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ROYAL ALEXANDRA & ALBERT SCHOOL



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Dear Parent,

I have been reminded this week of just how important it is that schools build character. Examination results are of course important, and preparing pupils to be able to think, be organised, and work well independently. So too are engendering interests in a wide range of activities, in the hope that some of these can be life-long and that they bring about a real sense of fun and fulfilment in the school years and beyond.

When I consider the product of our education system, however, I think who the pupils are as people is the best judge of that; how they conduct themselves, relate to others and the world around them, what values they have, and what strengths they have in terms of confidence, integrity, kindness and resilience, to name just a few. All of this can be expressed as character, and it is an immeasurable facet of education but a very important one. Any school worth its salt should care about building this, particularly a boarding school, and certainly we do here at RAAS.

As a physicist, one of my heroes would have to be Albert Einstein. Interestingly he had a lot of valuable things to say about matters other than physics during his life and one of my favourite quotes from him is with regard to education. "Education is what remains after one has forgotten what one has learned in school". Again, to me, this points towards character as one of the most important aspects that education has to offer.

In the last month I have been introduced to a new thinker and writer by the name of Jordan B Peterson, following the now-famous Channel 4 news debate surrounding pay gaps and the issue of cause versus correlation. This year he has had published a book entitled '12 Rules For Life'. Impressed by his ability to argue, and the power of his critical thinking shown on the news programme, I decided to look further. The book is a guide, it seems to me, on what aspects of character are worth developing. Reading through the twelve principles I have been impressed with the picture painted for a person who has these principles.

The very first rule from Peterson is stated as "stand up straight with your shoulders back". The notion of self-confidence being an important part of living life successfully seems a very good one. I have been talking about this to our pupils this week in assembly. Rather sweetly, when asked, the juniors told me that this was important as it meant people would not suffer from a bad back. Very good that this also leads to good advice on posture as well! Of course the advice goes wider than that, and encourages us to give things a go and be confident in

doing so. As many of us will know, when interviewing people for roles, we are far more likely to give job offers to those that appear confident and look you in the eye – and we should be finding ways of encouraging our children to grow towards that.

At RAAS we are committed to the pupils having an education focusing on the whole of a person, and I will be looking to see how well we measure up to Peterson's guide in what we do. In particular our Sixth Form is a place where leadership is cultivated in a large number of ways and we value this greatly. It is for this reason that we introduced Leadership Scholarships to the Sixth Form last year. We are in the process of developing a leadership programme for the Sixth Form, which we aim to launch next academic year. I look forward to communicating to you more about this later in the year, but it is already looking like it will be an exciting development as we work to enhance further our Sixth Form and what it offers to our students. At the time of writing we have a large number of pupils accepting offers to join our Sixth Form, in what looks like it could be a bumper year, so the timing seems to be very right.

I would encourage you to look into Peterson's book. In any case I can assure you that the pupils will be hearing more from me on the ideas of character during the course of this year.

With all best wishes



Mark Dixon

Headmaster