



19 December 2011

Dear Parents

So here it is...

The final weekly email of the term is coming to most of you in hard copy as we are sending out reports to most families. Those of you with children in Years 1-10 will find your child's report herein. Year 11 have already had their mock exam results and have parents' evening on Monday 9 January. Younger pupils do not get a written report at this stage. There's an obvious theme for you here, as with the festivities of the last few days still vivid in my mind I am feeling very much of the season.

...Merry Christmas...

I ought to put this at the end but the song isn't written this way, and you can't argue with Slade. I'm sure that your Christmas plans are very much advanced. I am looking forward to a break and to seeing my family. Christmas presents are pretty much sorted although no doubt we'll keep getting the odd little bit for the children right up to the last minute. We are still negotiating over goose (my favourite, traditional where I'm from) or beef (makes a change, lovely cold the next day) for Christmas dinner, but I suspect that the goose will win as my Mum's with us and she would love it – and as I'm cooking I get to choose. Amy wanted one of those four birds stuffed into one thing but there is only the five of us so it seems a bit over the top. I'll do that when we have the fifteen or so of Jane's family with us – most of them are visiting this weekend but stew, dumplings and Yorkshire puddings have been requested. I hope that you similarly have lovely plans for the break and the chance to get away from work to make it a really special family time. You'll be pleased to hear that when I asked the pre-prep and nursery assembly for words that go with Christmas the first one they came up with was 'family'. I know they mean their 'home family' but the 'school family' has had a pretty special time over the last weeks.

...everybody's having fun...

I am sure that you will have heard me say or read that this is the best job in the world. One reason is that I get to perpetuate those special moments that one has with children only once. I reckon that over my teaching career thus far and as a parent I have been to over fifty nativity plays of one sort or another, and in every one will have been moved by the sight of one of 'my' children doing something amazing. This year was no exception, in fact I think this year's crop have been fairly spectacular. Reception and Year 1's stable story complete with cowboys and a Year 1 boy whose mother was impressed to see him wielding a broom was a great start. The quality was high and for those making their first venture on to the stage it was a fabulous experience. Year 2 presented their own separate play based on their WWII studies. Thankfully Santa didn't get shot down, but he would have been blown away by the brilliant character acting and the gorgeously ebullient singing and dancing. Finally the nursery play, with Year 3 narrators, was a fantastic affair. Amazing costumes (well done parents, shame about the bathmat but it was in a good cause) helped some cautiously confident little ones did a brilliant job of bringing their story to life. I think you'll find that most nurseries don't undertake such a thing. If you needed evidence of the quality of our early years and pre-prep provision, it was on stage this Christmas.

The rest of the school were not to be outdone, as so many of you saw at the end of term carol concert in Holy Trinity Church. The atmosphere was lovely and I was overwhelmed by the support from parents, grandparents and others, old boys and girls who returned with their parents and local friends of the school who joined our celebrations. When I stood for my reading I was momentarily silenced by the fact that the church was standing room only, a visible sign of your support. Thank you. The musical presentations set a high standard. It was particularly lovely to see and hear the GCSE choir with bashful boys unafraid to raise their voices and give a foil to glorious girls. Strong solos by Emily Rose and Stephanie Berner (both Year 10) were highlights for me, and I'm always laid weak at the knees by Rutter's Angels' Carol sung well. Mrs Plumbley has made quite an impact.

...look to the future now...

Next term is packed with parents' evenings for some, options decisions for the Year 9 pupils, lots of sport fixtures, Silver DofE expeditions, interhouse music competition, an evening concert, Year 8 exploring Snowdonia, Year 9 and 10 visiting the French and Belgian battlefields, pancake races, lightning chess, Easter egg hunts and what should be a spectacular finish with ALS singers performing Bach's St Matthew Passion both here and in the stunning hall at Magdalen College, Oxford. And...breath. I'm tired just thinking about it. I will also be telling you more about our Sixth Form plans (ALS VI for short) and we will be starting to make plans for the celebration of our 150th anniversary in 2014. Some ambitious ideas are being thrown around, and I welcome more – on a postcard, by email or in person. In due course I will be asking for willing and interested types to join me in putting meat on some of the ideas but without doubt we would like to celebrate in style.

With a thought to the future as well I must tell you that with websites, banners, posters, mailshots and all that sort of thing our most valuable PR and advertising route is still you, and rightly so. We still get people coming in who do not know that we go to 16 (and 18 soon), that we have a superb nursery, that we use the superb sporting facilities at Warwick University, that we have probably the smallest classes in the area, that we get superb results from a non-competitive entry without fudging exam entries and so on. It may be quite cool being Warwickshire's best kept secret, but it means people are missing out. So I wonder if, looking to the future, you might make it a personal target to share the good news and send people our way. With a School in Action day on January 18 and a Year 7 entry assessment day on January 28 this could be a good time. Of course our Year 6 pupils have their pick of schools locally, but we know that despite offers from other schools many will be continuing their education at Arnold Lodge and will be joined by an influx of external applicants. In addition our Year 11 pupils are starting to receive their interviews and offers from Sixth Forms in the area. This will be the last year that this need be the case as ALS VI launches in September 2013, although we know that we will continue to produce pupils who are a sought-after commodity.

...it's only just begun...

It seems silly to write of a 150th anniversary and then use that strapline, but what I mean is that the school is in a period of growth and development, and I hope you join me in celebrating that and in contributing to it. More to the point for each child in the school their life lies ahead of them, and I am always conscious of the immense responsibility and great privilege that is mine in providing them the best start in life that I can. The staff share my joy in your family being part of our family, and join me in wishing you all happiness for this Christmas and for the most successful and peaceful New Year.

Yours sincerely