

Dear Parents

What a year it has been! As regular readers of my emails and *The Independent* will know, 2016 at WGS has been full to bursting with activities, trips, competitions, matches, plays, concerts and, of course, a little bit of learning along the way! On behalf of everyone here at School, I would like to express my thanks to each and every one of you for your unstinting support, which makes all that we do for our students possible.

One important extra-curricular milestone, as always, took place in this last week of term. I must record my congratulations to all those involved in the Christmas concerts on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. The Junior and Senior School's balance of traditional and festive music was finely judged, and the audience both participated and was entertained in equal measure. Amongst many delights, the senior choir's rendition of *O Holy Night*, with solos from Lydia Bridgewood, Annabel Rockett and Jessica Hughes, was particularly poignant and evocative. Amelia Kelly's reading of 'Advent' was extraordinary and the singing by the Junior School Choir, just lovely. Well done to all who took part.

You cannot have failed to notice over recent months that there is a world out there beyond the confines of the WGS community: 2016 has been memorable on a historical scale. Who would have thought that our countrymen would vote to leave the European Union? Or that the American people would see an 'interesting' business tycoon elected as their President? Or even that *Pokémon Go* could ever have become a worldwide phenomenon?

That Donald Trump has also been chosen as *Time* magazine's Person of the Year, was perhaps inevitable. He was a celebrity long before he was ever a politician – known in the USA simply as 'The Donald' from his time on their version of *The Apprentice* television programme – and his 'brand' went before him in the election. With a readership of some 26 million, *Time's* editors thus chose the person who, in their opinion, has had the greatest influence on the events of the year. I can't help feeling saddened by their choice. Other nominees included Hilary Clinton, computer hackers (generally) and Beyoncé (who, interestingly, was just voted one of the seven most influential women in the last 70 years by Radio 4's *Woman's Hour*!).

How do we measure influence? How should you compare the cultural effect of a political leader against that of a celebrity like Beyoncé? If it is true that young people glean most cultural and current knowledge from social media these days, we probably shouldn't be surprised that our young seem to know more about Ed Balls' performance on *Strictly Come Dancing* than his contribution to Gordon Brown's Labour government or Ed Miliband's Shadow cabinet. One of our key roles as parents and educators must be to ensure that children critically understand the context of all they see, hear and read.

In this vein, students from Year 7 recently debated the influence of celebrity status, mercifully finding very little to support celebrities' image as role models. Similarly, the Political Forum has been a hotbed of passionate discord too this term, so ably managed by members of the Upper Sixth – and I welcome such debate. Yes, you can be reassured that despite all the noise, trivia and modern obsession with the superficial, which is what the young's diet sometimes appears to consist of, here at School our students are encouraged to question and interrogate what many of their generation accept as the norm.

Influence is of course important and can be a catalyst for much needed change. This time last year, many of you completed a WGS Parent Survey to let us know your feelings about School life. Much has changed this year as a result of your views: the evolution of Firefly; the Parent Portal; a more

personal involvement when your child is rewarded for good behaviour; a Quiet Room for children who need some space during the day. We've also provided more information about clubs and activities, made improvements to catering and created better parking on site. This is commendable progress, but we mustn't rest on our laurels.

We are repeating the survey this year, to give you another chance to make your thoughts known, so that we understand what is working well and where further improvements are needed. The survey covers everything from the academic experience of your child to what you think of School uniform. Thank you in advance, for taking the time to respond.

Finally, short and long reports will be published today on the Parent Portal. Should you have any problems accessing them, do contact us. The School will be open until Friday 23rd December and term resumes on Thursday 5th January ('red week' in the two week timetable).

Have a great Christmas break.

With best wishes.

Kathy Crewe-Read
Head