

## Head's Blog – Trinity Term

### Monday 6th July

For a week which involved so much sport and outdoor activity to pass with minimal disruption due to rain was a real blessing. The Pre-Prep sports, switched to a morning because of the heat, a hard-earned draw in the cricket against the MCC followed by the Saturday's Open Day with its outdoor sports and social functions all meant even greater enjoyment because of the immense sense of relief at beating the rain. The School community was at its best on Saturday with Senior School Sports Day and Open mornings in the Pre-Prep and Prep, a typical Chartwells' lunch and drinks receptions and then Public Speaking judged by OW Michael Ellis (won by Alice Gividen), live music from the Blues Band, Prep School Sports Day, and OW cricket, a Memorial Service for three former teachers and an OW barbeque all made for a unique and memorable community family day. The two sports days, efficiently marshalled by the staff and commented upon once again by Allen Ramsden and James Knight were successful for both the seasoned county athletes as well as those proudly representing their House or Club.

This week is an experimental Activities Week in the Senior School with the traditional Duke of Edinburgh Silver and Gold Expeditions, Adventure Training for S10 then S9 near Ashbourne in the Peak District, Work Experience as well as a series of interesting activities in School. Pupils are learning more about the history of the School, presentational skills, preparing an application for our Eco Schools application and gaining Industrial knowledge from a range of outside speakers.

Our prospective S9s for September arrive tomorrow for their second taste of Senior School with an Induction day in School and our new S12 pupils have all now had a chance to meet new friends and teachers and most have begun to make their mark.

My end of term letter to parents will include a number of pieces of information pertinent to the new School year starting in September.

### Monday 29th June

It is telling when even those who attended last Thursday's Prizegiving ceremony yet had no children of their own who received prizes or were leaving, commented about the emotion generated in the marquee as we bade farewell to our S13 Leavers. Mark Denton (OW and Global Challenge Round The World yachtsman) provided a speech which focused on the importance of bouncing back from failure in order to achieve success. The evening also allowed me to publicly comment on the Inspection Reports which we received that day and which have now been e-mailed to parents. We are proud of the achievements which the Inspectors acknowledged.

This coming Saturday's Open Day is another major School occasion when the expectation is that pupils and parents will attend for both the sports day and a chance to socialise across all three parts of our School. It is sometimes difficult to comprehend when some fail to appreciate the importance in our annual calendar of these occasions.

There was also general praise for the visit to Cambridge undertaken by the Prizewinners when they were given the opportunity to choose their books at Heffers bookshop and then visit four colleges for an insight into academia.

Last Saturday's Summer Ball has long been regarded as a highlight of the social calendar for all of the community as well as being a fitting way to bid a final farewell to our Sixth Form Leavers and their parents. There had been a thought that the economy might have in some way diluted this year's event; the weather, food, Blues Band and live band all contributed to provide a memorable evening for the 550 revelers. Caroline Anstee and her Ball Committee are owed much praise for their flawless organisation.

Last Thursday also marked the arrival of a number of new pupils into the 6th form. They have each been supported by their mentors and new tutors in trying to ensure that they settle in as easily as is possible. We have received some criticisms of the appearance of Senior School pupils. It was suggested that this might simply be a more casual approach to life as temperatures rise and pupils' eyes are on the long summer break. It ought to be stated that appearance is important and short skirts, shoes, ties and shirts are monitored. I reject entirely that our pupils compare unfavourably with other local schools but we have spoken with some pupils regarding the length of their skirts and height of their heels and will continue to do so if we feel the need. We welcome parental support on matters of uniform and appearance.

As well as the performance of the Blues Band at the Summer Ball it was also an immense pleasure to witness at first hand the success of our Strings players this afternoon. Pupils from all three parts of the School, and some staff, performed brilliantly in our "Strings Fest" and we will certainly repeat this next year.

On Wednesday we are holding our Oxbridge Information Evening for all interested Senior School pupils and their parents. Many S12 pupils are venturing out across the country to visit universities as part of their UCAS decision-making. We are also putting the final touches to planning for both Silver and Gold Duke of Edinburgh Award expeditions starting next weekend as well as S9 and S10 Adventure Training in the Peak District and a whole series of exciting projects in School.

### Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> June

Although the accolade of Midlands champions eluded "adeo", last Thursday's long drive up to Grantham for the regional Young Enterprise Final was not in vain. The team won two awards for "Best Innovation" and "Best Marketing" and brought the curtain down on a hugely successful Young Enterprise year. The team was also represented at the annual Business Lunch in School on Friday along with the award-winning "Shares4Schools" team. The organization by Claire Mitchell and Jo Matthews and the help of Jayne Wilson, Debbie Barrett and Whittemore was also much-appreciated.

The weekend involved pupils and staff in the New Zealand Tour's Race Night, the RAF cadets on their "Longest Day" experience, cross country runners at Colworth on Friday evening along with tennis players and cricketers playing on Saturday afternoon : testament once again to the incessant activity of School life at weekends.

Attending the Speech Day of Milton Keynes Prep School confirmed my commitment to pursuing a new bus service from Olney. A number of parents living between Olney and Newport Pagnell expressed the view that they would consider us if this was introduced. A letter will be going shortly to parents who live in the Olney area and along the A509.

This week sees the Cambridge Prizewinners' Trip, the Summer Governors' Meeting on which I will comment in next week's blog, Prizegiving with Mark Denton(OW) who is our Guest Speaker and the annual Summer Ball. The School Shop is nearing completion and I am informed will be ready for viewing on Open Day next week.

Guidance placed on the website regarding our approach to the flu pandemic is designed to clarify our strategy and also to assist parents in identifying any possible signs in their family.

### Monday 15<sup>th</sup> June

The parental feedback from last Saturday's New Parents' Morning was complimentary and the bright sunshine added to the positive atmosphere. The purpose of the occasion is above all to initiate personal contacts to be developed between families and the House pastoral staff. There is so often a degree of trepidation felt in moving to the Senior School either from the Prep School or from outside our own community but we trust that after this social occasion and the Induction morning in the final week of term in July, most of the fears will have been allayed.

New procedures are in the pipeline for September including, of course the opening of the School Shop, after-school arrangements designed to channel pupils towards either activities or supervised study in the Study Centre with the aim of ensuring increased pupil safety after the end of the School Day, new and more relaxed Private Study arrangements for 6th form and revised Enrichment provision amongst others.

We are often asked about the examination systems which we choose at Wellingborough. We regularly conduct reviews of our current GCSE and A level courses as well as maintaining a watching brief over alternatives such as IGCSE and the Cambridge Pre-U. We have been holding debates about whether we should be entering our S10 pupils for GCSE modules. Our concern held by many of us is the arrangement whereby S10 pupils sit three modules, one each in Biology, Chemistry and Physics creates considerable disruption to School life. We are uncomfortable with the apparent practice of pupils taking time off School, pulling out of School activities, leaving School early to go home to revise and even staying up throughout the night to revise, often condoned by parents. Wearing a broad educational hat these practices cannot be condoned especially when sustained application should have been employed throughout the previous 12 months.

Other areas which we regularly review are those of the prefect appointment and prize systems. The former is finalized after considerable and lengthy deliberation; the selection procedure allows pupils and teaching staff to make recommendations to me, before my final decision. The selection procedure typically includes writing a letter of application, attendance at a selection and team building session and an interview with a member of the Senior Leadership team. The team of prefects is selected taking into account the individual personalities and the tasks which they are required to perform. Whilst we would include in our consideration the involvement of a pupil in the life of the School, this is not a reward for past commitment and we would expect that our prefects would represent a range of academic prowess and co-curricular involvement. There is not a template for our prefect. ( we try to ensure that it is clear that being 'good' for the selection period is not enough!). Although procedures vary slightly from House to House, similar principles exist for the appointments of House prefects.

We wish to herald as many of our successful pupils as possible and so, for each year, there is a prize for academic excellence, the recipient of which may have been nominated for more than one individual subject prize. This allows additional prizes to be awarded to other individuals who may not be the highest achiever in that subject, but who have maintained a high standard coupled with the effort and interest expected from someone worthy of a prize. In some subjects a prize is not awarded annually where it is felt there is no one who meets these criteria.

On Thursday we hope that our Young Enterprise team, "adeo", is able to continue its previous success this time in the Midlands Final which is the stage before the national finals in London in the final week of term.

On Friday lunchtime we host our annual Business Lunch; this occasion enables us to laud our successful Young Enterprise teams, make a public gesture of thanks to their business advisors and also to welcome members of the business community into School in order to cement our relationship with them.

This year we will also hail our S12 "Shares4Schools" competitors as they prepare to head to London to receive their national award having defeated the best student investors across the UK.

### **Monday 8th June**

There is something quintessentially British about open-air Shakespeare. This year's production by the aptly-named "Rain and Shine Theatre Company" of "The Taming of the Shrew" was performed superbly to a shivering audience of about 75 hardy souls on the grass in front of the Pre-Prep.

The weekend also saw a surprise birthday party for Elaine O'Sullivan our enigmatic Catering Manager in addition to the annual Dyson Plate Golf Challenge fought out between Staff and the Embankment Club. The cricketing success which the staff had enjoyed the previous week in defeating a combative Parents' XI was unfortunately not repeated on the idiosyncratic 9-hole course with its hidden dangers and deceptive lay out. Local knowledge won the day as the staff performed better in the bar than on the course.

It is always useful to compare notes with colleagues from other schools about our respective experiences and particularly in the present financial climate. This week I will be doing so with HMC Headmasters from the east of England in Cambridge and also in London with Heads from the Federation of Independent Day Schools. Items due for discussion on both occasions are League Tables, alternatives to GCSE and A levels and the provision of Bursary funding in our schools.

On Saturday we host the New S9 Parents' and Pupils' Information Morning where we and Housemasters and mistresses help to ease the natural anxieties and concerns of those joining us in S9 in September. Finally to rank alongside our recent successes in Public Speaking and Young Enterprise we have just won the national "Shares4Schools" competition with a team of 12 S12 pupils. In this national competition run by the Share Centre we beat 48 other schools and, starting with a real fund of £1500, we made a profit of 134.9% thus making over £2000! The competition ran from October until last Friday. The pupils, supported by Mr Williams, have made their decisions during Monday afternoon Sixth Form Enrichment lessons. They will now attend a winners' day at the Guildhall, London on July 1st to collect their award. Monday 1st June

Many of us were enjoying our Half Term break whilst countless others were slaving over their revision books in preparation for GCSE, AS and A2 modules or indeed for internal S9 and S10 examinations. Even amidst this concentration upon academics pupils managed some light relief on CCF Camp at Barnham and at the highly successful annual Wellingborough School Equestrian Event held again at the Milton Keynes Centre. The fact that 61 schools took part in the event this year is a great accolade to Kath Owen and her helpers.

The House Drama Competition, this year judged by David Smith former Director of Drama at Oakham, proved to be another memorable night. This year's offerings of Willy Russell's "Our Day Out", and two musical adaptations, "Bugsy" and "Chicago" entertained us all. Again the pupil-inspired direction and production, when one considers that we are a day school without the advantage of a boarding school time allocation, was nothing short of stunning. Each of the 80+ participants was worthy of the highest praise and the rehearsal heartaches were undoubtedly worthwhile.

A glimpse at the calendar for the coming weeks of the second half of term reveals an incessant round of activity. The "Taming of the Shrew" on Sunday, the New Parents' Morning, the Young Enterprise Midlands Finals and the Business Lunch have all to be planned before Prizegiving on Thursday June 25th. A number of pupils and parents will, I hope, also be interested in the Oxbridge Information Evening planned for Wednesday July 2nd.

## Monday 18th May

Last Friday saw the official departure of our S13 at their Leavers' Service. There were not the torrents of tears that we saw last year but an equally emotional event with huge credit due to Jamie Wright and Steph Graham for their organisation and for the nostalgia offered by Alice Palmer, Chrissy House, Kate Skinner, Oscar Hills, Simon Brooke and Steph Reed along with the tuneful Adam Cooper and Ankur Khajuria. Allen Ramsden as ever captured the moment perfectly and Susan Barnhurst showed how much the Leavers have brought to us over the years.

With Study Leave starting our focus has switched to the two remaining years in School (S9 and 10) in terms of appearance, punctuality and civilised and respectful behaviour and treatment of others. I am asked at times about our policy towards verbal or physical bullying, cyber-bullying and anti-social behaviour in general; no school is immune from instances of unacceptable behaviour. It is however, not, in any way, endemic and we will continue to be proactive across the whole School. The simple fact of the matter is that we respond methodically when these matters are uncovered. I would encourage parents to maintain a watching brief over the use of mobile phones for texting late at night.

This Thursday evening the S9 and 10 youngsters enjoy one of their high points of the School calendar on with the Junior House Drama Festival. The fact that the event, with its three productions (Our Day Out, Chicago and Bugsy Malone) is pupil-directed with minimal teacher involvement, means that its charm is that there are a few rough edges but this is far less important than the fact that many pupils who would not otherwise appear on stage have an opportunity to do so. The evening's adjudicator will be an ex-actor and former Head of Drama at Oakham, David Smith.

We have referred in the past to the annual Old Weymouthian Lunch as being a quite unique event - its intriguing background is explained on the Weymouth House web page but our guests were evacuated to Wellingborough School in 1940 from Weymouth College on the south coast. The S12 girls of Weymouth House entertain them over lunch and our visitors regale us with tales of School here in the 1940s- each year these charming octogenarians are such wonderful company and this year was no exception.

The Ladies' Macmillan Charity Golf Day on Friday this week is another one of those community events which always brings in its wake a noisy but joyous gathering of mums whether they be "hackers" or "smooth-hitters" .

This week also sees the District Athletics event at Kettering on Wednesday, a meeting to consider new bus routes and planning for next week's Wellingborough School Equestrian Event at the Milton Keynes Equestrian Centre.

## Monday 11th May

This is the week when emotions run even higher than usual with the S13 students preparing for Leavers' Day on Friday when afternoon School will finish at 3.15 p.m.. Sometimes muscles are flexed and boundaries pushed but we are all looking forward to a few days when focus is primarily on examination preparation rather than time-wasting, silly pranks.

This evening's Singers' Recital in the Recital Room was well attended by parents and allowed an opportunity for a significant number of singers to maintain our high singing standards and perform in front of an audience as soloists, in duets and choirs.

After the CCF had taken part in the ceremony to open the international Waendal Festival, the weekend's deceptive sunshine failed to lull the cricketers and tennis players into believing it was summer as a chilling wind numbed both fingers and bones. The highlight of a number of notable team and individual performances was probably the 101\* by Zak Harvey, his first for the 1st XI in his fourth season at this level. It was no great burden to host 20 Cripps' boys for a deserved barbeque on Sunday afternoon after they had completed a nine-mile walk as their Waendal involvement. Sunday afternoon was also the occasion of the Confirmation Service in Chapel for Freddie and William Groome and Isobel Croft.

This week, in addition to hosting a Dinner for the outgoing School Prefects, we also welcome the Headmasters of Oakham, Uppingham, Oundle, Stamford, Kimbolton and The Leys, Cambridge and their wives. However, without exception the characterful octogenarians of the Old Weymouthian Club arriving for their annual reunion, always steal the show.

Last Friday was an occasion of unbridled joy for some, disappointment for others as we announced the Heads and Deputy Heads of School for 2009-10 and the Heads of House :

Joint Heads of School	Matthew Palmer and Georgina Anstee
Joint Deputy Heads of School	Howard Barnhurst and Fleur Starcevic

Cripps' (J.Millett), Fryer's(B.Humphries ), Garne's (W.Knibbs), Parker-Steyne's (J.Warren), Platt's (M.Wilson), Marsh (H.Rogers), Nevill (H.Knight), Weymouth (A.Loveys).

I wish all of the above success in their new challenge and positions of responsibility.

### Monday 4th May

Over recent years Kath Owen, now supported by Charlotte Woodward, has worked tirelessly to develop our Equestrian teams. This last weekend the successful trend continued at the Oakley Cross Country Trials. The Wellingborough team comprised Sarah Bould, Lucy Henson and 2 riders from the Prep School, Jess Henson and Becky Short. The team won 1st place against Kimbolton and Bedford. It was quite a daunting course and the girls should be congratulated for bravery as well as skill! This coming Sunday there will be a couple of teams showjumping at Potton.

I would insist that any absence from any School function and weekend sporting fixtures are no different to any other, should be flagged up in advance to me as per the instructions in The Guide to The School. Sporting teams did suffer at the weekend as a result of the Bank Holiday partly as a number of families took the opportunity to have a weekend break, others were still suffering the after-effects of last week's Duke of Edinburgh practice expeditions! Although this is all understandable there were others whose absence was perhaps rather more dubious. Under-strength teams found it difficult to compete with Repton who are probably one of the strongest cricketing schools in the country. However, pride of place undoubtedly went to the U14 XI whose chase of 166 to win in 30 overs was excitingly completed in the final over with 3 balls to spare. Although Charlie Macdonell top-scored with 61 this was a classic team victory.

This coming abbreviated week sees the beginning of the events to acknowledge the imminent departure of this year's S13 Leavers. Planning is frantic for next week's Lunch and Service and this week we will be holding a barbeque and planning for next week's Leavers' Lunch and Chapel Service. One point being made to all of those who are facing Public Examinations is that, despite official Study Leave for examination preparation, we still believe that lessons, all of which continue, and the use of teachers and fellow students, should be a fundamental part of any revision strategy.

Finally readers will shortly receive the latest WSSPA magazine with its "newsy" accounts of Senior School life; although some would like a more formal reflection of the variety of experiences our young people enjoy, I would argue that the production is a colourful and informative snapshot of so much which is interesting and lively and the production team is deserving of our thanks.

### Monday 27th April

The visit, organised by Mrs Matthews, of Nick Hewer of "The Apprentice" fame this afternoon has been of real interest to many of our pupils but particularly those with entrepreneurial skills and aspirations. We gained insights into the production of the series and heard of Nick and Alan Sugar's views on the dubious "Pants Man" and Paula's inability to differentiate between sandalwood and cedarwood! The visit comes hard on the heels of a successful evening last Thursday in the County Finals of Young Enterprise. "Eloquence" won an award for the best trade stand but "adeo" with its biodegradable hessian plant pots and pet burial bags, won the "Best Company" Award which takes them through to the Regional Finals, only one step away from the UK finals in London.

It is one of the great regrets held by many of us that foreign exchange visits have so often fallen foul of Health and Safety regulations because, by providing an opportunity to live with a foreign family, they enable a young person to experience a new culture in a way which is wholly different to a hotel-based visit. Thanks to persistent efforts by the MFL Department we have built up a relationship with Lycée St Martin from near Nantes in the Pays de la Loire in north-western France. Last Tuesday it was a pleasure to meet up with them again as their 36-strong group enjoyed time in lessons and a treasure hunt around School. Interestingly we often receive details of individuals who are interested in exchanges and this week a 15-year-old German girl's family contacted us about their desire to find a suitable exchange for their daughter. If readers are interested perhaps they could contact my PA, Mrs Whittington, for further details.

The mild weather allowed a full programme of sports fixtures which included tennis victories over Bedford H.S. and competitive cricket matches against the strong Magdalen College School, Oxford. The highlight was arguably the 20-run 1st XI victory despite the weakening of senior sides by the Gold and Silver DofE practice expeditions taking place last weekend. Much praise was voiced by the leaders of those two expeditions for the manner in which all pupils conducted themselves and braved the arduous conditions.

It gave me a great sense of satisfaction to resume the presentation of Commendation Award certificates in assembly last week for the first time since we re-vamped the award system. Last year Mrs Clark organized an Oxford visit and readers might be interested to hear of our plans to take this year's prizewinners to purchase their books from a Cambridge bookshop ahead of the Prizegiving Ceremony and combine this with visits to Newnham (\$9), Clare (\$10), St.Catherine's (\$11) and King's Colleges (\$12).

This week's events include Tuesday's House Music competition for S9 and S10 as well as the Annual Sports Award Evening on Thursday.

### **Monday 20th April**

Every day and every week brings its achievements but occasionally there are successes which call for one to stop in awe and take stock. Last Saturday in Cheddar, Somerset at the Rotary Youth Speaks UK & Ireland Finals the Year 9 Public Speaking Team of Helen Amos, Alice Gividen and Helen Gent provided one such moment. The girls deservedly won first prize in the Intermediate age group Competition at the National Finals with a wonderful presentation and Alice also won the best individual award as Principal Speaker. We look forward to presenting their trophy at the Prizegiving ceremony in June.

The cricket season got underway for the two senior XIs at home to Uppingham and although the 2nd XI went down, the 1st XI, despite being under strength due to injury, enjoyed much the better of a winning draw. It was heartening to see Mr Knight on his annual return from Western Australia expressing pleasure with many of the younger, less experienced players he has worked with in the first week of the season.

Internally it is a time of, on the one hand immense activity in preparing students for the home straight as far as examination preparation is concerned, whilst also trying to continue as normal for those not involved in Public Examinations. In fact even the Year 10 pupils have external Science modules in the coming weeks. For many these are indeed the closing weeks of their school lives. I include in this category those whose families are making decisions because of financial pressures which they face and for whom we are unable to provide additional bursary help from our over-stretched "Hardship Fund". As I explained to my colleagues in our pre-term meeting we are not so arrogant as to believe that we can remain immune from the economic chill wind blowing throughout the economy. We will be getting our heads down, trying our best, pulling in our metaphorical belts and planning for the days which will inevitably come when the sun shines on us more brightly. To this end we continue to spread our message to feeder schools; today I have visited Winchester House, Brackley where we have had interest from parents and on Saturday I visit Great Houghton for a regular Information Morning against the background of increased interest from there of late. Friday will be an evening for spreading the message again as well as reacquainting ourselves with old friends at the OW Oxbridge Dinner in Cambridge which follows on from the highly successful London Dinner at the end of last term.

The Bursar is looking to review the "Clarion call" system which has now been in place for a little over a term. The positive feedback received in February for its use during the adverse weather and its success in providing instant urgent information for sudden changes to schedules, suggest that we must not overload the service. Currently the penetration level for parental e-mail addresses is not as great as it is for mobile numbers so it would help immensely if our records were updated regularly. This week the system has been used to publicise a change of schedule for Thursday's Sports Award Evening which has been put back a week because of an unavoidable clash with a visit to the RSC at Stratford and the Young Enterprise County Finals at the Guildhall in Northampton.

Our charity work continues this Tuesday with the innovation of the "Swish" Evening where designer labels are available for as little as £2 in aid of Macmillan Cancer.