

July 2008

Dear Parent,

Where has the summer term gone? A huge amount of hard work has been done for CE, scholarships and exams, but very few boarders will remember prep sessions when they recount their sunny boarding days at Vinehall! They will however hopefully recall the support from their friends and staff, as they have been a very close group.

We all have enjoyed the wonderful grounds and facilities of Vinehall this term. Obviously the theatre has become a second home for a number of our older boarders, and we are sure that one day they will appreciate how lucky they are to have a theatre of such quality in a Prep school. The "Calamity Jane" leavers will be in the history books in this important anniversary year.

"Red Barrel" has been the outdoor activity of choice on many evenings – a complicated and exhausting wide game. The children run for miles! We have also made good use of the cricket nets, the golf course, the tennis courts and there have been countless impromptu games of football, touch rugby, American football, rounders... one of the many advantages of living with lots of others means that team games are a daily possibility.

Other activities this Summer term have included a wonderful afternoon with Mrs. Dix completing some hilarious and challenging team building games; a "try dive" in the school pool; big screen nights; a treasure hunt and quiz; an orienteering course; pottery in the art room; and raft building on the pond. One memorable Friday night, Mr. Butcher delighted the temporary boarders by introducing them to the legendary Vinehall Water Slide. We have a new generation of Dr. Who fans, and younger boarders have enjoyed cosy TV sessions in The Peel. Mr. Reid will be remembered for his "Vinehall's Strongest Man" event held during the year 6 camp weekend.

Our weekends are always much looked forward to and we would like to thank the rest of our Saturday Clubs team - Mr. Whitehead, Mr. Ingram, Mrs. Harmer and Mrs. West – and the Sunday duty members of staff, for their enthusiasm in organizing events, activities and trips that appeal so much to a variety of boarders. There will be even more clubs on offer next year, so the boarders will be spoilt for choice! This is our aim, so if you have a particular interest or skill that you would like to share with some (or all) of our boarders for an hour or two one weekend next term, we would be delighted to hear from you!

For the Caithness family, the favourite trips this term have been mountain biking at Bedgebury, a wonderful sunny day at Camber Sands, and the junior boarders' day out at Drusilla's Zoo. We also enjoyed a day at Knockhatch Adventure Park, with quad bikes and laser quest being the highlights for many.

Summer 2008 will always be remembered for the latest "must-have" item of clothing, the new boarders' hoodie. We are delighted at the quality and popularity of them. Beware – they will shrink if tumble dried, and they can't be replaced.

This term we enjoyed both lie-ins and late nights. Additional Food Opportunities (always important to boarders) have included toast with the Gappers, Caithness teas, breakfast in bed for some boys, marshmallows and popcorn for some girls, and late night biscuits for all during exam week. We've had BBQs and a number of outside suppers, and eaten a record number of weetabix!

The hotly contested Dorm Cup was won by the junior boys in Rooks dorm. Congratulations to Chris Bensted-Smith in his first term as a dorm leader. Other dorm leaders may well be going to Chris for training, particularly as Rooks dorm has the largest number of temporary boarders each week. Well done Chris.

Staffing News: There will be a few changes in staffing next academic year. We are very sad to lose the hardworking, popular and inspirational Mr. Jez Reid, who has completed his successful gap year here. He has been an invaluable support to the Caithness family, the Gap students and the Matrons. Mr. Reid has willingly undertaken a huge range of duties and built up a wonderful rapport with our boarders. We wish him all the very best for his future outside Vinehall and assure him of a very warm welcome whenever he visits.

We are delighted to welcome back Miss Annie Dron, who has completed her PGCE and is returning to Vinehall to teach a Year 3 class. Miss Dron will be working in the boarding house again on Monday evenings, and will be running one of the Saturday afternoon clubs with Dr. Jarrett. We are also looking forward to working with Mr. Ryan Mitchell, who will be taking on some boarding responsibilities when he joins the school in September.

The Caithness family remain in The Peel, in the centre of the Boarding House, and we are supported by a fantastic team of matrons and gap students, and of course, Sister Victoria. Friday evenings, always a busy night for temporary boarding, finds Dr. Jarrett in charge.

Housekeeping issues for September

As usual, we'd like to remind you that your child should return to school in uniform after school holidays and exeats (short-sleeved polo shirts for the first half of next term), and that all items of clothing, including home clothes, should be named. After exeats, boarders should arrive around 10 minutes before their bed bell, and no earlier than 7pm.

At the start of term, Pyjamas, slippers, dressing gown and toiletries should be packed separately in overnight bags together with pants and socks for the first two days. One set of games kit should also be brought separately so that it can be put into the changing rooms that evening ready for Games lessons the next day.

We have organised many of next term's weekend activities already, and hope that all boarders will want to, and be able to, join in. Certain children have out of school activities such as rugby training that might make this difficult, but apart from these, we would expect all others to attend. It can be frustrating when at the last minute, after groups have been formed and plans made, some children tell us that they are not going to be there, so we would be grateful if you support us in this or at least give us plenty of notice! We are sympathetic to prior family commitments, illness, birthday parties and the like. We also have some international or long-distance boarders who appreciate being invited home with their more local friends occasionally.

Activities that will include all boarders are: a World Challenge Adventure Day on Sunday 7th September (details in separate letter), a Bowling and Laser Quest party in Eastbourne (Sunday 28th September), a pool party at Tenterden Leisure Centre (Sunday 9th November), the boarders' Christmas party and disco (Saturday 13th December), and the carol service followed by "Dorm Decs" competition (Sunday 14th December). We also have a number of on-site activities planned, and find the children appreciate the time together to explore the school grounds or just sit and chat. We try to include as much detail as we can in the school calendar, although an empty space is unlikely to mean that there is nothing at all organised for the boarders.

On the subject of outings, sometimes there may be changes of plan and different venues or activities chosen. It can be difficult to get hold of parents to let them know of these changes if they are last minute, and so we would like to assume you would be happy for us to change plans without letting you know, unless the activity is likely to involve more than usual expense or risk. If, however, you would prefer always to be told of changes, do let us know.

Mobile phones: in the past, children have not been permitted to have these at school, unless they need them at exeat for travelling long distances. We are moving with the times however, and appreciate that you would like to be able to easily receive calls from your child. FULL TIME boarders are therefore permitted to bring in a named mobile phone, to be used only for texting or phoning home. These mobiles are kept in Dispensary and are only to be used upstairs in the boarding house after Prep and before bed, when they should be returned for safekeeping. Abuse of this privilege may result in mobile phones being sent home.

Phoning home: it is best if your child normally phones you from our call box or mobile (see above) rather than you phoning them. If too many parents ring school, it clogs up the phone system and has poor Matron running manically in all directions trying to find people when she is also trying to man Dispensary, laundry and a number of dorms! We do of course understand that this will not always be possible. If you ring school and find that no-one is answering (especially in the early evening, or on Sunday, when boarding staff are not likely to be in earshot of the phone) then one option is to try the boarding mobile (07929 777945) which is usually held by a duty member of staff. It may be that

all 3 upstairs extensions are in use, in which case you will hear a constant ringing tone but we won't be able to hear you ringing. An email to houseparents@vinehallschool.com with a time for your child to be near the phone is another option.

Keeping up to date with what is happening: Boarding almost always has a lengthy entry in the weekly emailed newsletter, Vinelines. This often includes photographs and diary entries from boarders, and we use Vinelines to communicate various housekeeping issues to boarding parents. We try to make it entertaining as well as informative. If you don't already receive Vinelines by email, it is worth signing up for it. Contact the office to find out how! You can also find it on the school website.

PSPs (and any other valuable items) should be named. Games should be age-appropriate, and children should not bring films to watch on them. Year 8s may wish to bring in a DVD or video to watch in their common room on wet evenings or weekends. These must be clearly labelled and approved by Mr. or Mrs. Caithness before they are viewed. One per boarder only please.

Handbooks: a printed version of the updated Boarders' Handbook will arrive over the summer, or can be accessed via the website - www.vinehallschool.com

We would like to wish all our leavers happiness in their new schools. We are very sad to see them go, and of course the "Calamity Jane" leavers will always be particularly special as they were our first Year 8's. We will miss them, especially their singing, dancing and music making, but hope they will come back to visit us from time to time, or even send us a letter or two?

Have a wonderful summer! We will spend most of ours in Yorkshire and in Scotland, and aim to be outside as much as we can. We will be back in the Boarding House from the 26th August.

Yours sincerely

Magnus, Helen, Archie and Elizabeth Caithness