

North Yorkshire Councillor report March 2024

High number of children secure first choice secondary school

More than 90 per cent of parents and carers in North Yorkshire secured their preferred secondary school for their child, continuing the county's high level of success in recent years.

A total of 90.11 per cent secured their first preference with 95.82 per cent of all families in the county who requested a school place for September 2024 receiving an offer from North Yorkshire Council for one of their top three preferences of secondary school.

This year, 6,130 North Yorkshire pupils are transferring to secondary school.

Last year a total of 89.84 per cent parents and carers in North Yorkshire gained their first preference. Meanwhile, nationally 82.6 per cent of applicants received an offer of their first choice school, down from 83.3 per cent a year earlier in 2022.

Within North Yorkshire, parents of Year 6 children can preference up to five schools on their common application form. This year, the majority of parents made full use of the opportunity to select up to five schools.

For children currently in Year 5 who are due to start secondary school in September 2025, parents and carers will be able to apply from September 12, 2024, and are urged to make use of the opportunity to list five school preferences on the form.

Anyone requiring more details can visit <https://www.northyorks.gov.uk/education-and-learning/school-admissions>

Join your local library in celebrating British Science Week

Space-themed quizzes, treasure hunts and a date with the popular code-a-pillar are among the events on offer at North Yorkshire libraries to celebrate the wonders of science.

This year marks the 30th anniversary of British Science Week, running from March 8 to 17, showcasing the STEM subjects of science, technology, engineering and maths.

The county's libraries are offering visitors the opportunity to engage with coding in a fun and interactive way and will showcase the digital kits available to use and borrow from branches.

Library staff are on hand to introduce young people to ‘micro:bits’, the pocket-sized computers designed to help with coding, which can be borrowed.

Visitors can take part in micro:bit hunts around the library, which will involve young people activating them to answer questions. There will also be a reaction game, where people must code the micro:bits and make a game pad to play against a partner.

Other challenges involve building a timer to be used for team challenges, building a buzzer to play a fastest-finger game, and building a DJ sampler to create soundtracks.

Young people can explore Junior Britannica, an online encyclopaedia with safe, fact-checked, age-appropriate content, to learn about the moon and take part in a quiz. They can borrow a Reading Sparks science kit to continue their journey.

Also, visitors can use the code-a-pillar, a caterpillar with a head unit and interactive segments, which has become a popular feature in libraries. It allows children to think independently, introducing pre-schoolers to sequencing and giving instructions.

For full details of the events on offer, visit North Yorkshire Council’s website at www.northyorks.gov.uk/BritishScienceWeek2024 For more information about the events or to book a place, contact your local library.

Easter holiday fun is ‘lifesaver’ for families facing adversity

FEAST, which this Easter takes place from March 25 to April 8, is coordinated by North Yorkshire Together. North Yorkshire Council receives funding for the programme from the Department for Education.

Open to all children and young people in North Yorkshire, those who are eligible can attend for free and also receive a hot meal or packed lunch.

Bookings are now open for the Easter holidays, with thousands of free places available across the county.

When eight-year-old Oliver Groom lost his father last year, it turned his world upside down.

For Oliver’s mother, Becky Groom, despite being estranged from her ex-partner, it also brought new challenges. Fortunately, Ms Groom found some support from FEAST, which provides free activities and healthy meals to eligible children and young people in North Yorkshire during the school holidays.

Ms Groom lives in Scarborough with her son and is the manager of a busy local pub. Oliver attends mainstream education but receives additional support from social services and Early Years teams, as he finds some social situations at school very challenging.

The school has worked closely with Ms Groom to ensure Oliver gets the support he needs and both agreed he would benefit from extracurricular activities during the school holidays.

Ms Groom said: "When Oliver's dad died, I lost all that support - he was an extra parent and always helped out in the holidays. Not only that, but the child maintenance payments which I had received from him stopped. It was really difficult."

With her finances now even more constrained, the cost of putting Oliver into holiday clubs was out of reach for Ms Groom. She added: "The amount it was going to cost me was so extreme, it just wasn't an option for us. I felt like I was up against a brick wall."

Fortunately, having learned of the family's situation, the school made them eligible for FEAST vouchers and Oliver chose to attend Nigel Carson Sports School over Christmas where he particularly liked playing football, dodgeball and cricket.

Ms Groom added: "Oliver loved going to Nigel Carson Sports School because there were so many different activities to take part in each day. The staff all understood what had happened and were fantastic in supporting Oliver - he knew who he could talk to if he needed someone. He came home every day in a great mood, and it was so reassuring to me to know he was well looked after."

Meanwhile, finding something to do with the children in the school holidays can be tricky for most families. What is more, keeping an autistic child occupied, alongside a sibling who is not neurodivergent, is a real challenge. Fortunately, Skipton resident Sarah Brearley found the perfect solution in FEAST.

Miss Brearley's 11-year-old son Teddy attends a special needs school to support him with his autism. When his after-school club shared information about FEAST activities during the holidays, Ms Brearley looked into it straight away.

She said: "With Teddy, keeping him in that daily routine of 9am to 3pm during the school holidays gives him some stability and rhythm, making the transition from and back to school less disruptive."

Miss Brearley signed Teddy up for Kanga Sports, in Skipton, where he has been able to take part in a range of fun activities with other children his age. The impact on Teddy was huge. She added: "For Teddy to go somewhere and feel entirely accepted, he could be himself and we didn't see any negative behaviours. The team

at Kanga were absolutely brilliant – they’re really geared up for active kids who want to run around all day.”

Meanwhile, Miss Brearley’s 10-year-old daughter, Nala, chose to go to Wild Explorers, near Skipton, where she took part in outdoor activities in the woods. Nala attends mainstream school, which Miss Brearley said played a big part in their decision to split the siblings up.

“The kids aren’t used to spending huge amounts of time together, and during the holidays if we don’t have activities planned, they fight,” she said. “This way, the kids were able to do something they both enjoyed, separately, and they got on so much better afterwards.

“They both came home more confident and keen to show each other what they had learned.”

North Yorkshire Together’s strategic director, Max May, said: “We’re grateful to the Brearleys for sharing their story, which highlights the profound impact that FEAST can have on families. We’re thrilled to see how FEAST is providing vital support to children like Teddy and Nala, offering them opportunities for growth, confidence and joy during the school holidays. As we approach Easter, we’re committed to reaching even more families across North Yorkshire, ensuring that as many children and young people as possible have the chance to participate and benefit from the great opportunities FEAST has to offer.”

Eligible families across North Yorkshire will receive information about FEAST and a voucher to book their free place via their school. More details are available at <https://northyorkshiretogether.co.uk/feast>