

Friday 15th December 2017

Dear Parents

I usually begin my end of year message reminiscing about what a year we've had but it feels right on this occasion to reflect on what a week it has been!

The decision to close a School owing to bad weather is never taken lightly. My senior team and I considered most carefully the implications of such a decision and, as you would expect, had a detailed procedure to follow so that we could be confident of reaching the right decision. However, this still doesn't lessen the impact that I know a closure has on predetermined deadlines such as GCSE coursework, tests that have been scheduled and, particularly on this occasion, all the end of term festivities and events. I also did not take lightly the impact that a closure would have on you, your work and your care commitments. So thank you for all your understanding this week; your supportive messages endorsing our decision have been very much appreciated. Thank you, also, to those of you amongst the Sixth Form who are now driving to School. The treacherous conditions this week will have tested your driving ability to the limit. I want to thank you for your courteous parking - not just in your designated car park, but with respect to our residential neighbours.

I asked Dr O'Brien, who has nearly 40 years association with School, what his memories of School snow closures were. He recalled a previous Head, Patrick Hutton requiring all Senior Departments to set homework for all year groups during a period of closure. Without the magic that digital life makes possible, the homeworks had to be communicated from a landline phone in School to each family. Suffice to say the homework set was not at all complicated! Graham Lewis, a creative Head of Maths at the time, set the entire school the problem of working out the number of possible arrangements of the letters of the word "FREEZE"! (Mathematicians reading this will note the appropriate use of the exclamation mark.)

In those days, if a decision to close School was taken during a normal working day, students had to line up in Form groups to use a designated year group phone to contact parents. These days, a message can be sent to everyone in seconds and updates relayed through our online channels in real time. What's more, the fact that that these channels are two-way is great: we have tremendously enjoyed your photos of snowmen, igloos and even a sleigh ride sent in this week. Thank you.

Your children will have received their copy of *The Independent* this week: do ask to take a look. As usual, the term has been bursting to the seams with activities, trips, competitions, matches, plays, concerts and, of course, the day to day bread and butter of teaching and learning. 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, your children, possible.

The fact that so many of your children take part in extra-curricular clubs never ceases to amaze me. Much obviously takes place after School, and so it is no surprise that very many of your children enjoy spending even more time here at the end of the day – and we

welcome this. However, a reminder if I may. For obvious reasons of safety we cannot have students on site for whom we cannot account, and so any child who remains at School after 4pm must either be in an organised club or activity, or signed in to Homework Club (or Late Club in the Junior School). It goes without saying too, that Homework Club is exactly that: if all homework is completed, then attendees must undertake silent reading or revision.

Looking ahead, in 2018 we will remember and commemorate the 100th anniversary of the end of the First World War. Events will include a special "Remembrance and Hope" concert on Sunday 11th November 2018 at Birmingham's Symphony Hall. On this special occasion we will join with other schools that have an association with the Merchant Taylors' Company for a joint concert. Our Founder in 1512, Sir Stephen Jenyns, was twice elected Master of this famous Guild, and to this day we still have a strong connection with them. It is a date for your diary and I hope you will be able to join us for that. I will provide details nearer the time next year.

Your voice is vitally important to us. This time last year, many of you completed a Parent Survey to let us know your feelings about School life. As ever, we acted on your comments, thoughts and ideas. Improvements this year have included new alerts and better support for late homework; the roll out of our popular rewards and sanctions to the Junior School; improvements to our Pastoral Parents' Evenings; improved post-16 information for our Year 11s so that they are even better informed about subject choices and life in a Sixth Form; new breakfast and late clubs in the Junior School; a better sports kit for students. Hopefully you will have noticed further improvements to our School site too, including refurbished Physics laboratories, new interactive e-boards in all Junior classrooms, and new soft seating and computer resources in the Sixth Form. More site improvements are already planned for 2018, so watch this space!

Because the survey is such a useful way of harnessing your ideas, we are repeating it again this year – albeit in a more condensed version, with some previous questions and some new ones added too. Links are provided below but, should you prefer, hard copies will be available at Reception. Thank you, in advance, for taking the time to respond.

- Senior and Sixth Form Parents can complete this survey
- Junior School Parents can complete this survey

Finally, Senior school reports will be published today on the Parent Portal: full written reports for Years 10, 11 Lower and Upper Sixth and short reports for Years 7, 8 and 9. Junior Parents can already download their most recent latest reports. Should you have any problems accessing them, do contact us.

The School will be open until Friday 22nd December and term resumes on Thursday 4th January (a 'red week' in the two week timetable), when we will welcome Becky Bradley, Head of Girls' Games and Melanie Cuthbert (Head of Academic Music) to our community.

Have a wonderful Christmas break.

Kathy Crewe-Read

Head