

13th December 2018

Dear Parent/Guardian

Re: Year 9 – End of term letter

It has been another fantastic term for the Year 9's. The word 'flourish' can be over used, but they really are flourishing into a group of confident, resilient, ambitious, fantastic young students whom are getting set to make waves in the future!

The focus of this term was to enjoy lessons and not to worry about options. Our GCSE options process starts officially after Christmas, and please rest assured that if it is your first time through the process as a parent, there will be a lot of information and support available next term. Students will receive an options booklet which contains all the information regarding each course. The student and parent options evening is on the 17th January and parents' evening follows on the 14th February. As the prospect of options can be a stressful time for students I was mindful to put it into context early on, assisted by the Head Girl, that GCSEs are a stepping stone to further education not a dividing pathway on to future careers. The year group are well on their way to success as the atmosphere in lessons and form times are productive with a real sense that the students are enjoying their learning. Staff continually feed back to me that students are engaged, hardworking and not hesitant to get involved, which makes lessons interesting for teachers themselves as well.

What happens outside of the class room during enrichment activities and clubs enhances the learning that takes place inside the classroom through balancing work and play, defusing stresses and learning valuable interpersonal skills. Our year group never lacks enthusiasm for getting involved and this is shown in the data as it is reported that they attend the most clubs as a year group across the school. There is still scope for all to become involved and I ask that you support me in encouraging all the girls to take advantage of the wealth of enrichment provisions we have at The Holt. In the New Year I will email to you the winter term enrichment timetable for you to reference.

The House calendar has been as full as ever with events in business and, geography, Spanish and Harvest. In PE, the standard of play at House netball was excellent. There was strong competition between all teams and it was well supported by the rest of the year group. Sportsmanship was evident, as although the stakes were high, every student and team played well in the spirit of the game. The final standings were; in 3rd place 9G, second 9W and 9C were undefeated as champions. Well done to all of those students who competed and represented their House.

This term, fourteen students attended a STEM day at Wellington College which aimed to challenge the view that careers in science, technology, engineering and maths were more suited to males than females. Millie and Abi spoke about the trip during the end of term presentation assembly and I include an extract from their speech below:

“Did you know that under a quarter of STEM careers are occupied by women, and only 15% of engineering graduates are female? Not only does this mean there are less options for women, it also means there is a lack of half of the population’s ideas and perspectives. Despite having an equal level of intelligence and capabilities in STEM, the damaging stereotype that “STEM is for boys” continues to affect girls’ career choices. STEM is for girls just as much as it is for boys, and if you’re passionate and interested in Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths, please pursue this and don’t let society change how you feel, because the only way to break down stereotypes is to challenge them. With STEM, you can make a difference not only to our generation, but the generations ahead of us.”

As a keen conservationist and lover of the outdoors myself, this year’s green project is somewhat ambitious as we look to rejuvenate the grass bank outside science into a native British wild flower meadow to provide a habitat for the insects and bees. To link this further to the exciting potential career pathways in science and conservation, I arranged for two Doctors of science, Mark Fife and Emma Howsen, to visit from Pirbright Institute of Science in Guildford. Mark, the head bee keeper at Pirbright, delivered a workshop on bees and their vital impact on the environment. Emma spoke about her time in Africa working with the tribes in developing a more efficient way to diagnose foot and mouth disease in livestock. The Year 9 conservationists, with the help of the sixth form prefects, will now lead an assembly to the rest of Year 8 and 9 on the importance of bees and creating habitats for them, along with assisting myself and the site team in establishing the flower meadow at the school.

This year saw the introduction of a new enrichment opportunity of the Youth Parliament. Entries were open to all students in KS3 with several year 9 students putting themselves forwards to compete. Hemani in 9C was overall winner of the event. Hemani spoke about the importance of understanding mental health in the end of term presentation assembly:

“Prince Harry, an advocate for raising awareness of mental health, once said our mental fitness is even more important than our physical fitness because without it we can’t survive, let alone thrive. And the end part of that quote applies to everything – start off with the basics first then everything else becomes easier. Because, even with the Youth Parliament I was so unsure whether to do it or not but now I have got over the first hurdle, everything is just easier.”

I wish her the best of luck as she now goes on to represent The Holt in the Wokingham finals in the New Year.

As Christmas draws closer, there has been a focus on charity within the school. The students, and school, have been giving to those who may be less fortunate than themselves through donating to the charities for the shoe box appeal, Crisis at Christmas, as well as donating to the Friends of The Holt events such as the Christmas fayre. The atmosphere was electric with students running fun stalls such as Smack The Rat which I remember myself running in secondary school! It seems some things never go out of fashion. There was haggling for prizes, sweets, chocolates and raffle tickets, yet a firm eye kept on the margins by the stall runners. I think it’s safe to say good business was done on that day and everyone came away happy. Thank you for your continued support for the charity work we do at The Holt. I am aware that there has been a lot going on in the past couple of weeks and we are always grateful to receive your donations, including those for Harvest earlier in the term.

Also on the theme of giving, 9C, G, H, and L have been continuing the school tradition, which spans the generations, of visiting WADE (Wokingham and District Association for the Elderly) this term, to assist with lunch times. The girls have all taken it in their stride, serving and cleaning with a smile. The remaining forms will all have a turn as the year continues.

The festive celebrations have been rounded off with one of my favourite House competitions- The Christmas Doors Competition. The forms worked together well to create their masterpieces on their form room doors. I was pleased that I didn't have to judge, as I would have found it difficult due to the standard being so high. I am yet to hear the end result but I'd like to commend the girls for all of their time and effort that they have put into them.

It has been another action packed term! I wish you all a restful Christmas break and a happy New Year when it comes.

Yours sincerely



Miss C Shephard
Head of Year 9