

26 March 2010

Dear Parent

We find it hard to believe that the end of the Lent term is upon us. Looking back we are (as always) impressed with how much the children have managed to pack in. Many of our boarders have coped extremely well with the additional pressure of scholarship examinations this term and all of them can be proud of their achievements to date. Particular congratulations must go to the boarders who are scholarship award winners: Charlotte, Joy, Chloe, George, Dan, Jack W, Jack HR, Alec and Ben.

As last year during this term, we have had some memorable snow days. A number of staff live on site, and some of the other teachers always manage to join us. Although we dedicate lots of time to having fun in the snow, we manage to operate fairly normally, with interesting lessons and great food. Once outside we love to see so many boarders playing and acting like children, particularly when there is so much pressure these days for them to be "cool" and to withdraw into electronic games.

With a change of format this year, we decided to offer a Taster Boarding Week for Year 7 pupils considering full boarding for their final year. We had 22 day pupils staying for four "normal" nights and we trust that they found this helpful in deciding whether boarding life was for them. We had a lot of positive feedback from teachers and parents as well as the children themselves.

Our boarders' clubs on Saturday afternoons included a range of activities. For the fit and active, Dr. Jarratt organised a popular skiing club, and a number of boys and girls have been honing their dry ski skills at Bowles. Mr. Caithness's mountain bikers defected to skiing due to the snow / rain / mud / cold! Mr. Whitehead has led interesting and informative expeditions to Hastings, Brighton and to the Cabinet War Rooms in London. The scholars in particular appreciate this type of club. Mrs. Harmer's "Food, Fashion and Fine Arts" club, which is attended by the girls mainly, continues to provide a lovely relaxing and creative series of activities, with the highlight for some being a shopping trip into Tunbridge Wells. Some of us managed to support a local amateur dramatic group with a visit to the pantomime. One memorable Saturday afternoon all the boarders joined together for "Ready Steady Bake" and produced some delicious cupcakes.

Sunday activities have been equally wide-ranging. We have been 10-pin bowling and for a wet and windy walk on the beach. We have built dens, played "Red Barrel" in the woods with Mrs. Dix and made cushions for our Mums with Mrs. Glossop. Chef worked with our boarders for a brilliant "Cook your own Dinner" day, and the girls had their very own "Girls' Night In" with a film. There have been two memorable discos – one at Roedean and the other here at Vinehall where our new resident Gap Students led the dancing and demonstrated their popularity with the children!

Mrs. Pickerill ensured that the work ethic of our school was not forgotten with her interesting maths activities, whilst Mr. Higgins organised a great Easter egg hunt around the grounds. Mr. Butler must get special commendation for arranging for us all to go to High Wycombe to watch Wasps vs Gloucester. We all dressed up, had our photos taken on the pitch and our name in the programme, and enjoyed a great game of rugby. It was a wonderful and memorable day out for the boarders!

Evenings generally follow a routine of supper, prep, music practice, free time, toast, shower and then bed, but no evening is ever the same. Mr. Caithness took a group to a lecture about "Murphy's Law", and our Year 7s practised their ESB presentations in front of us. We celebrated Burns Night, Australia Day and lots of birthdays as well as enjoying astro sessions, sports hall sessions, movie evenings, Saturday night tuck and weekly "Caithness teas" for the tidiest dorms. We have had some lovely services in our little chapel – our favourite being the Mothering Sunday service at the end of an exeat weekend. Two of the most memorable evenings included the introduction of a "Dracula" game (very complicated rules and a lot of screaming in the dark!) and our pyjama party in the Sports Hall.

The 2010 version of the boarding house hoodie is due to arrive any day now and the trackies are already in regular use. Please can all items brought to school be named clearly, particularly in the case of temporary boarders, since matrons are unable to return misplaced items to their owners without a clue!

Could we ask all parents to check carefully any electronic items that their children bring to school. The children should know that they are not allowed to watch movies or music videos except on the television in Hurricanes so please do not allow your child to bring in an ipod or similar loaded up with these things. Please support us in ensuring that your children are only gaining access to material (games and music) which is appropriate. The devices the children bring in should not have internet connection capability.

The boarding staff have all worked tremendously hard this term. Our new gappers are proving to be very good at helping the children to organise their busy lives and run many activities including the junior boarders' club. We are currently considering expanding the junior boarders' programme on a Tuesday night so that coming to stay in the boarding house in Year 5 or 6 does not seem quite so daunting. Rooks dorm has now been redecorated and looks very smart indeed.

Our boarders generally take great pride in their dorms and try to keep them tidy. The winner of the Dorm Cup for Lent 2010 is Mousehole. Well done to dorm leader Bobby Bensted-Smith, Tom Bass, Kyle Seo and new boarder Ben Kang for setting such a good example.

We are looking forward to welcoming a number of new boarders next term. A few day pupils have decided to make the leap into full time boarding and we have some new pupils to the school as well as our Spanish returners. We are saying goodbye to Pat Malone, our fantastic, thorough and ever-patient cleaner. She is taking her well-deserved retirement from Easter and she leaves with our very best wishes and thanks for all the hard work over the years.

To the parents we would like to extend our thanks for your continuing support and for entrusting us with such lovely children. We wish you a very happy Easter.

Yours sincerely

Magnus, Helen, Archie and Elizabeth Caithness