Chinese New Year is the most important celebration in the Chinese calendar but when does it start and what is the meaning behind it?

- Chinese New Year is mapped to the lunar calendar. Each lunar month is about 28 days long – the time it takes for the Moon to orbit the Earth.

- This means New Year starts on a different date each year. In 2015, the Chinese New Year starts on 19th February, while in 2014 it started on 31st January.

- Chinese New Year is also known as the Spring Festival and lasts for fifteen days. It starts when the Moon is at its darkest and ends when the Moon is at its brightest.

- Celebrations usually start the night before on Chinese New Year’s Eve.

What is the meaning behind Chinese New Year? There are legends associated with Chinese New Year. Here are some of them.

- Legend tells of a mythical beast called Nain, which translated, means ‘Year’. People believed he lived in the sea for most of the year but came out at New Year to frighten them. They soon realised that he was scared of the colour red, loud noises and fire and so used them to frighten him off.

- Another belief is that the Jade Emperor wanted to find a way to organise dates on a calendar. He invited animals to enter a swimming race, explaining that the first twelve who finished would have a year named after them. The traits of each animal were displayed during the race and it is believed that people born in these years inherit some of these characteristics.

- Others believe that the Chinese Zodiac was built on a twelve year sequence and that the Gods allocated an animal to each of the twelve years.

What year is 2015?

- 2015 is the year of the Goat. It is believed that those born in this year will have a calm nature and be dependable, charming and creative. It is also believed they will be great team workers.

How do people celebrate?

- Before New Year’s Eve, houses are swept to brush away any bad luck from the previous year and make room for good luck.

- Families gather together on New Year’s Eve for a family reunion. They celebrate by eating special foods - usually pork, chicken and fish. They may also have a party or visit a temple.
• Traditionally, firecrackers were lit at midnight to scare off Nain and chase away other evil spirits but these are now banned in many countries as they can be dangerous.

• People wear red to scare off evil spirits and because it is considered to be a lucky colour.

• Children are given money in red envelopes and adults exchange gifts as well.

• Celebrations end with a lantern festival and a dragon dance or parade. Homes are decorated with lanterns and a dragon up to 30 metres long, made from silk, bamboo and paper, is paraded through the streets.