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For families with children from 0 to 11 • Summer 2026 • Issue 92 • FREE

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WITH LOWRY PRESENT

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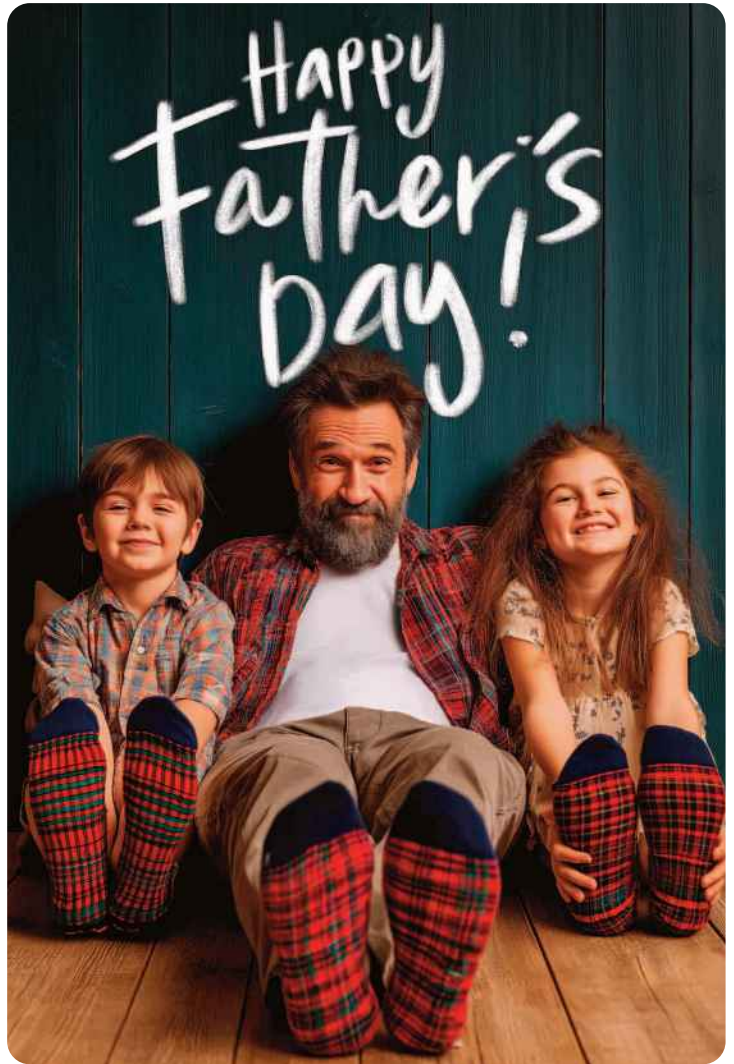

THE SUNDAY TIMES

SCHOOLS GUIDE
2026

INDEPENDENT SECONDARY
SCHOOL OF THE YEAR
NORTH WEST

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Issue 92 Summer 2026

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A word from the editor

Summer has finally arrived, and with it comes a packed new issue of M&D Magazine filled with ideas, inspiration, and plenty of family-focused reading for the months ahead.

Inside you'll find our Father's Day Gift Guide, a round-up of many Summer Holiday Camps to keep children entertained during the break, and a guide to some of the best family-friendly Summer Festivals taking place locally.

Education is also in the spotlight this issue, from the exciting news about Bowdon Preparatory School going co-ed to a thought-provoking article from a maths tutor asking whether today's children are truly prepared for a future shaped by artificial intelligence.

We also explore the sensitive subject of parental responsibilities after separation, looking at how both the law and society continue to view parenting roles and obligations in modern family life.

Whether you're planning days out, summer activities, or just looking for something interesting to dip into in the sunshine, we hope you enjoy this issue - and as always, check out our website for regular updates. *Zoe x*

The M&D Out and About listings are always carefully selected to offer our readers useful information. Although every effort is made to ensure that information is correct M&D cannot be held liable for any errors or omissions. We strongly advise you to check details with the event organisers.

Kings of Summer! Action-packed fun back in Cheadle Hulme



Kings Camps are returning to Cheadle Hulme School this summer, offering sports and activity camps for children and teenagers aged 5–17.

Running from 27 July to 21 August, the Multi Active programme for 5–14 year olds features more than 30 sports and activities across the week, with children grouped by age. Activities include football, hockey, lacrosse, swimming and benchball, alongside themed sessions such as the popular “Wet Wednesday”, a long-standing favourite with returning campers.

Flexible booking options are available, with families able to choose three, four or five-day weeks, and extended hours running from 8.15am–5.30pm to support working parents during the summer holidays.

For older teens aged 15–17, the Rookie Academy focuses on developing confidence, leadership and teamwork skills through sport and practical activities. It is aimed at those interested in coaching, childcare or gaining experience working with younger children.

Kings Camps is part of the not-for-profit Kings Active Foundation, a UK registered charity which has run camps across the UK since 1991. Its aim is to help children stay active, have fun and learn together, while its Supporting Families programme provides subsidised places for those facing challenging circumstances.

The organisation also offers staged payment options and allows families to change booking dates free of charge. According to Kings Camps, all staff are fully trained and hold enhanced DBS checks; childcare vouchers as well as the Government Tax-Free Childcare Scheme can be used towards bookings.

More information is available at kingscamps.org/cheadle



activities

Don't put your foot in it! *by Paul Wojnicki*

It's that time of year again, when you start thinking of something more imaginative than socks for Father's Day. Sure, he'll tell you he doesn't want anything, but secretly he's hoping for more than a novelty mug, so check out this handy guide to help you pick something for the special man in your life.



For the dad who loves football: *The Dare Skywalk*

Last year, I encouraged you to throw your husband off the top of Anfield Stadium, on the Anfield Abseil. If dad enjoyed that caper and fancies a visit to what is widely regarded as the best club football stadium in the UK, why not treat him to a visit to the Dare Skywalk at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium?

Tottenham Hotspur might not be doing particularly well in the Premier League this year, by the time this is printed, they might have been relegated for the first time in almost 100 years. Their stadium though, and the Dare Skywalk, will always be a premier experiences, whether the team is or not.

The Dare Skywalk sees visitors fitted with safety harnesses by a climb leader, then clipped into a rail and scaling the exterior of the stadium on an exposed walkway, with panoramic views of London's skyline. At the summit, climbers walk along a glass platform – directly above the stadium – toward Tottenham's iconic golden cockerel.

If – like me – you're prone to fits of vertigo, then being the last person in the group is probably a good idea at this point, as participants spend several minutes on a narrow walkway overhanging the pitch, listening to tales about the stadium from the guide. Those at the rear won't feel quite as exposed on the walkway during this talk.

For the truly brave, the Dare Skywalk Edge adds an extra thrill: a controlled descent over the side of the stadium from 42 metres high.

Bookings can be made via [tottenhamhotspur.com](https://www.tottenhamhotspur.com). Look out for deals in the school holidays, when kids often go for free when accompanying an adult.

For the dad who loves great coffee: *The Wacaco Pixapresso*

I've been a huge fan of Wacaco's devices for a while now and still have my Nanopresso machine tucked under my desk at work, so I can enjoy perfect hand-pressed espresso coffee whenever I'm in the office without having to fork out a fortune at the local coffee shop.

While the Nanopresso is still as impressive as it was when I got mine all those years ago, Wacaco have built on their range and have recently added a fully electric, portable espresso machine – the Pixapresso. Unlike the Nanopresso and their other earlier portable devices, the Pixapresso features a built-in heating system, allowing users to brew coffee from cold water without needing an external kettle, making it ideal for travelling or camping, as well as making the perfect brew at the office.

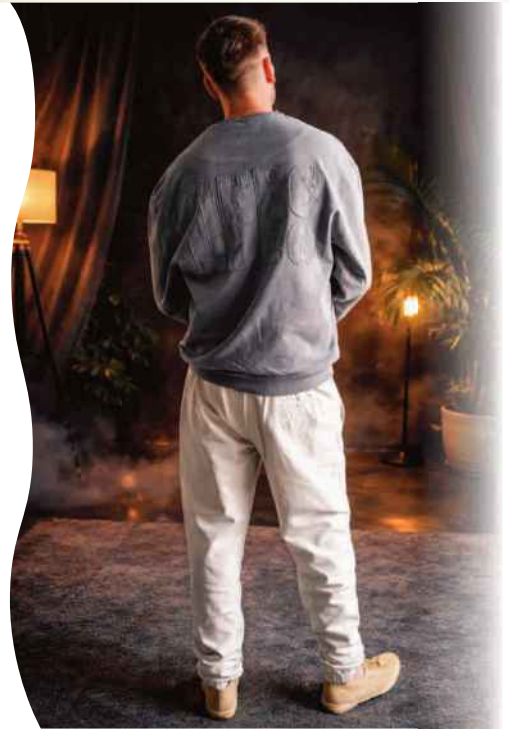
Simply charge the Pixapresso via a USB-C cable and you'll have enough power to make five double espressos, which should be enough to get most folks through the day. The powerful 20-bar pressure system ensures each shot of Dad's favourite java will have the perfect crema sitting on top. The Pixapresso is also compatible with Nespresso capsules, as well as ground coffee, adding to its versatility and convenience. In fact, it's entirely possible to replace your bulky pod machine with this handy little gadget and have the option of taking it with you when you're out of the house at the same time.



You'll find the Pixapresso, and other great hand-held coffee makers at [wacaco.com](https://www.wacaco.com)

For the dad who values downtime: *Premium loungewear*

All week it's structure, deadlines, and dressing the part for the office. But the weekend – that's Dad's reset, when he gets to swap sharp lines for soft cotton, trade tight collars for relaxed fits, and substitute pressure for comfort.



This is where quality loungewear comes in – not just as something he wears, but as a reflection of how he feels and moves. Quality loungewear isn't lazy, it's every bit as intentional as it is comfortable. Whether he's taking the dog for a walk, taking the kids to the park or just staying in. Loungewear is dad's off-duty uniform, built for comfort, made for real life, and worn his way.

Explore the full range at [lifeco.clothing](https://www.lifeco.clothing)

For the practical dad: Power him up with a Jackery portable power device

Skip the predictable gifts this Father's Day and give the practical dad something he'll actually use. Whether he's into camping, road trips, DIY projects, or just being prepared, portable power is a game-changer, especially in these uncertain times. Portable power devices, like those from industry-leading brand Jackery, make it easy to keep everything charged wherever he goes – from phones and laptops to tools and small appliances. They are also useful as back-up power for any emergencies. Portable power devices are a good way of saving money if you have an EV tariff and get cheaper electricity at night. Perfect for dads who are always on the move, or who just like to be ready for anything.

Find the full range on [uk.jackery.com](https://www.uk.jackery.com)



Flexible physiotherapy for children in Greater Manchester



“Every child deserves access to high quality physiotherapy that is tailored to their individual needs,” Sophie says, pointing to what she sees as an ongoing challenge in ensuring timely and consistent support for children requiring intervention.

The service has been developed with flexibility as a central feature, offering appointments outside of traditional clinical environments. This approach, Sophie suggests, can make it easier for children to engage with therapy and for parents to incorporate recommended strategies into daily routines.

MCP can also work alongside NHS services rather than replacing them. Sophie, who previously worked within the NHS, highlights the role of coordinated care in improving outcomes. ‘Collaborative working helps maximise outcomes for the child,’ she says, noting that some families seek additional input where waiting times or service limitations affect access.

The model places particular emphasis on the role of parents and carers, not only as participants in sessions but as contributors to ongoing progress at home. ‘Parents and carers play a vital role in a child’s development,’ Sophie explains, adding that guidance and practical strategies form a key part of the support offered.

While services like MCP sit within a growing private healthcare sector, they also reflect broader pressures on paediatric services and the demand for more adaptable models of care. For families, the availability



of flexible physiotherapy options may offer an alternative route to consistent support, particularly during early developmental stages.

Further information

For details visit:

www.manchesterchildrensphysiotherapy.co.uk

Email:

sophie@manchesterchildrensphysiotherapy.co.uk

Telephone: 07887 777 894



MCP is a children’s physiotherapy service based in Sale, supporting children and families through consistent care, practical support, and a focus on individual progress.

Manchester Children’s Physiotherapy (MCP) provides services for children from birth to 16 years old, working with a range of needs including developmental delay, neurological conditions, orthopaedic issues and congenital disorders. The service operates across clinic, home, nursery and school settings, reflecting what paediatric physiotherapist Sophie Johnson, who runs the clinic, describes as a need for care that fits around family life.

out and about

THOMAS & FRIENDS
DAY OUT WITH THOMAS

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18 - 19 July 2026

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With special guest
Matt Baker

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Guide to events

Holiday Camps, Clubs and Classes

27 - 31 July

RNCM Young Strings Summer School

The Summer School gives string players between 6-13 years a fantastic opportunity to develop their musical, creative and performance skills in a fun and friendly environment. Daily activities are led by a team of experienced RNCM tutors and include string orchestra, chamber music, Dalcroze Eurhythmics, choir and some creative activities.

The children are grouped according to age and experience and take part in large ensembles, chamber groups, singing, movement and improvisation/ composition activities. There are plenty of different activities throughout the day, and ample opportunities to enjoy break times outside in the garden at this lovely quiet school. The week culminates in a concert performance. Manchester High School for Girls, Grangethorpe Road, Manchester, M14 6HS www.rncm.ac.uk

28 - 31 July

Theatre Camp - Littlevoices

Little Voices are open to all children aged 5-15 years, not just Little Voices pupils! No previous drama or singing experience is needed.

Every child is seen, heard, and valued - whether they're naturally outgoing or a little shy - they will have the chance to shine in front of a supportive audience of family and friends.

Ivy Manchester Church, 97 Barlow Moor Rd Didsbury, Manchester M20 2GP, UK www.littlevoices.org.uk

27 - 31 July; 3 - 7 August

Footlights theatre - Didsbury Holiday School

10 - 14 August; 17 - 21 August

Footlights theatre - Macclesfield Holiday School

A full week of Acting Singing and Dance. Each day, children take part in fun, structured performing arts sessions in acting, singing and dance, led by a professional team.

All staff are fully DBS-checked and trained. Most holiday weeks end with an informal performance, giving families the chance to celebrate what the children have been working on together.

Didsbury Holiday Club, The Barlow RC High School, Parris Wood Road, Manchester M20 6BX
Macclesfield Holiday Club, All Hallows Catholic College, Brooklands Av., Macclesfield SK11 8LB www.footlightstheatre.co.uk

27 July - 28 August

Summer Holiday Club - St John's RC Primary

Extended outdoor adventures for children aged 3-11 in a screen-free environment at "We Are Adventurers" holiday club, where children can steadily develop valuable skills, boosting their confidence while creating opportunities for new friendships.

Children stay with their age-appropriate 'tribe' enjoying activities like archery, survival skills, shelters, fire, water, bushcraft, campfire cookery, musical forest, navigation, trees or bug hunting - the list goes on!

The school holiday club site is managed by a qualified forest school leader or senior instructor who is part of the core team at We Are Adventurers. All team is paediatric first aid

trained and experienced at delivering all aspects of the adventure programme. The ratio of leader to children differs depending on the risk assessment of each of the activities.

St John's RC Primary School
Longford Road, Chorlton M21 9SN
www.weareadventurers.co.uk

20 July - 28 August

Rocket Holiday Camp at Chorlton

MULTI-SPORTS HOLIDAY CLUB

Football | Basketball | Dodgeball | Cricket | Hockey | Netball | Tennis | Badminton | Volleyball | Benchball | Ninja Kids | Obstacle Courses | Captcha the Flag

STAGE: A PERFORMING ARTS HOLIDAY CLUB
Gymnastics | Drama | Dance | Cheerleading | Musical Theatre | Singing | Arts and Crafts

SOLVE: A MULTI-ACTIVITY HOLIDAY CLUB
Problem Solvings Games | Treasure Hunts | Fort Buildings | Quizzes | Nature Trails | Team Building Games | Arts and Crafts | Letter and Number Games | Orienteering

All children are free to swap between the 3 areas throughout the day.

The Sports Hall, 451 Mauldeth Rd W
Manchester M21 7SX
www.rocketholidaycamps.co.uk

27 July - 28 August

Junior Sport Stars activity camps

A fun-filled, action-packed experience for children with a variety of structured sports coaching and child-led activities to choose from each session. Each day starts with fun warm up games to prepare the children for the day ahead and, most importantly, to get to know each other and the coaching team. Children then break into groups depending on what they want to do. There are three groups to choose from: Soccer Stars, Sport Stars, or Create & Explore Crew.

Lane End Primary School, Ramillies Avenue
Cheadle Hulme Stockport SK8 7AL
Tithe Barn Primary School
Mauldeth Road Heaton Moor Stockport SK4 3NG
www.juniorsportstars.co.uk

20 July - 22 August

Kings Camps at Bridgewater School

Looking for a fun, active way to keep your kids happy during the holidays?

Kings Camps run school holiday camps for 5-17 year olds, packed with sports, games and activities to keep children moving, making friends and having a blast. The programme includes over 30 activities - plus fun themed days like Wet Wednesday and the big end-of-week event, the Kings Games (parents are invited too!). Facilities at this camp include; Sports Hall, Activity Rooms, Outdoor Area.

The Multi Active Programme is designed to bring out the best in every child, regardless of their ability, through a wide range of active games and sports.

Bridgewater School, Drywood Hall, Worsley Road Worsley, Manchester, M28 2WQ
www.kingscamps.org



27 July - 28 August

Super Stars Holiday Club

Each holiday club week is themed in advance so your child can either attend full time or pick and choose their sessions depending on the daily activities.

The Holiday Club childcare runs between the hours of 9 am and 5 pm during most school holidays. The club cater for children from the ages of 2 years to 11 years old and offer nutritious snacks throughout the day. The staff is first aid trained.

All children bring their own packed lunch if staying for the full day.

Hart House, 234 Market Street, Droylsden, Manchester M43 7AZ www.superstarsclubs.co.uk

27 July - 21 August

Superstarscamps

Providing fun and engaging sports sessions throughout the North West since 2006, Superstars offers Multisports, Football & Dance holiday camps for children aged 5-14.

Superstars also offers Specialist Activities like Zorbs, Inflatable Obstacle Course, Laser Tag, Fashion Camp, Woodwork Camp, Lego Camp, etc.

July 27 - July 31

Multi-Sports, Football, Dance, Lego, Knitting (KS1), Crafts (KS1/KS2)

Aug 3 - Aug 7

Multi-Sports, Textile Camp, Laser Tag, Zorbs, Archery Tag

Aug 10 - Aug 14

Multi-Sports, Woodwork, Crochet, Jewellery Making, Silent Disco

Aug 17 - Aug 21

Multi-Sports, Fashion Camp, Drone Soccer, Coding

Navigation Primary School, Hawarden Rd
Altrincham WA14 1NG
www.superstars.classforkids.io

27 July - 28 August

LSC (Little Sports Coaching) Multi-Activity Holiday Club

Each day, your children will take part in each of the activity programmes: Active, Cognitive, Creative and Sportive.

Active: Engaging, fun, action-packed physical activities, games and challenges.

Cognitive: Explore and grow thinking skills with stimulating, problem-solving activities.

Creative: Delve into an exciting range of imaginative and creative arts & crafts.

Sportive: Participate in a range of sports to develop technique, teamwork and sportsmanship.

Thorn Grove Primary School, Woodstock Ave
Cheadle Hulme, Cheadle SK8 7LD
www.wearelsc.co.uk

27 July - 28 August

Fun Fest Bramhall

13 July - 21 August

Fun Fest Altrincham

Children can choose from a menu of over 50 different activities including Pottery, Messy Mayhem, Beauty School, Football, Cupcake Heaven, Mad Science, Harry Potter experience, Mission Impossible and many seasonal activities. There really is something for everyone!

Fun Fest Holiday Clubs are Ofsted registered for children from 3 years old. Early years children are allocated their own key

workers which helps them to feel secure. Queensgate Primary School, Albany Road Bramhall, Stockport SK7 1NE
Altrincham Preparatory School for Boys
Marlborough Road Altrincham WA14 2RR
www.fun-fest.co.uk

20 July - 28 August

Venture Out Holiday Club

A week-full of activities!

Drop off and pick up around work times. It's completely outdoors, regardless of the weather. Children can come for a day, a week, multiple weeks or parts of different weeks.

It is smaller, friendlier club - children are grouped generally by age.

A programme of activities that are a mixture of team building, nature handicrafts, outdoor sports, bushcraft, forest school, nature games, canoe trips.

The Club's activities, timetable, staffing and supervision are especially designed to promote sociability, confidence and manage their energy levels and welfare.

Burnage Rugby Club, Battersea Road, Heaton Mersey, Stockport, SK4 3EA
www.venture-out.co.uk

3 - 7 August - Stockport, 10 - 14 - Didsbury

Show in a Week

Have fun, learn new skills and make new friends in Stagecoach Holiday Workshop - a show in a week! The workshop culminates in a fully costumed performance on the last day for friends and family to attend.

For children aged 5-18:

St Simon's Primary, Bosden Avenue Hazelgrove, Stockport, Cheshire SK7

For children aged 6 - 17:

Chorlton High School South, 451 Mauldeth Road West Chorlton, Manchester M21 7SX
www.stagecoach.co.uk

12-17 August part 1, 17-22 August part 2

Chetham's Piano Summer School - Junior Piano Courses

Chetham's International Piano Summer School (CIPSS) is 25 years old in 2026 and is set to continue its legacy, with lots of celebrations and surprises. An extraordinary programme filled with world-class recitals at Stoller Hall, alongside engaging lectures, open lessons, and enriching opportunities to explore composition, theory, analysis, jazz, improvisation, harpsichord, organ, and of course, solo piano. Set within the impressive and secure campus of the UK's largest specialist music school, this inspiring annual event boasts exceptional facilities and welcomes world-renowned and legendary musicians into the heart of Manchester.

CIPSS is open to pianists of all ages and abilities. Please note that participants under 18 must be accompanied by an adult chaperone - non-resident chaperones attend free of charge.

Chetham's School of Music, Long Millgate, Manchester M3 1SB
www.pianosummerschool.com

17 August - 28 August

Cheshire forest school

A day spent in the woodland with plenty of free play, activities and fun!

There will be opportunities to build dens, make mud pies, bug hunt, relax in hammocks and experience mindfulness in nature. There will be different adult led nature craft activities on offer throughout the day and the children will be able to access rope swings, hammocks, ninja and

Guide to events

straplines and other play areas - spending time with friends in a safe and natural space with the support of the Forest School Team.

On arrival at base-camp, there is a full site tour, explanation of the safety rules and the day routine. This is usually followed by a team game/challenge such as a hide and seek game or a team building exercise.

There is a break for a morning snack and for lunch; and a campfire to cook a snack in the afternoon. The children will need a packed lunch, snacks and a refillable water bottle. The setting is NUT FREE.

Cheshire Forest School, Novascotia Lane, Whitegate, Northwich, CW8 2DD
www.cheshireforestschool.co.uk

28 July - 20 August

Depot climbing Holiday Club

A fun-filled 3.5 hours of climbing-related activities that are rooted in developing balance, agility, teamwork, and confidence. Lunch, refreshments, and any equipment necessary are provided. Each session has up to 16 participants with 2 fully qualified, DBS checked & NSPCC trained instructors providing constant supervision, instruction, and care.

The session begins with an introduction and shoe fitting before icebreakers and team-building exercises.

A quick refreshment and toilet break precedes a fun-filled climbing session around the centre where participants will be coached through specific movements in game-orientated activities. Breaking for another drink and comfort break, participants will then be offered the option of further climbing activities, games, and arts and crafts, before ending the session with lunch. Unit N1/N2 Mosley Road, Central Park Estate, Trafford Park, Manchester M17 1PG
www.depotclimbing.co.uk

3 - 21 August

Football Fun Camp - Didsbury High School

The Football Fun Factory was created to provide incredible childhood football experiences for boys and girls of all ages and ability levels. The camp is all about creating an environment where children can express themselves, play, make friends and have fun!

Each day will include traditional football activities, inflatable experiences and plenty of time will be devoted to football matches.

Didsbury High School, 4 The Avenue, Didsbury, Manchester M20 2ET
www.thefootballfunfactory.co.uk

27-31 July, 3-7 August

SciTech

An immersive summer programme of science and technology is run twice, allowing you to choose between two available weeks. During your chosen week, every child will experience each of the following five subjects: energy, structures, chemistry, ophthalmics, and forensics. The young scientists are split into age groups (5-14 years) so the experiments and teaching can be tailored to their specific ability level. This ensures the learning experience is just right for every child.

Baguley Hall School, Ackworth Road, Manchester, M23 1LB
www.scitech.co.uk



Summer Festival Fever

13 June 11:00 - 16:30

Universally Manchester Festival - a community day for all!

The University of Manchester is holding a jam-packed day of inspiring Bee Curious talks, hands on science activities, creative sessions, performances, tours, and the chance to meet with the uni staff, students and community partners! From poetry to physics, music to medicine, and computing to creative writing, there's loads to discover and do - activities on offer for all ages. The University of Manchester, Oxford Rd., Manchester M13 9PL
www.universallymanchester.com

20 June 10:00am to 5:00pm

Macclesfield Festival and Parade Day

There will be plenty of returning favourites including Aerial Circus from Lets Circus, Buttonholes from Homestead Grown and the Choose Macc Park Green Party and a whole host of new workshops, gigs, exhibitions and more! The Silk Museum will be acting as a Wellness Hub with sensory spaces, writing workshops, music performances and sunflower planting. A range of activities over the day including crafting with Artspace, caricatures, hanky printing and creative brick building will be held in the Market Hall. Make your way to Market Place for songs from the Voice Box Music throughout the day and a special performance from Magic Voices Choir. While there keep your energy up with a visit to one of the street food vendors. The Community Parade will be heading off from the Town Hall at 11am
Macclesfield Town Centre
www.macclesfield-tc.gov.uk

20 June 11:00 - 19:00

Bramhall Summer Festival

The Bramhall Together Trust promises an unforgettable experience for all ages! The leafy village of Bramhall will come alive

with a spectacular day filled with thrilling entertainment, mouth-watering food and drinks, and an atmosphere like no other. This year's festival will offer a blend of mischievous fun, magical moments, markets, food and drink stalls and memorable performances. Bramhall Village, Bramhall, SK7 1AW
www.facebook.com/bramhalltogethertrust

27 June

Happy Radio in the Park



Brand new one-day festival promises fantastic music and entertainment for all the family headlined by award-winning tributes to artists like Harry Styles, Benson Boone, Whitney Houston and Duran Duran as well as local performers and community groups. The event will also feature family attractions, traditional fun-fair rides, and local food and drink such as Wood Fire Smoke Restaurant and many more, with pop-up stalls which will champion all the amazing things Wilmslow has to offer. The Carnival Fields, 80 Altrincham Road, Wilmslow SK9 5NG
<https://happywilmslow.com>

27 - 28 June

Altrincham Festival

This free community event has been running for nearly 50 years. It's perfect for families and locals wanting that traditional carnival atmosphere.

The Grand Parade: Starts Saturday at 11:00 AM on St Margaret's Road. It winds through the town centre, goes through Timperley Village, and finishes at the festival fields. The Showground: Located at Beech Fields (Grange Avenue). A full stage line-up with choirs and local bands, a funfair, dog shows, and plenty of stalls. 2 Vaughan Road, Altrincham, WA14 5UY
www.facebook.com/Altrincham.Festival

June 27 - July 5

Didsbury Arts Festival (DAF)

Didsbury Arts Festival (DAF) is an exciting contemporary festival of art and creativity, working with local, national and international artists. Join for a rich programme of music, film, theatre, dance, visual art, spoken word and more - delivered through events, performances, workshops, exhibitions, immersive experiences and community engagement.

This year's theme is "Visible/Invisible", focusing on uncovering hidden stories and shining a light on often-overlooked community elements. Expect a massive opening in Fletcher Moss Park (June 27) and the "Big Burnage Parade" (July 5). The program includes contemporary dance, music, spoken word, and workshops across various village venues.

Didsbury, Manchester M20
www.didsburyartsfestival.org

11 July

Manchester Brick Festival!

A LEGO fan event dedicated to all things brick! This will be a great day for families, collectors, adult builders and every other kind of LEGO fan. With lots to see and do including speed building competitions, large scale displays, activities, traders selling loose bricks, new LEGO sets, retired LEGO sets, minifigures and accessories plus a dedicated building area. Established in 2018, this celebration of all things LEGO is open to fans of all ages
Sugden Sports Centre, Manchester Metropolitan University, 114 Grosvenor St, Manchester M1 7HL
www.brickfestivalevents.com

Jason Donovan to star in High School Musical at The Lowry



Jason Donovan is set to take to the stage at The Lowry, Salford, this summer, starring as Coach Bolton in a new production of Disney's High School Musical.

The show, which marks the 20th anniversary of the hit film, runs from 22 August to 19 September 2026. It will see The Lyric Theatre transformed into an immersive East High basketball court, complete with on-stage seating and an extended stage designed to place audiences right in the heart of the action.

Donovan joins a cast including Tobias Turley as Troy, Leonor Correia as Gabriella, Caitlin Tipping as Sharpay and Luke Bayer as Ryan, with original film star Kaycee Stroh also appearing as Ms Darbus.

The production features all the well-known songs

from the movie, including Breaking Free, We're All In This Together, Get'cha Head in the Game and Stick to the Status Quo.

Best known to many as Scott Robinson in Neighbours, Donovan became one of the UK's biggest pop stars in the late 1980s, scoring hits such as Especially For You with Kylie Minogue and Any Dream Will Do. His extensive stage career includes leading roles in Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat, Priscilla Queen of the Desert and The Rocky Horror Show.

Donovan said, "I'm delighted to be joining this new reimagined High School Musical theatrical experience 20 years on from when I first discovered the film."

The production is co-directed by Joseph Houston and William Whelton, and produced by Hope Mill Theatre.

The ultimate day out for dogs - and their humans

out and about



Dog lovers, mark your calendars - DogFest is back, and it's shaping up to be one of the most tail-wagging weekends of the summer. Packed with activities, entertainment and plenty of treats for both humans and hounds, this much-loved festival is a celebration of everything we adore about our four-legged friends.

Whether your pup is a champion sprinter, a social butterfly or simply happiest rolling around in the grass, there's something for every canine personality. One of the biggest draws is the ever-popular Breed Meet-Ups, where dogs and owners can mingle with fellow fans of their favourite breeds. Expect lots of wagging tails, excited sniffing and countless photo opportunities.

For dogs who enjoy a challenge, the Dogstacle Course, Hay Bale Hurdles and Dog Agility Courses

promise plenty of energetic fun. Competitive canines can race for glory in the DogFest Dash, while water-loving pups can make a splash in the Dog Diving area - whether they're seasoned swimmers or brave beginners testing the water for the first time.

If your dog's idea of heaven involves chaos and flying paws, the Giant Ball Pit is guaranteed to be a hit. Meanwhile, owners looking for a calmer moment can head to the wonderfully named Paws & Peace Meadow, where shaded seating and even "doga"

sessions offer a chance to relax and unwind together. There's far more than just dog activities on offer too. Throughout the weekend, visitors can browse shopping stalls, enjoy live entertainment, listen to expert talks and pick up useful training tips. Add in plenty of food and drink options, and it becomes a full day out for the whole family.

For those wanting an extra touch of comfort, DogFest Plus tickets offer fast-track entry, premium parking and access to the exclusive Plus Paddock complete with covered seating, private toilets and a dedicated bar. Four-legged VIPs will also receive a special goodie bag packed with treats, including a bandana, doggy ice cream and a chew toy.

Tickets start from £27.50 and must be booked in advance via DogFest - because with this much fun on offer, there won't be any tickets left at the gate.



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PARENT20

A soaring family adventure beyond comfort zones *by Peter Matthews*



Watching your children step outside their comfort zone is one of the most rewarding parts of parenting, and our visit to iFLY, at the Snow Centre, Trafford, delivered exactly that. I flew with my daughter Saffy (7), and my son Eric (4), and it turned into far more than just a fun activity. It became a confidence-building experience we are still talking about days later.

What makes indoor skydiving so different from other activities children might try is that it genuinely feels extraordinary. This is not another soft play centre or theme park ride where children sit passively and watch the excitement happen around them. Indoor skydiving asks them to participate, trust themselves and try something completely new. Both children are too young to jump out of a plane

just yet, but iFLY gave them the closest thing possible, in an environment designed entirely around safety, confidence and fun. From the moment the children put on their flight suits, helmets and ear plugs, the whole experience felt exciting and immersive. For Eric especially, every stage felt like an adventure and a "first".

Naturally, as a parent, safety was my biggest consideration. One of the

most reassuring aspects of the experience was how clearly iFLY lives its SOAR values, particularly starting with S for "Safety First". Every stage was carefully explained, and the instructor remained alongside the children throughout. Our instructor, Tedd, was exceptional. Calm, encouraging and clearly experienced, he guided us every step of the way and instinctively understood how to build the children's confidence.

Eric was a bit nervous at the start, especially seeing the tunnel and other people flying. Tedd handled this brilliantly. Rather than allowing him time to overthink things, he wisely took Eric up high early in the session before he could become anxious watching others. That immediate success completely transformed his confidence, and afterwards he could not stop smiling.

Saffy absolutely loved it too, declaring afterwards that it was "better than a roller coaster", which, in seven-year-old terms, is basically a Michelin star review.

Most importantly, the experience created real conversations afterwards

over our debrief pizzas. The children talked about bravery, trying new things and overcoming nerves. For parents wanting to help their children grow in confidence and resilience, indoor skydiving is far more than just an activity, it is an experience that stays with them.

If you would like to find out more about this family's flying adventure, visit mums-dads.co.uk to read the full story from their visit, including extra highlights, tips and behind-the-scenes moments.



Growing up with intelligent technology

Image: FlatIcon.com



**AI is here:
the education
wake-up call**

The time of Artificial Intelligence is upon us. Are we ready? And more importantly - are our digitally savvy children ready for this brave new world?

We asked Dr Oksana Kiseleva, a regular contributor to M&D Magazine and a maths tutor with 15 years of experience. She began teaching maths in order to help her own children, who are now building successful careers in computing and engineering. What started as a parenting endeavour has grown into a successful tutoring model rooted in conceptual understanding. Oksana believes in teaching maths through deep thinking rather than rote learning. And she thinks the stakes are getting serious.

"Day after day, AI becomes increasingly powerful. A long list of jobs is about to become obsolete! Yet we are still not preparing our children well for the future world of AI."

"It is worrying that maths teaching in schools is still largely based on memorising facts and learning calculation techniques. It feels like we're stuck in Victorian times - rote learning and mechanical arithmetic - fixated on skills AI can perform instantly!"

"It's time to wake up. We need to teach our children reasoning, problem-solving, and analytical thinking. So, get your best thinking hat on and let's start solving problems! It's us humans vs AI. We can't lose this battle!"

Dr Oksana Kiseleva runs a page called Learning Math Together on our website. Scan this QR code to read her articles and find out more about her method of teaching.



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Bowdon Prep's new chapter - the move to co-education



Bowdon Preparatory School is entering a significant new phase in its history as it joins the internationally respected Repton family of schools and begins a carefully phased move towards co-education from September 2026.

Long recognised for its nurturing environment, small class sizes and strong academic foundations, Bowdon Prep has built a reputation for offering children individual attention within a close-knit and supportive community. Families have long valued the school's emphasis on confidence, curiosity and character development alongside academic achievement.

Now, through its partnership with Repton, the school is set to build on those strengths while benefiting from the experience and wider opportunities associated with one of the UK's most established independent school groups, which has connections both nationally and internationally.

The transition to co-education will begin with the younger year groups, following a gradual and carefully managed approach designed to ensure continuity and stability for current pupils and families. The phased introduction is intended to allow the school community to evolve naturally while maintaining the environment for which Bowdon Prep is known.

Despite the changes, the school's leadership is keen to emphasise that Bowdon Prep will remain firmly rooted in the values and ethos that have

defined it for many years. Its warm atmosphere, strong pastoral care and close relationships between staff, pupils and families are expected to remain central to daily school life.

Small class sizes will also continue to be a defining feature, with a maximum of twenty pupils per class. The approach reflects the school's ongoing commitment to personalised learning and ensuring every child has the opportunity to thrive both academically and socially.

The move also reflects a wider trend across the independent sector, where schools are increasingly recognising the benefits of joining established educational groups in order to strengthen long-term sustainability while preserving their individual character and identity. For Bowdon Prep families, the partnership aims to offer the reassurance of a well-established local preparatory school combined with the wider expertise and opportunities associated with the Repton family of schools.

Families interested in learning more about the school's next chapter can arrange a visit or attend the Open Day on 16 June by contacting admissions@bowdonprep.org.uk.

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The parent we trust by Cat Allan



In my spare time, I rear calves - caring for baby cows that have been separated from their mothers. It's a role some people question. But the calves in my care are healthy, well fed, content and thriving, despite the fact I'm not their mum.

And it got me thinking about parenting - and who we instinctively trust to do it. Which brings me to a friend of mine, who separated after years of their partner struggling with alcohol and prescription drug misuse. It wasn't hidden. There were incidents that put their three children at risk: driving under the influence, falling asleep while responsible for them, behaviour serious enough that contact eventually had to be supervised.

But within months, things changed. The parent in question convinced professionals they were well again, and shared care resumed. Not through the courts, but because my friend believed - as many of us do - that children need both parents in their lives wherever possible.

Pause for a moment: who did you picture as the struggling parent in that story - father or mother?

Many of us would like to think we don't make assumptions. But often, without realising it, we do. Instinctively, many still expect "the dad to be the problem". In this case, it was the mother.

My friend, let's call him D, now spends half his life worrying. His fears are not abstract. They are rooted in lived experience, in patterns of behaviour he has seen before. Another father I spoke to described something similar: he believes his ex-partner is still using drugs while caring for their children, but feels powerless to intervene.

Legally, the picture is more balanced than many people assume. Under the Children Act 1989, courts are required to prioritise the welfare of the child above all else, rather than favouring one parent because of gender. Fathers who actively pursue custody or shared care are frequently successful in securing meaningful involvement in their children's lives. Most arrangements are never decided by a judge at all. They're agreed informally, shaped as much by social expectations as by law. Around 90% of UK child arrangement cases are resolved without a full court hearing.

Yet statistics only tell part of the story.

In practice, mothers still tend to become the primary carers after separation, largely because they are more often the main caregivers beforehand. And while that may reflect long-standing social patterns rather than explicit legal bias, those patterns shape expectations in powerful ways.

Mothers are still widely seen as the default parent - more essential, more nurturing, more trustworthy.

Fathers, meanwhile, are often viewed as secondary caregivers, or as risks to be managed. At the same time, mothers can also be judged more harshly when they fail to live up to those ideals.

That perception matters.

In D's case, concerns raised with the school and authorities have led nowhere. His ex-partner now works at the children's school. Allegations of ongoing addiction are brushed aside, while stories about him circulate freely. When something goes wrong, he feels the suspicion falls naturally towards the father.

"No matter what happens," he told me, "she comes out smelling of roses."

I'm a mother myself. When I left a toxic relationship, I was believed without question. Nobody challenged my account or asked whether I might be exaggerating. Would the response have been different if I were a man? I can't honestly say otherwise.

None of this is to suggest that the legal system is stacked against fathers. The evidence is more nuanced than that. Serious safeguarding findings - what people casually call a parent being "unfit" - are relatively uncommon and can apply equally to either parent when risks such as addiction, abuse or neglect are substantiated.

But outside the courtroom, life is messier than legislation. Because while the law may strive for neutrality, people often do not.

Teachers, neighbours, friends, even professionals carry assumptions about what mothers and fathers are supposed to be. And when safeguarding concerns depend partly on who is willing to listen, those assumptions can shape outcomes in ways we rarely acknowledge.

We have spent decades - rightly - pushing towards equality between men and women. But genuine equality also requires us to confront an uncomfortable truth: mothers are not automatically safer, kinder or more suitable parents simply because they are mothers.

As with calf rearing, parenting is not ultimately about who gave birth.

It is about who shows up, who keeps children safe, and who enables them to thrive.




THE SUNDAY TIMES

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