

December 2014

Dear Parents

Following three very successful Christmas Dinners, two Christmas Assemblies and a fine Junior School Play, I am now looking forward to the production of Romeo and Juliet before visiting the Army cadets at their Christmas Camp over the weekend. There are not many busier places than this School in December!

The Parents and Friends Association has also been very busy with the Christmas Shopping Evening generating a profit of over a thousand pounds and the Christmas Fayre generating a massive five thousand pounds – a thousand more than last year. Congratulations to a busy Committee and supporters.

This is the third year that the First XV have played against Gordon's School for *The Sovereign's Cup*, but this was also the first time that we were victorious, following a close game and, at times some desperate defending against a Gordon's team that did not believe it would lose. The Netball team has only played twice for *The Duchess of Gloucester Cup* against Gordon's. This year we came close to them in the first three quarters, but Gordon's finished very strongly to win.

Mrs Ross, the new Head of Sixth Form, has conducted many interviews for entry to the Sixth Form next September and she is planning for a Lower Sixth of 67 boarders and 33 local pupils. We are offering one new subject next September: Computing. This is because there are two classes studying the subject in Year 11 and we wish to offer them the opportunity to continue with the subject in the Sixth Form. Last September we introduced Music A level and I am pleased that there is a small but enthusiastic group studying Music in the Lower Sixth.

The Department for Education analysis of our GCSE and A levels finally arrived this week and the 170 pages of analysis (*this is no exaggeration*) make interesting if lengthy reading. In a year of great national turbulence in school examination results the data highlights many strengths and areas of improvement on the previous year.

Our Key stage 2 attainment was above National Average for all subjects and our Value Added figures were positive.

Nationally, the percentage of Year 11 pupils achieving five or more good GCSEs including English and Maths fell by 6.6%. This is a huge fall and not something that the press has particularly picked up on. Our drop was slightly larger, but, pleasingly, the Value Added figure for the school was above National Average and showed a good improvement on the Value Added figure from 2013.

Our average point score for the best 8 GCSE subjects also improved compared to last year. A very pleasing statistic is that 99% of our pupils left with 5 or more A*-G GCSE grades, compared to 92% National Average, which allows pupils access to Post 16 College courses. Once again Mathematics and Languages have proved to be very strong subjects across the school achieving significantly above National Averages.

At A level the most significant statistic is that 61% of all grades were grade B or better, and the more successful universities are now only interested in grade B or above for admissions.

GCSE English and Maths have become significantly harder over the last few years as the mark required to gain a grade C has gone up, coursework has been replaced by controlled assessments (which represent a smaller proportion of the total marks) and the courses are now two years ending in exams, rather than the old system of unit tests which could be retaken to improve marks.

To deal with this we have increased the number of lessons of English and Maths in Years 8 and 9 from four to five a week. We have also dropped ICT from the compulsory GCSE subjects which has given space for an extra lesson of English and another of Maths in both Year 10 and Year 11.

A couple of weeks ago we had a long-awaited Ofsted Boarding Inspection. I am very pleased with the results of that inspection but cannot give details until we receive the final report early next term. As soon as it is received I will distribute it to all parents.

With my best wishes for the Christmas holidays.

Paul D Spencer Ellis

Headmaster