
Principal's Newsletter

6 March 2020

Dear Parents,

The sun shone on us for World Book Day yesterday. The array of characters our pupils and staff chose to represent in their sartorial permutations is quite extraordinary. One young man was dressed as a Fortnite character, so he told me. I was not aware that this was a book, but in any event it was highly creative and obviously meant a lot to him. Harry Potter and Where's Wally appear to have strong support among all segments of the primary phase. The atmosphere was exuberant, passionate, and excited.

The day is timely. Reading is declining in every age group, especially the young. It is perhaps unsurprising that, when we exclude reading text messages and Instagram posts, young people are reading less and less, and enjoying reading less and less, according to the latest report published this week. The book with its analog technology, recently referred to as medieval by a pupil at our school, is in direct competition with a glowing screen linked to every possible image or experience in the world. Girls enjoy reading books slightly more than boys, apparently, but the time spent reading and the enjoyment of that more limited time are both trending down overall. This does matter. Bibliophilia is the love that dare not speak its name in peer circles. To read is to expand one's world, one's mind, one's heart, but somehow, despite shelves of teen fiction and endless school encouragement, less and less reading takes place.

I was therefore inspired by one young man who was dressed as Spiderman for World Book Day. Sure, it is not exactly Tolstoy or Dickens, but there is, unlike Fortnite, a book version, a comic book version. Reading a comic book is better than not reading at all. Every child should have the experience of falling in love with a book, its text, smell and undigital appearance included. If yours has not found that book yet, we must keep looking for it together. Indeed, to be a good parent is in part to read, suggest and recommend the right books! Our librarians would love to help.

It is impressive to receive emails detailing the careers interview lists. Pupil each have an opportunity for a face to face interview discussing next steps after GCSEs. Our careers provision has been recognized as top-of-the line by inspectors and by other people who know what best practice is supposed to look like. May I repeat my plea from last week to consider whether you would be willing to volunteer at our Year 11 mock interview day on Thursday 19 March – thank you to those who have already responded.

Our debating team is a force to be reckoned with. Most of our top debaters are only in Year 11 and they regularly debate the Year 13 students from Manchester Grammar and other illustrious schools. Mr Barnicoat assures me that Jan M (Y11 Howard's) gave the best debating performance he had ever seen in our "shirt", raking the carefully constructed argument of various Year 13 students over the proverbial coals at the most recent regional competition. We are going to Durham to compete in another prestigious competition later in the year.

An important notice regarding the Secondary Phase's **Speech Night on Tuesday 24 March**. The **secondary phase of the school will finish at 3.15pm that day** (rather than the usual 4.15pm) to allow pupils and staff enough time to get to the Cathedral later that evening. There will be the facility for pupils to remain in school until 4.15pm if needed. Prep School and Pre Prep will finish at their usual times. Further details of arrangements for Speech Night will follow next week by separate email.

Thursday was a musical day. During the morning, Year 7 pupils departed en masse to Hope Street to attend a concert given by the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra. The concert, entitled 'Our Global Vision' focused on climate change and linked music with these issues we are currently facing. Mr Bishop reports that the pupils were a real credit to us and enjoyed the experience. The evening saw pupils from Key Stage 3 host their annual 'Music Masters' Concert in their new performance space in the Rushworth Music Centre. Performances ranged from solo items to group performances and featured many compositions the pupils had written themselves. We look forward to seeing our young musicians develop further!

In many respects we have become a tree farm, planting or in the process of planting many trees. Some parts of the campus will eventually be reforested, hopefully draining some of the boggy conditions of our fields in the process. Some of this is related to preparation of the building site for the Prep School expansion on the site of the old middle school basketball court. Like the city of Troy, there are layers of history and archaeology in these places on our campus. The whitewashed wall of our swimming pool which was decommissioned in the 1990s still stands as a reminder of all the ways our campus has been used and will now serve to enclose a pleasant courtyard for pupils. Beechlands is stripped back and bare, ready for its conversion into our new boarding facility. Fencing, signs, and trade vans abound.

The U14 and U15 rugby teams defeated Darwen Vale school yesterday to progress into the semi-final of the Lancashire Plate competition. The U14 won 45-7 and will play Ripley next while the U15 triumphed 27-12 and move on to face St Mary's.

Mayor Joe Anderson has been invited by the all-powerful Eco Committee to discuss ways we can make the school greener and more sustainable. I think it is extraordinarily good of this busy leader to make time to discuss such matters with our young people. We look forward to his visit.

The Mayor will also be involved in the Launch event in May of Aspire Liverpool. This philanthropic brainchild of Sir Terry Leahy, former CEO of Tesco and Mr William Currie, entrepreneur and both committed scousers, is a systematic programme of preparation for students and pupils across the city for applications to top universities. It is targeted particularly at pupils who lack the family support to make such an application easily, but it will involve pupils and students in Year 10 and Year 12 from across the city. We will be able to nominate up to 6 Year 12 students and up to 4 Year 10 pupils for this programme. All Liverpool schools are determined to ensure that going to school in Liverpool is not a disadvantage when applying to top universities. The project director Nick Crofts is based at our school in the offices of Classics for All. Another great partnership.

Planning for the launch of Day boarding next year continues apace. Over the next few months we will be holding some consultations with parents and pupils about how we hope to shape this programme. Our intention is to make the programme financially accessible, brilliantly varied, and effective in supporting the wellbeing and progress of the pupils who participate and spend time with us after school.

The Department for Education has launched a helpline to answer questions about Coronavirus related to education. Staff, parents and young people can contact the helpline as follows:

Phone: 0800 046 8687

Email: DfE.coronavirushelpline@education.gov.uk

Opening hours: 8am to 6pm (Monday to Friday)

The DfE have also emphasised the message that the best way to tackle the challenge posed by Coronavirus is by following public health authorities' advice, for example on [hand washing](#), and reducing the impact and spread of misinformation by relying on information from trusted sources, such as that on <http://www.nhs.uk> and <https://www.gov.uk/>.

This weekend we are playing much sport, preparing for the production of *Popstars*, participating in the North of England rugby 7s, and looking forward to more dry days.

May I wish you and yours a pleasant weekend of rest and relaxation.

Yours sincerely,

Mr H van Mourik Broekman
Principal