

December 2012.

Dear Parents and Guardians

This has felt like a very long term – Sunday 2nd September when boarders returned from the Summer holidays seems ages ago and separated from today by a lot of rain and gloomy weather !

The extension to Edinburgh, providing a large ICT Room and an extra Common Room means that we have finished the programme of building seven extensions to boarding houses. The new Edinburgh Extension opened at the same time as we welcomed Mr Daniel Swan as the new Housemaster - having been Director of Sport at Shiplake College – and our first Head of House to tweet !

In September we celebrated record GCSE results and the percentage of Year 11 pupils achieving five GCSE passes including Maths and English rose from 62% in 2011 to 68%. This was very pleasing, but even more so when you consider that the national figure fell while our results went up.

We also had our first A level results. Two thirds of the Upper Sixth applied to university and all of them got in, with the majority going to their first choice university. What particularly pleased me was that those who had opted not to apply to university found places on more vocational courses or found jobs in their preferred employment sector. A good Sixth Form ensures all Upper Sixth leavers progress to the next stage of their education or career.

And Ofsted visited ! It has now become clear that almost no School is being judged "outstanding" under the new inspection system that started this term, so I am very pleased both with the grading of "good" and with the many positive comments in the Ofsted report, particularly about the Sixth Form.

With 138 pupils in the Sixth Form (and with 180 expected next September) I am pleased by the leadership role that the older pupils are taking in the School. Prefects help to manage the Dining Room. Other Sixth Formers help with sport for younger pupils, with reading in the Junior School and with running the Charity Committee. And they really set the tone by the way that they dress and their attitude to study.

Highlights of the term include the Sixth Form Dance Show, the Music Evening, two performances of the Junior Nativity Play, two performances of the Pantomime, the Carol Service, three successive Christmas Dinners, two Celebration Lunches, countless sports

fixtures, our Intermediate and Senior Teams doing so well in the local "Youth Speaks" competition. And then there was Luke Townsend coming 8th in the National Schools Show Jumping Championships and the team (Luke and Sam Townsend, Lucy Risley and Hannah Church) coming 11th out of 31 Schools qualified for the national finals. Our World Marathon Challenge, raising money for Save the Children won a silver salver as the fastest team in the South East of England and the 17th fastest in the World. And please forgive me for missing out a lot of other great events.

The builders are progressing well with the Fitness Centre and by the end of February we will have a proper facility with professional standard running machines, cycling machines etc.

Food is very important in a boarding School and over the last few months we have lost both our Catering Manager and our Head Chef. I am very pleased to announce that Andrew Piper, a very experienced Catering Manager who has been our relief manager for some weeks, has accepted the permanent post. Ricardo Nunes has worked at this School for some fifteen years and has been second chef for a few years. I am very pleased that Harrison's Catering has now recognised his talent and enthusiasm by making him Head Chef. Mr Carl Bingham, Deputy Head, is keen to involve pupils more in consultations about food and I look forward to meals being even better in future.

January 2013 sees GCSE modular exams for Year 11 and AS exams for the Lower and Upper Sixth. This is the last time there will be January exams. In future all GCSE exams will be at the end of Year 11 and AS and A2 exams will only be held in the Summer. This gives more time for teaching but requires pupils to learn more and remember more for the exams that they have rather than lots of little exams.

Saturday 2nd February is the Year 9 Options meeting for pupils and parents and I look forward to seeing as many parents as possible for what is a really important decision time for pupils.

With my best wishes for a pleasant and restful Christmas and an excellent 2013.

Paul D Spencer Ellis
Headmaster.