

August 2011

Dear Parent

Welcome to the academic year 2011-2012. I hope you have all enjoyed a happy summer holiday together and are looking forward to the new term feeling suitably refreshed.

I am very pleased to report that for the second year running, the number of children starting at Vinehall this September has increased on the previous year's total and the atmosphere remains increasingly positive. We therefore look forward to a period of sustained growth which hopefully the national economy will mirror. Boarding numbers are also positive in the new era with Mrs Coles and her team at the helm and the boarding house is of course boosted each week by the numerous children who temp board. If you wish to have a tour of the boarding house with a view to your child starting boarding in either capacity, Mrs Coles will be delighted to show you around.

Over the summer there have once again been two lets and a number of sports courses. Our maintenance and grounds teams have been working incredibly hard to ensure that the school looks as smart as ever, ready for September, highlighted by the superb redecoration of the front of the main School building, and we are looking forward to having the children back so that we can launch into another busy year's learning at Vinehall.

Staff

In the Prep school we welcome Mr Steve Pomery, who joins the Mathematics and Science departments, bringing his daughter Eva (who joins Year 4) with him.

As you will be aware, Mr Reid continues his role as Assistant Housemaster, but this term combines the role with that of teacher of history and junior subjects. Mrs Coles also starts as Housemistress 'upstairs', and we have a new gapper with us for one term, Simon Rigby, who has been experiencing gapper positions in two previous schools before joining us to complete his journey around the UK. You will also no doubt see Mrs Coles' husband Gideon in the house, and although he has no formal role within the School, he will be involved in some activities as indeed he already has.

I am delighted to offer public congratulations to Mrs Kawai-Calderhead, who is expecting a baby in January 2012. As a result, I am pleased to report that we have managed to secure the services of Mrs Helen Hoffman for two terms for maternity cover for Annie starting at the beginning of the Lent Term 2012. Mrs Hoffman will fulfil all of Annie's roles both as teacher and Head of Juniors. As you may know, Mrs Hoffman worked here until recently and therefore knows many of our children and all about Vinehall!

With Mrs Linda Callard on sabbatical until the end of half term, I am pleased to report that Mrs Jenny Shepherd, who will be known to many of you from her previous time with us, joins us again for what will certainly be a busy term with our new overseas pupils.

Prefects

Congratulations to our newly selected Head Boy, William McNeilly and Head Girl, Siena Barry Taylor. The other eight promotions, including the two deputies, will be announced in the first assembly of term.

Calendar and Events

The school calendar will be available for you as usual in the Front Hall (subject to delivery) for the term ahead, listing the main events of the term. The calendar is posted on our website and weekly updates and reminders will be published in our e-newsletter, Vinelines. An invitation to Grandparents' Day to pass on to your extended family will be sent out shortly.

Clubs

The list of clubs was sent out at the end of last term and many have already sent replies. The list will also be available on the website. Please discuss with your child which they will be doing and reply as soon as possible if you are yet to do so.

Saturday matches and absence

Please note the dates of the Saturday matches for this term and keep them free. We run the Saturday matches to give your children more opportunities to represent the School and to enable working parents to have the chance to watch their children. Therefore, it is extremely unfortunate if teams are weakened or matches have to be cancelled because children are absent. Please remember to ask permission for absence

from me (by email or letter) and to do this well in advance and only for reasons which are completely unavoidable.

Carol Service

Following the success of the Carol Service which moved to the Saturday last year, we have decided to repeat this date in the calendar, to which all prep school children are expected to attend. The service will therefore take place on Saturday 10th December at 3.00 p.m. We intend to maintain the special feel that the Carol Service has always had and Dorm Decs will take place as usual for boarders afterwards. Full details will be sent later in the term but please mark this date in your diaries now.

Form Placement

You should by now have received individual form lists for your child(ren). Form placements have been considered over a long period of time with immense care and are based on internal assessments, teachers' experience and observations of friendship groups, as well as with the intention of achieving a fair balance in each class. As one parent recently said to me, the annual success of Vinehall pupils is down to the fact that there are "bright, hard-working children in every class, and a culture of support from all the teachers".

Medical

If there is any medical information that we need to know, please ensure that Sister Victoria is informed. Any new medical conditions or updates on existing ones should be made known to Sister Victoria in writing please, including a need for pupils to wear glasses. If your child requires medication during the daytime, you will need to sign a consent form in the dispensary (or at the Pre-Prep office). As suggested by Ofsted when they inspected the (Outstanding) boarding house last term, we will be tweaking our medical consent form to explicitly mention 'emergency first aid', as new regulations mean our previously acceptable all-encompassing treatment consent is no longer considered 'best practice'.

If your child is suffering from any illness we ask that you keep her/him off school. If your child is ill, please let us know by phoning the office after 8.00 a.m. or the Pre-Prep office after 8.30 a.m. We will require a note on their return giving the reason for the absence. Please check your calendar in order to avoid making appointments at the same time as important school events, including Saturday matches.

Pupils who are unwell may miss games and if you write in to request off-games, please state whether you feel that your child is well enough to go and watch games inside/outside rather than sit-out the session in the library. Where possible, we would prefer the children to watch.

Child Protection and welfare

The safety and welfare of children is central to all that we do at Vinehall. We have a well-trained Welfare Team of staff representing children across the School which meets regularly to maintain lines of communication. On very rare occasions we are required to take actions which some parents could find surprising and threatening, but in such cases we will always work towards mutual understanding. We will explain our professional responsibilities and we will give every reassurance as to our motives but we will always stress that, for us, children's needs have to come first.

It is not our intention to overplay this important and statutory aspect of our duty of care to the children but to ensure that we cover child protection correctly and with efficiency. For your information, the Child Protection Officer is Mr Whitehead and Deputy Child Protection Officer is Mrs Quelli Coles. Both Mrs Richardson as Head of Pre-Prep and I are part of the Welfare Team, as is the School Nurse. We also have the support of a Governor, Mrs Liz Goodman, who has special responsibility for Child Protection and together we share the responsibilities of child protection at Vinehall.

Safety on the Drive

Please take extreme care to curb your speed and watch out for children on the drive. As the evenings become darker, it is imperative that children wait in the porch, by the front door or in the front hall/rec room at the end of the School day and nowhere else. Please do not instruct your children to wait anywhere else.

In the unlikely event that you depart down the drive by which you enter, please remember that for safety reasons you should only turn left (towards the roundabout). The other exit may be used for turning either left or right.

Saturday School and Saturday assembly

Saturday school continues for Year 7 and 8. The full programme of activities for Years 3-6 is also in place and parents involved will receive a separate letter concerning this. Drop-off time on Saturdays should be

from 8.00 - 8.15 a.m. as we will have our assembly at 8.20 a.m. I would be delighted to see any parents who wish to stay for Assembly on Saturdays so please do attend and stay for a cup of tea or coffee afterwards.

Sunday Services and Catholic Mass

Father John presides over our Sunday services for boarders and we hope very much that many families will choose to join us. Dates are published in the Calendar and extended families are extremely welcome to join us too. It is always lovely to see a full chapel and the boarders themselves are delighted to welcome guests. For our Catholic boarders, a minibus travels to Battle Catholic Church every Saturday just after the evening meal.

Friends of Vinehall

The Friends of Vinehall Committee will be happy to receive your support and contact details are printed at the back of the calendar. We hope that parents will be able to support the various School events that the Friends organise. Please ensure that you book your bonfire tickets early – statistically, the weather must be better this year!

Communication

Staff are always happy to see you to discuss any concerns you may have although we would request that you allow the teachers time in the morning to prepare for the busy day ahead. Form teachers are the first port of call for pastoral or general concerns. We recommend that you request a telephone call through the office or make an appointment to see a member of staff after school when they will have more time to talk to you. Form teachers will write to you at the beginning of term with details of the best way to stay in touch with them. Most staff have a School email address which is now shown in the School calendar. Please do stay in touch so that we can address any problems at an early stage. As a rule of thumb, if you are considering getting in touch but feel unsure, do contact us.

Prep Diaries

Pupils in Year 5 and above are issued with their own prep diary which should come home daily and should be signed every weekend by parents/guardians or boarding tutors. Please help us to encourage the children to use these books to note down and organise their prep.

Juniors have home-school contact books in which they keep a reading log. Mrs K-C (Head of Juniors) will be in the de Beer corridor each morning to speak to parents. Year 3 parents will also wish to stay in close contact with Mrs K-C or Mrs Everist as new pupils settle in.

School Uniform

Second-hand uniform is available from the matrons. Requests can be left in the School office. The Simmonds uniform shop can be contacted on the School shop number 01580 881597. Uniform can be ordered on line on www.simmonds-ltd.com. Please make sure that uniform is named and looped as necessary. Children may wear summer or winter uniform until half term, dependent upon the weather.

Girls' shoes

Please remember to buy girls' shoes with a solid sole/small heel. Pump style shoes do not support the feet and encourage the wearer to shuffle along instead of walking normally. I am afraid that you may be asked to replace them immediately if your daughter has artfully persuaded you to buy the wrong type.

Tours for parents and the Open Days

Please do not miss out on a tour of Vinehall if you have not yet had one or feel that your last full tour was too long ago. Our Registrar, Mrs de Havilland, will be delighted to book you and/or friends in for a tour of the school with me at a mutually convenient time. You might also like to come along to our open mornings when we hope to have samples of School lunches available too. Please contact Mrs de Havilland for details. It is your enormous enthusiasm for the School that interests other parents and kindles the interest of the next generation of Vinehall parents. To this end, we will be sending you two invitations for our Open Morning on Saturday 8th October which we hope you will be able to distribute to those parents you feel might be interested in viewing the School.

Beginning of term arrangements

Day children should arrive at School between 8.00 a.m. and 8.15 a.m. on Thursday 8th September (Pre-Prep 8.20 a.m. – 8.40 a.m.). Boarders return on Wednesday 7th September at 4.30 p.m. in full School uniform. This ensures boarders have at least one full set of School uniform for the following day!

The first day of term is always busy. We would appreciate it if you would please take care on the drive and complete the drop-off as quickly and safely as possible. Guardians for new pupils should aim to meet their

charges upon arrival (so please ensure they are early and ready in the front hall) and new parents are invited to coffee in the rec. room.

To ease congestion on the drive on the first day, you are welcome to bring PE kit, wellingtons, etc. into School before term starts. School will be open for staff meetings on Monday 5th, Tuesday 6th and Wednesday 7th September and you will have access to pegs during office hours.

Finally....Getting your child ready for the start of term

Remembering to do everything necessary to get a child prepared for the start of a new academic year always seems like something of a marathon! You will therefore find an attached checklist of essential things which need to be done before the start of term. I hope this will be of help for those of you who like to tick things off as you go along.

We welcome all our families whether they be new or established. Those of you who attended the Prize-Giving at the end of last term will have seen how much Vinehall children develop and achieve during their time here and we look forward to continuing the same process with your children this year.

With best wishes for the academic year ahead.

Yours faithfully

Richard Follett
Headmaster