
Principal's Newsletter

10 December 2021

Dear Parents,

The season means nativities and lessons and carols. One of the joys of leading an all-through school is to experience the full spectrum of musical, dramatic and religious endeavour as it relates to the season.

It may be thought that all Reception nativities blend into one. But they do not. This year stood out somehow as exceptional. Perhaps it was because we have not been able to hold one for years. Perhaps it was because parents sat, masked, but still recognized by enthusiastic pupils socially distanced, marched in at the last second, like an entry to a sacred temple. The parental support for the production in the making, assembling, designing of some of the most fantastic costumes ever was one of the things that sets this year's nativity apart. Choirs of angels, herds of shepherds, dancing stars, jumpered narrators, robed Mary and Joseph. The educational triumph of the thing is obvious. 84 4 and 5-year-olds learn lines, sing songs, become camels, move around in a more or less coordinated fashion, sit on the stage. Before the show the adrenaline is so vigorously pumping through young veins that one worries how the whole thing can remain contained on the stage. The explosion of the energy in each of the 5!! performances is a tax on the energy levels of pupils. The show takes about 30 minutes and at the end there are yawns, signs of physical and emotional exhaustion in the performance. The Christmas Story as resilience training. Hats off to the staff, the entire team of adults who can organize something like this, contain and channel the energy. Most significant about the whole thing is that the very act of putting on the nativity is an affirmation of its central theological importance: every person matters, everything matters, it all means something.

The more ecclesiastical setting of Mossley Hill parish church was the next stop for Christingle. I attended the Year 4 and Year 6 singing, declaiming, acting, showing and telling. Mr Harvey and Ms Clark could be seen inexhaustibly conducting more than a hundred in traditional and more modern carols. There is an energy to the Prep School generally which makes me want to teach, dance, sing, and smile, and this occasion was no different.

The PTA have also asked me to pass on their thanks to all the staff, parents and pupils who helped to raise a brilliant £290 for the PTA during the Christingle events, and to all our PTA volunteers who helped out.

Rose in Year 8 came to ask me to get the card she had made with friends for John the lollipop man to him. It was moving to receive this token of affection for him, as he is not well and the pupils recognize in him someone who meant something to them, who made their lives better, while helping them cross the road safely. I reflected on the experience of all-through school for them. They remember John the lollipop man as a figure from their earliest memories, part of their story here at school.

Monday's Service of Lessons and Carols at the Cathedral saw us return to a tradition and a place where we had not been for three years. The choir and orchestra performed well. Guests, of which there were by necessity very few and very distanced at that, commented on the confidence of our young readers and their outstanding elocution in the cavernous enormity of the Cathedral. It was sobering not to be able to fill the place with parents, an intimation of the dreaded omicron variant and the possible return of restrictions. The forewarning of this is always the decision by Ofsted to cease inspection, a bit like a regulatory lockdown. This has now happened in response to the many schools, ourselves included, who are struggling with staffing issues due to covid and are in no position to face this torturous ordeal. It would be reasonable to think that school after Christmas might look different yet again and that at some point the government will have to make a decision again about exams and SATs.

The creativity of parental excuses for not having their child attend the service shows little sign of being diminished. We get everything from emergency shifts at work to very convoluted post facto explanations. Next year, we will hopefully return to a post covid attendance which reflects our common commitment to the event.

There are no excuses possible in the case of 2021-2022 mocks. This is why the mocks just finishing have been so important and so properly and seriously conducted. Even in Year 1, Ms Russell-Moore has revealed the amazing number of assessments to me. What are we learning? How well are we teaching? Who is thriving, who is struggling? What exactly do we need to work on with pupils? Public exams are assessments which often do not allow for any feedback, any adjustment of teaching or curriculum. Mocks and internal assessments form our plans for the future and allow us to focus on the challenges pupils face as individuals. They are therefore an important part of what we are doing in the run up to Christmas.

A reminder that our Charity Action Group is supporting the Whitechapel Centre's Christmas appeal this year – please [click here](#) to find out how you can help.

Mrs Crook (SENCO) has asked me to highlight some new programmes that will be running in January and March 2022 for parents whose child has received a diagnosis of autism (ASD). Please [click here](#) to find out more information.

The boarders went to the Trafford Centre together and concluded that one of the best things about the place was that it was exceedingly well heated. We are living on a very muddy campus at the moment and the effect of stormy weather on pupils has been a

source of teacher comments for hundreds of years. Pupils are in some ways heavily influenced by weather. In the storm, it was great to see the Santa Dash being run in secondary. Chapters 7 and 8 exerted themselves across the gloomy field to score the house points. Meanwhile on Wednesday, the Prep School supported St Luke's Hospice with a sponsored Elf Run. Preparations are under way for a highlight of the final week of term: the dancing competition and the battle of the bands. It will all end of course on Friday the 17th for pupils and much planning is going into the delivery of the traditional Christmas dinner on Thursday the 16th.

But before that Oswestry School's rugby and hockey teams will have to be dealt with on the last block fixture of the season while the U12 rugby team are involved in a fixture in Yorkshire against Yarm School and Hymers College. Hopefully, the storms will subside and we will be able to declare both Chapter 7 and Chapter 8 as the first two undefeated teams in one year.

May I wish you and yours a pleasant and dry weekend.

Yours sincerely,

Mr H van Mourik Broekman
Principal