

18 December 2009



Dear Parent

## Letter from the Boarding House

The Michaelmas term sometimes seems long but we feel that the second half has passed very quickly. We hope that your children will be full of stories of their busy but enjoyable time boarding at Vinehall this term. The last few days of any term are always very trying as there are so many extra things going on. It is heartening to still hear laughter from the dorms despite the tiredness following our Boarders' Christmas disco, dorm decs, senior play, the formal dinner & dance for Year 8s, packing and all of the other events!

For many of our boarders, the Michaelmas term has been their first time living away from home. We aim to create a welcoming family atmosphere in the boarding house and at the same time we recognise that we will never replace home. Boarding aims to complement home life, giving children the opportunity to develop independence and to appreciate family all the more when they return. As you know, a year ago we changed the mobile phone policy, allowing all boarders to keep a phone here in school if they wish. This has had mixed success – it made homesickness much worse to begin with – but most parents find it easier to stay in regular contact. Please bear in mind that your child is most likely to sound negative on the phone home to you, as they offload to a familiar ear, but that the rest of the time they are usually having a wonderful time. Likewise, some children like to phone every day, because they can, whilst others will only phone if they want something! If we are worried about how your child is coping we will contact you and of course you can always contact us either by phone or email. We ask all children to write a letter home each Sunday and we know how much they appreciate receiving letters in return.

Each week we aim to contribute to Vinehall's emailed newsletter, Vinelines, with text and photos. If you are not receiving this directly to your email account, please contact [mjh@vinehallschool.com](mailto:mjh@vinehallschool.com) and request that your email address is added to the distribution list. Vinelines can be accessed from the Vinehall website, too. We take hundreds of photos and only a handful will fit onto Vinelines, so we use another website to show photos of the boarders' active social life: [www.fotki.com/vinehallschool](http://www.fotki.com/vinehallschool). You can download our photos or print them out from there.

Saturday afternoons are usually club afternoons. Sailing club with Dr. Jarratt has included a number of outings on the lake and the sea. Towards the end of December the sailors opted for the relative warmth of the Sovereign Centre and swimming instead! Mr. Whitehead's History club visited HMS Belfast as well as exploring Rye, Pevensey Castle and the local history museum in Battle. Fine Arts club with Mrs. Harmer has been suitably 'girly', with shopping trips and craft activities. Mr. Caithness and Mr. Coles are discovering increasing numbers of enthusiasts for their muddy mountain biking expeditions to Bedgebury Forest! Saturday evenings are usually dedicate to tuck and movies although we have had a dedicated group of 'X Factor' fans this term!

So many activities have been organised this term that it is hard to know which ones to highlight. We really enjoyed the first weekend of term and Raft Building Day when we mixed up our boarders and took them to Crawley. Some very enthusiastic outdoor instructors introduced us to a variety of team games and then let them loose on the water in rafts. We all managed to complete the sponsored walk, and had lots of fun with our Year 5 "taster boarders" making Guys for the bonfire. Our boarders like to get out of school on trips, and all enjoyed going to Eastbourne for ten pin bowling and Laser Quest as well as a fantastic evening indoor climbing at the Evolution Centre. A smaller group had a lovely afternoon at Groombridge, and others did some Christmas shopping in Tunbridge Wells.

We appreciate and make use of our grounds as much as possible. Sometimes the children just like to be outside playing, without very much input from the adults. They are lucky to have so

much space to explore and a number of the boarders keep their bikes here to use in their free time. We make almost daily use of the sports hall thanks to the legendary gappers' sports hall sessions! We also use the music block frequently and in recent weeks we have been found in the art room being creative. One resource that we tried this term was the sprung dance floor in the old gym – we had a super afternoon there learning a few Scottish dances when our Year 6s came to stay for a weekend. Our dining room is the focal point for breakfast, supper and evening “toast”, and for some special occasions too: we had a quiz night earlier in the term and on Friday we had the most wonderful disco for nearly 100 boarders, all dressed in red, green or silver.

During the darker months we spend more time in Hurricanes - our Boarders' Common Room. It is used to watch TV and films, play air hockey, Uno and Connect 4, read the paper, complete jigsaws or just a place to sprawl on the “fat boy” cushion and chat. Chef Ian, already a popular man amongst boarders for his treats and puddings, is now held in even higher esteem by the boys since he donated an Xbox to Hurricanes! In the run up to exams, Hurricanes is a quieter place, where boarders can get a little extra support with their revision or watch the news. We still have the use of the recreation room downstairs for pool, table tennis, or an alternative T.V. We have even used the rec room for karaoke this term!

We are very conscious that this next term will be a particularly important term academically for many of our boarders so we will aim to support them in their studies as well as providing light relief. As we did during exam week this term, we will be organising extra revision sessions, providing practical support and turning the lights off early when necessary.

## Staff

We are sad to say goodbye to our dedicated 2009 Gap Students: James Atfield, Nicole Terry, Tim Webster and Carol O'Riordan. They have been a valuable support to us, and great role models for the children. Our 2010 Gap Students will have a lot to live up to! They are three young Australians: Kelsey McIntosh, Kristy Robertson and Kevin Ingram-Gillson, and the British Tim Middleton. We know that the boarders will give them a warm welcome in January.

## Results for Michaelmas Term

Dorm marks this term have been incredibly good this term – the winning dorms have been neck and neck since September and achieved the Matroning equivalent of 98% over 68 days! It has made us proud to see so many of the children learning to organise themselves and developing self-sufficiency. Each term, the dorm with the highest overall score is awarded the **Matrons' Cup**. It was, unbelievably, a tie this term between two particularly house-proud and competitive dorms of Year 8 boys. Last term's winner, Barney Aldridge's **Larks** dorm, was awarded the Cup jointly with Theo Barry-Taylor (a.k.a Willy Wonka) who led **Rabbits dorm** with a rod of iron! Alice Whaley's **Amazons** dorm (Year 7) was close behind in 3<sup>rd</sup> place.

Rather than a Christmas Talent Show this year, we decided to imitate the X Factor with a singing / karaoke / instrumental competition called “**The V Factor**”. It was a very entertaining day, with the boarding staff as mentors and judges and the winner decided by public vote. One highlight was Elizabeth leading the entire boarding house with “If you're happy and you know it!” The overall winner was declared: Yolanda, Alice and Ruby (**Amazons**) with “Take a Bow”. Well done girls!

“Dorm Decs” provided fantastic entertainment on Sunday. Mrs. Jeremy and Mrs. Winchester were very impressed with the creativity and enthusiasm shown by our boarders in re-designing their dorms. The eventual winners were the girls of **Squirrels** dorm (Katie, Emilia and Siena) with their shrine to Audrey Hepburn. In second place it was “I believe in...” by the Year 8 girls in **Elephants** dorm. Mousehole's funfair from the younger boys came in third. It must be said that a huge amount of effort was made by all the boarders and as usual it was very difficult to choose between them. All of the dorms had created something memorable and the visiting parents and children were drawn in to the different scenes.

## Information

Contacting us by phone:	Boarding House	01580 883098
	Dispensary	01580 883096
	School	01580 880413
	Boarding House Mobile	07929 777945

email [houseparents@vinehallschool.com](mailto:houseparents@vinehallschool.com)

If you have any queries about clothing or the health and welfare of your child, you can email our matrons – Karen, Tanya, Quelli or Sally – on [matrons@vinehallschool.com](mailto:matrons@vinehallschool.com). Sister Victoria's email address for medical matters is [sistervictoria@vinehallschool.com](mailto:sistervictoria@vinehallschool.com) and she is in Dispensary at least 3 days a week.

Mr. Mitchell runs the boarding house for us on Mondays and Quelli is in school that day until 9pm. Urgent messages for us should be left with the front office and we will attend to them as soon as we can.

### Next Term:

We look forward to seeing you and your children at 4:30pm on Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> January for tea. Supper for the boarders will be served at 6:00pm, at which time we would be grateful if you could have said your goodbyes so we can settle quickly into the normal routine.

All the boarding staff wish you a very Merry Christmas with your children and a happy, healthy and enjoyable New Year.

With best wishes

Magnus, Helen, Archie and Elizabeth Caithness