

Dear Parents

I recall as I sit down to write to you, that at this time last year I was explaining the rationale for deciding to close a School due to bad weather. The country was in the grip of icy snow and freezing conditions: Christmas concerts had to be rescheduled and school life was temporarily put on hold. Thankfully, such occurrences are rare, but of course, we prepare so that we are ready should the unexpected happen.

We plan for various scenarios that could impact school life, even if they are extremely remote possibilities. Today your children helped us rehearse what is probably the least likely of all scenarios, our new Lockdown procedure. In much the same way as we practise the Fire Drill, we ran through 'Lockdown' to ensure students and staff recognise the bells we would use and what to do in the event of an extreme threat on the school site. I explained the rationale to Senior and Sixth Form students in Assembly earlier this week (Mr Peters explained the process to all Junior School students too) so they would understand why the rehearsal was necessary: today I was able to thank everyone for taking the drill so seriously. I do appreciate that such activities can sometimes worry students, so if you have any questions to ask, please do get in touch.

With recent news so focused on Brexit, you would be forgiven if you missed the fact that the Children's Commissioner, Ann Longfield, has announced that every school should have a counsellor, to provide help for children with mental health issues. Whether the nation's mental health is deteriorating, or diagnosis of problems is improving, it seems we are all agreed that children need better access to support. For that reason, we appointed a School Counsellor, Bavna Abbi, to our team in September. She has been a counsellor for nearly 20 years and has extensive experience working with young people. The students have been introduced to Bavna in assembly and know how the School referral system works. She is a valuable addition to our team.

Specialist mental health care notwithstanding, in a world where superficial celebrity is worshipped and lives (or should that be 'fake' lives?) are implausibly packaged and presented as idealised, romanticised dreams for digital consumption, we can all help our children by telling them, and showing them, that real life is not perfect. Young people need to learn and understand that sometimes life is tough, lonely, and hard work, that not everyone will always 'do well'. Of course, we rightly tell them we want them to be happy and to succeed, but do we remind them that it is OK if sometimes things don't work out as desired? Bad stuff happens, and it is an important part of our role as parents and educators to equip young people with realistic expectations, and the resilience to face the 'slings and arrows of outrageous fortune' whenever they may occur.

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 at the seams with activities, trips, competitions, matches, plays, concerts and, of course, the day to day bread and butter of teaching and learning. Indeed, the term has been so jam-packed that even on the evening of the final full day of term, yesterday, our Upper Sixth Theatre Studies students performed their own devised play for the assessed element of their A level before a live audience. Congratulations to Ellie Denton, Jada Joshi and Emilia Moxey for their at once thought-provoking, moving and funny production on the vicissitudes of growing up as a dyslexic child. The Christmas Concert too, was excellent and certainly contributed to festive cheer this week. Thanks to all our able musicians for such an extravaganza.

Finally, I really hope you enjoy reading your child's end of term report: many are truly excellent and bear testimony to the considerable hard work that has been put in over the recent weeks and months. Should you have any problems accessing them, do contact us. The school will be open until Friday 21st December and term resumes on Thursday 3rd January (a 'red week' in the two week timetable).

For now, have a wonderful Christmas break and I wish you a prosperous new year.

With season's greetings

Kathy Crewe-Read

Head