

September 2009

Dear Parent

Welcome to the academic year 2009-2010. We read of increasing confidence in the broader economy and trust that it will continue across this year. At Vinehall, we aim to support our pupils, families and the wider community. We will be hosting a conference for heads of Pre-Preps and for domestic bursars this term and I am the Vice-Chairman of IAPS (the Independent Association of Preparatory Schools) for the year.

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

### **Staff**

My PA, Mrs Day, remarried in the summer and is now Mrs. Renshaw. In the Pre-Prep, Mrs Nicholls accepted a new position elsewhere at the end of last term so she has left our team of teaching assistants. Her hours have been taken on by existing staff. Upon the retirement of Mrs Howorth, our secretarial team has adapted and there will be just one secretary on duty in the front office. Please be sympathetic and allow time for messages to get through. If you could please help by taking conversations out of the busy front office and into the front hall, the secretary would be grateful since it can become very noisy in the front office.

We have a new gapper, Miss O'Riordan, who has just finished her 'A'Levels at St Leonards-Mayfield and joins us for the rest of 2009.

### **Prefects**

Congratulations to fourteen Year 8 pupils who have been selected as prefects this year: Head Boy Jack Winchester; Head Girl Chloe Jeremy; Deputy Head Girl Isabelle Powell; Deputy Head Boy James McNeilly; Hector Elliott, Oscar Kotting McMillan, Sam Buchanan, Chase Collins, Phoebe Baker, Charlotte Ward, Charlotte McNally, Isabella Bearcroft, Kajal Radia and Claire Hunt.

As ever, we shall review the performance of our Year 8 pupils across the year and it is possible that others could be made up during the year.

### **Calendar and Events**

I enclose a school calendar 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*.

Please find enclosed a Grandparents' Day invitation to pass on to your parents, in-laws and extended family.

We are hosting another Parent Forum in October. This is an opportunity for parents to put questions to - and raise issues with - the Head and the Chairman of Governors. Please email any questions for the October Forum to [headspa@vinehallschool.com](mailto:headspa@vinehallschool.com) by 15 October or return the enclosed slip to my PA, Mrs Renshaw.

**Form Placement**

Attached to this letter is a form list if you have a child in Year 4 or above. Form placements have been considered with immense care and are based on internal assessments, teachers' experience and observations of friendship groups, with the intention of achieving a fair balance in each class. In Years 4 and 5 we have grouped the children according to age. We have given considerable thought to class allocations with regard to social issues, academic potential and gender balance. If you have any serious concerns about groupings, please contact Mrs Cooper (for juniors) or Mrs Redstone.

**Academic Matters**

You will notice from the calendar that we have timetabled examinations for Years 6 and above. Tests for younger year groups will take place in class. The children will be given plenty of warning and there should be no need for extra revision outside of class. Children will be told their results after the exams and a summary of results will be included with your end of term report.

Parents evenings are scheduled this term for Pre-Prep, Year 3 and 8D.

**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).

If your child has been diagnosed with swine 'flu over the holiday, please will you let us know. If you have any concern that your family has been exposed to swine 'flu then please contact the School Nurse and if you or your child has any symptoms, please keep away from school. Similarly, 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 8.15 am or the Pre-Prep office after 8.30 am. We will also require a note giving the reason for the absence. If you wish your child to miss school for any reason other than illness, then you should write to me well in advance to request permission. Please check your calendar in order to avoid making appointments at the same time as important school events, including Saturday matches. Please ensure that your family holidays are booked to coincide with school holiday times and if you wish to request absence for any reason other than illness, please write to me.

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 and benefit from some fresh air.

**Child Protection and welfare**

In all of the work that we do at Vinehall, we see the safety and welfare of children as paramount. This means that sometimes we have to take actions which some parents could find threatening. In such cases we will 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 in order to ensure that we cover child protection efficiently we have a Welfare Team of staff representing children across Vinehall. For your information, our Child Protection Officer is Mr Geoffrey Whitehead, Deputy Head, and Deputy Child Protection Officer is Mrs Quelli Coles. The Heads of the

Prep School and Pre-Prep Department and the School Nurse also sit on this Welfare Team with the support of a Governor 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.

### **The Prep School day**

The new timetable in the Prep School means that we all finish lessons at 5.20 pm so the children should be available for collection by 5.30 pm.

### **Terms and Conditions**

You may be aware that the current Terms and Conditions (sometimes referred to as the parent contract) make provision for the School to make reasonable modifications from time to time. Accordingly, we have reviewed and amended the document this summer in line with the model contract drawn up by Farrer and Co. Solicitors, on behalf of the Independent Schools Bursars' Association which is used widely by independent schools.

I enclose a copy of the revised Terms and Conditions for your information. They will take effect from 1 January 2010.

### **Saturday Assemblies, Sunday Services**

Parents are very welcome to join us for Saturday morning assemblies in the theatre from 8.20 am and for coffee afterwards. Father John Lambourne 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.

### **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.

### **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 and emails can be forwarded from the school office (there is a list of contact details in the blue 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. Parents/boarding tutors should sign the book every weekend.

Juniors have home-school contact books in which they keep a reading log. Mrs Cooper (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 Miss Dron or Mrs Everist as new pupils settle in.

### **School Uniform**

Second-hand uniform is available from the matrons. Notes 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](http://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.

Pupils should not wear nail varnish, hair braids or tattoos to school. Jewellery should not be worn, other than small crucifixes or crosses and plain silver or gold studs for girls with pierced ears (these must be removed or taped for games).

### **Hair**

May I remind you how important it is to have checked your children's hair several times before the start of term, using a nit comb? We would be grateful if you would ensure that your children return to school with hair cut and tidy! Pupils' hair should be of its natural colour and cut to a sensible length, out of the eyes (above the collar for boys). Girls may wear blue hair bands.

### **Tours for parents**

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 Parry, will be delighted to book you 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 on 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> October. You are always welcome to bring along friends who might find a visit of interest. Please contact Mrs Parry for details.

### **Beginning of term arrangements**

Day children should arrive at school between 8.00 am and 8.15 am on Thursday 10th September (pre-prep 8.20 am – 8.40 am). Boarders return on Wednesday 9th September at 4.30 pm.

The first day of term is always especially 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 arrive by 8 am and aim to meet their charges upon arrival 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, wellies, etc. into school before term starts. School will be open for staff meetings on Monday 7th, Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> and Wednesday 9th September and you will have access to pegs during office hours.

We welcome our new families and welcome back established families. Please note the new finish time for weekdays: 5.20 pm.

Yours, with best wishes for the academic year ahead,

Julie Robinson  
(Head)