for their child based off the level of support they need.
- **Make use of tech to support** – We know tech can be vital for communication, learning and sensory or emotional regulation for children with special educational needs. It's important that children continue to receive access that is right for them.
- **Explore all relevant strategies** – While age-based recommendations may not be appropriate they can instead be approached as a list of practical strategies for parents to explore.
- **Use resources tailored to children with SEND** – We worked with Ambitious about Autism to create [tailored advice and resources for parents](#) to use with their children.